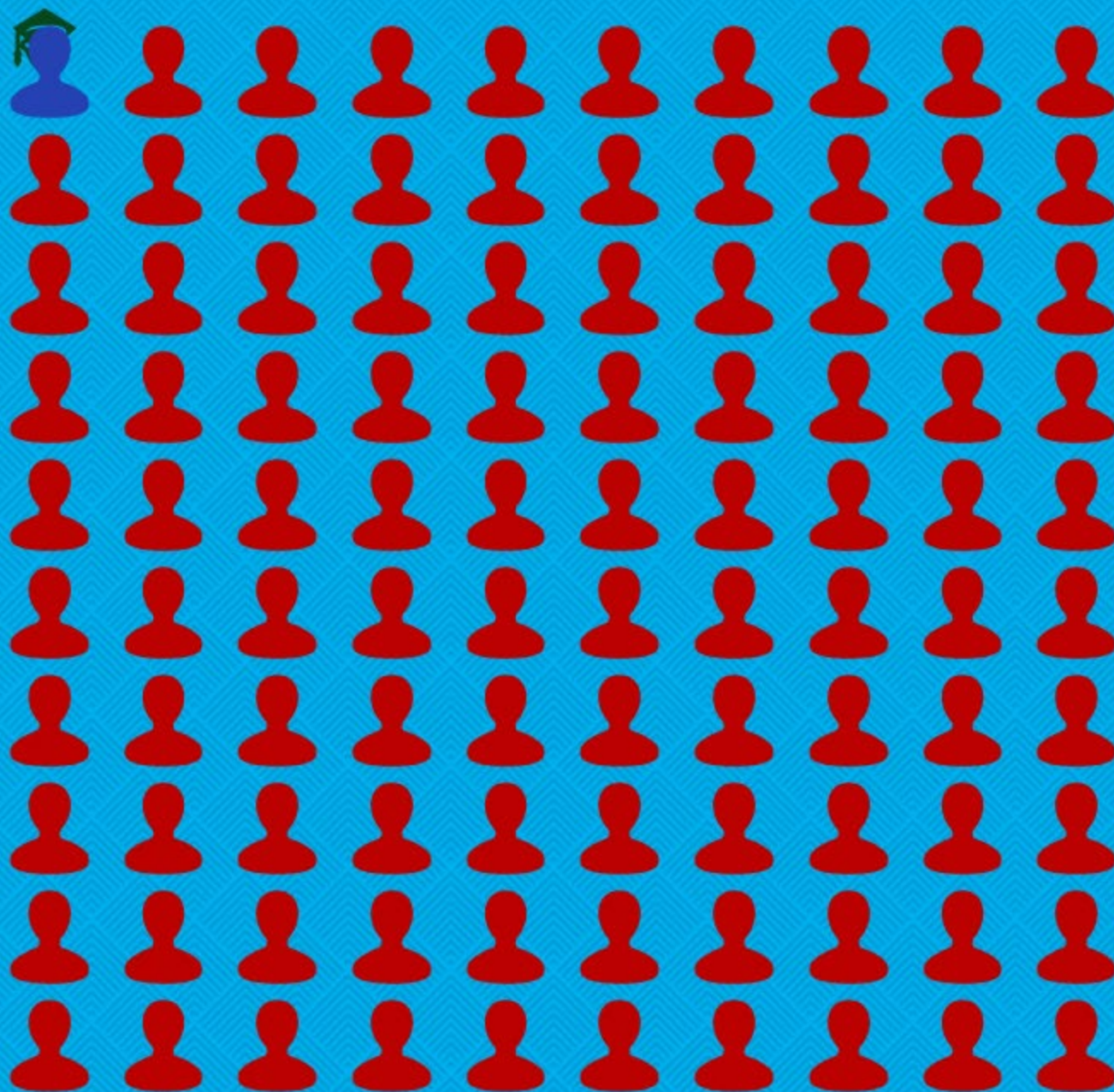


# One in One Hundred:

Drivers of Success and Resilience among College-Educated Romani Adolescents in Serbia



1%

Only 1 in 100 Romani Adolescents Makes it to University



**HARVARD F X B**  
CENTER FOR HEALTH AND HUMAN RIGHTS



## Report contributors

Harvard FXB: Jacqueline Bhabha, Margareta Matache, Miriam Chernoff, Arlan Fuller, Susan Lloyd McGarry

Center for Interactive Pedagogy: Natasa Simić, Jelena Vranješević, Milan Stančić, Boris Spasić, Milena Mihajlović

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

*One in One Hundred: Drivers of Success and Resilience among College-Educated Romani Adolescents in Serbia*, a collaboration between the François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University (Harvard FXB) and the Center for Interactive Pedagogy in Belgrade (CIP Center), goes beyond scrutiny of educational deficits and obstacles to investigate factors for success and resilience among Romani college students. The project title refers to the 1 percent of Roma who beat the odds and reach university. Although the focus of this research is on Serbia, the statistics (and related patterns) reverberate throughout Europe.

The project studied the educational trajectories of 89 Romani adolescents who succeeded in attending college in Serbia and 100 Romani youths from similar neighborhoods who did not. The study used a mixed-methods approach: a quantitative survey of both groups, qualitative interviews with a subset of the college students, and further qualitative research through a two-day workshop, designed to be a safe space for a subset of the college students to share on sensitive topics.

Almost all of the respondents (93 percent) in the sample (both college students and comparison group) reported that their parents valued education for their children... These findings contrast starkly with the dominant narrative and related policies that portray Roma parents and the Roma culture more broadly as being indifferent or even hostile to education.

### Similarities: Poverty and Valuing Education

The two groups shared many similarities. Most respondents in both groups had experienced poverty, came from cohesive but marginalized communities, and had deep connections to family and friends. Almost all of the respondents (93 percent) in the sample (both college students and comparison group) reported that their parents valued education for their children. This response mirrors the results from a previous Harvard FXB and CIP Center project, *Reclaiming Adolescence: A Roma Youth Perspective*, in which all Serbian Romani parent interviewees expressed a strong hope that their children would complete their education. These findings contrast starkly with the dominant narrative and related policies that portray Roma parents and the Roma culture more broadly as being indifferent or even hostile to education.

### Differences: Early Education, Teacher/Peer Support, and Family Level of Education

We found several determinants of engagement with higher education among these Roma youth. Our quantitative data emphasize the importance of three factors as determinants of positive higher education outcomes: access to early childhood development services, robust teacher, peer, and financial support systems in school, and parents' and relatives' levels of education.

The qualitative data provide us with additional insight that suggested another key difference. For many of the college students, a non-Roma ally—a peer or a teacher—helped them to persevere in the face of discrimination.

## Untangling the Role of Discrimination

The two groups diverged in their experience with discrimination (or readiness to name it). Both groups reported different rates of discrimination, according to the school level they were attending.

More college students (58 percent) than non-students (41 percent) said they had experienced discrimination in either primary or secondary school. Both groups reported greater levels of discrimination in primary school than high school. A particularly troubling finding was that overall 18 percent of the college students and 8 percent of the non-students reported experiencing discrimination often or almost every day at some point during their time in school.

Even though more college students reported discrimination than did respondents in the comparison group, over one-third of the college students in the quantitative survey did not mention any experience of experience. However, in the *Writing Lives* workshop, almost all participants told painful stories of discrimination, lending credence to the idea that discrimination is vastly underreported, and suggesting a path for future exploration of such sensitive topics.

In Harvard FXB/CIP's previous study *Reclaiming Adolescence*, the qualitative data showed that Romani youth tend to normalize and internalize discrimination in their lives. As discrimination accumulates, they become less confident and more pragmatic about their aspirations and desired careers. *One in One Hundred* takes the research one step further, by not only confirming the negative effect of discrimination but by showing how to combat it. Two of the most distinctive and decisive factors for educational success in the case of the 1 percent of Romani youth who enroll in higher education are 1) teachers' belief in a Romani student's intellectual capacity and related support and mentorship and 2) teacher and peer support in standing up and facing discrimination.

What Romani children most need for educational success is what all children need: good schools, characterized by equity and inclusion, with unbiased, and well-prepared teachers.

Given the rich qualitative data in *One in One Hundred* and our previous research, it is likely that those who do not mention discrimination may have experienced it at similar levels, but lack the tools, sense of safety, or resources to allow them to name it or call it out. Even those who are relatively successful—Roma college students—report having faced an oppressive environment of persistent stigma, negative stereotyping, and explicit racism, starting from their earliest encounters with the educational system.

## Need to Radically Change the Emphasis of European Policies

What emerges most forcefully from this study, then, is the need to radically re-orient the emphasis of current European research and policies designed to improve Roma access to education. A prime target of research, should be anti-Roma racism, given its profound and widespread influence. Instead of focussing on Roma "behavior" to improve the educational performance of Roma students, both research and policy development should target the deeply prejudicial and rights-violative institutional and societal environments, that are key determinant of Roma educational underperformance. What Romani children most need for educational success is what all children need: good schools, characterized by equity and inclusion, with unbiased, supportive, and well-prepared teachers.



## PREFACE

Across Europe, policy makers, scholars, and opinion leaders often attribute existing educational inequalities between Roma and non-Roma children and youth to lack of appreciation for education among Romani families and in the broader Roma culture.<sup>1</sup> This widely espoused narrative is at odds with robust new data highlighting the pervasive historical, structural, and normative factors that prevent Roma children and youth from accessing quality education.<sup>2</sup> This long-standing narrative reflects structural racism and often deeply held (and sometimes unconscious) racial prejudice.

Throughout the European continent, within the European Union (EU) and beyond, Romani children and adolescents are pushed out of school long before college.<sup>3</sup> This process of exclusion (overt or covert) affects student enrollment, attendance, and attainment; it is the product of past and present historical, social, and economic racism that burdens Roma children from their earliest years and affects all interactions with their environment. This long-standing and prejudicial context is compounded by the contemporary impact of poor quality, often segregated, educational services within the classes and the schools to which Roma are relegated, as a result of biased placement strategies or

Throughout the European continent, within the European Union (EU) and beyond, Romani children and adolescents are pushed out of school long before college.

1. Within this report, we use both Romani and Roma as adjectives, and use Roma as the noun describing people.

2. As well as this and earlier Harvard FXB's reports, see, for example, Christian Brüggemann, *Roma Education in Comparative Perspective* (Bratislava: United Nations Development Program, 2012), in particular see his comments on school attendance, 50.

3. We use "pushed out" throughout this report because we believe it better reflects the dynamic experienced by Roma youth than "drop out." For data on Roma school leaving, see *European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Education: The Situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States*, (Luxembourg: European Union, 2014).

<http://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2014/education-situation-roma-11-eu-member-states>

Roma-only facilities. For instance, to this day, Roma children are disproportionately assigned to special schools for children with disabilities. All these processes exacerbate the enduring non-Roma privilege in educational provision today.

Serbia reflects the broader challenge of Roma access to education across Europe. According to the 2014 Serbian Statistical Office (SSO)/UNICEF survey report, only 6 percent of Romani children between the ages of three and five attend early childhood education programs as compared to 50 percent of the Serbian national average.<sup>4</sup> Nationwide, only 85 percent of Roma children attend primary school, compared to 99 percent of all non-Roma children. Moreover, 36 percent of Roma children do not finish primary school while this applies to only 7 percent of non-Roma children. As for secondary education, only 22 percent of Roma children (a higher proportion of them male), attend; in contrast, 89 percent of non-Roma children do. The number of Serbian youths enrolling in higher education has been increasing over the past years, but the number of Roma youth attending college is still negligible. In a 2017 World Bank/UN Development Programme (UNDP) study, only 1 percent of Roma youth age 26 through 29 from marginalized areas had completed college, compared with 23 percent of non-Roma youth of the same age and from similarly marginalized areas.<sup>5</sup> Throughout this report, we use that 1 percent number, as multiple sources report similar data.<sup>6</sup>

What are the factors that drive the success of this very small minority of Roma youth in Serbia who ... despite discrimination, socio-economic difficulties, and historical obstacles, do manage to make it to college?

One in one hundred Roma does make it to college. What are the factors that drive the success of this very small minority of Roma youth in Serbia who, by contrast with the majority of their cohort and despite discrimination, socio-economic difficulties, and historical obstacles, do manage to make it to college? This important question, barely explored to date, is the focus of the research presented in this report.

A previous research project in Serbia, *Reclaiming Adolescence*, offers some insight into what occurs for those who do not continue their schooling. As experiences of discrimination inside and outside school affect the lives of Romani adolescents, they become less confident and more pragmatic about their aspirations and desired careers.<sup>7</sup> For *Reclaiming Adolescence*, Harvard FXB and the CIP Center (the Center for Interactive Pedagogy in Belgrade) collaborated in the conduct of that research adopting a participatory action strategy with Romani and non-Romani youths in Serbia to identify both community strengths and needs.<sup>8</sup>

4. Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia (SORS) and UNICEF, *Serbia Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey and Serbia Roma Settlements Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2014, Final Reports* (Belgrade: SORS and UNICEF, 2014).

5. World Bank and UN Development Programme (UNDP), "Roma at a Glance: Serbia," April 2018, <http://www.eurasia.undp.org/content/rbec/en/home/library/roma/regional-roma-survey-2017-country-fact-sheets.html>.

6. See, for example, the discussion in Brüggemann, *Roma Education in Comparative Perspective*, 24 and "Impact indicators" for Operational Objective 5 in Republic of Serbia, *Action Plan for the Implementation of the Strategy of Social Inclusion of the Roma for the Period 2016–2025* (Belgrade: 2017), which mentions a baseline of 0.6 percent of the Roma population having a higher education degree, 22.

7. Jacqueline Bhabha, Arlan Fuller, Margareta Matache, Jelena Vranješević, Miriam C. Chernoff, Boris Spasić, and Jelena Ivanis, "Reclaiming Adolescence. A Roma Youth Perspective," *Harvard Educational Review*, Summer 2017.

8. Ibid.; see also Harvard FXB, "Rights and Participation of Roma Youth," webpage, August 11, 2015, <https://fxb.harvard.edu/research/adolescent-empowerment/roma-program/rights-and-participation/>.





## OVERVIEW OF METHODOLOGY

*One in One Hundred*, also a collaboration between Harvard FXB and the CIP Center, adopts a different approach. While maintaining some participatory elements from the previous project, this research project goes beyond scrutiny of educational deficits and obstacles to investigate factors for success and resilience among Romani students. The project studied the educational trajectories of 89 Roma adolescents who succeeded in attending college in Serbia and 100 Romani youths from similar neighborhoods who did not, either being pushed out of secondary school before completion or ending their education with a secondary school diploma. However, the study does not include the experiences of the most marginalized Romani youths, those who are pushed out from school before enrolling in high school.

The study used a mixed-methods approach to identify the factors that enabled Romani adolescents to enroll in college (see Appendix 1 for detailed information on the methodology). As well as a quantitative survey of both groups, we developed further insights into the educational advancement of Roma youth in Serbia through follow-up with two qualitative methods. First, student researchers trained to handle sensitive questions conducted in-depth interviews with a sample of the college students. Second, we gathered a subset of the college students in a workshop designed to be a safe space to share personal stories, including traumas. Our approach extends the process for doing research on sensitive topics such as discrimination and

ingrained racism by applying a qualitative instrument that allows teenagers to discuss difficult experiences in a supportive and non-threatening environment.

The study lays out the contextual and personal factors contributing to the success and resilience of Roma youth successfully enrolled in college. We analyze the features of these young people's micro cosmos—the communities they grew up in, their families, the schools they went to, their beliefs and competencies, and the values that may have played an essential role in their academic accomplishments. We aimed to identify factors that helped or hindered access to college and familial, school, and societal factors that were critical in helping college goers persevere with their college studies.

For the quantitative part of the study, we recruited and trained students as researchers. They administered questionnaires to 89 Roma college students enrolled in four Serbian universities and to a comparison group of 100 non-students. Most of the questions and scales in the two questionnaires were identical to facilitate comparison between the answers of each groups of respondents. The questionnaire included several thematic sections, with both internationally used psychological inventories and questions specifically designed for this research. Additionally, the questionnaire for Roma college students included questions regarding their college experiences, while the questionnaire for the comparison group included open-ended questions about why they had left high school (if they had), whether they planned on enrolling in the future and why (or why not).

Following the quantitative survey and preliminary analysis, the student researchers conducted semi-structured interviews as one of two additional qualitative information sources. The 20 interviewees were selected from the 89 students: every fifth respondent on the list or the next one if the fifth declined to take part in this stage of the research. We used thematic analysis to investigate the replies to the open-ended questions.

The second qualitative research activity was a *Writing Lives* workshop, a methodology developed by Professor Sharmila Rege of the University of Pune in Maharashtra.<sup>9</sup> We adapted the *Writing Lives* assignments to the circumstances of Roma youth and created a communal space in which they could tell the personal stories of their journey to college.

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9. Harvard FXB piloted this methodology with the University of Pune and the Institute of Development Studies described on the Harvard FXB webpage, The Champions Project – Unpacking Success <https://fxb.harvard.edu/research/adolescent-empowerment/gender-and-adolescent-ag>. More detail about *Writing Lives* is available from the several reports on that page, most relevantly, Jacqueline Bhabha, and Orla Kelly, [Child Marriage and the Right to Education: Evidence from India](#), Evidence Submitted to the UN Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2013.



## FINDINGS

We describe this group of 89 college students as “forerunners,” because of their distinctive educational path. Rather than contributing to a narrative of exceptionalism, our purpose is to identify the success triggers for college enrollment within the family, community, and at school, as factors relevant to broader policymaking processes in contexts where populations are struggling with racial or ethnic inequality in education. The comparison respondents are forerunners in education, too: they have shown resilience in the face of racism and other barriers by making it to high school.

Parents, family, communities, school and peers, social capital, and the geopolitical environment all influence the development of children.<sup>10</sup> The social and intellectual trajectories of children are shaped by continuous interactions between sources of vulnerability and sources of resilience.<sup>11</sup> In this study, we explore both supportive and hindering factors influencing our sample’s educational trajectories, including their schools, families, networks, and community resources.<sup>12</sup>

Almost all of the respondents (93 percent) in the sample (both college students and comparison group) reported that their parents valued education for their children.

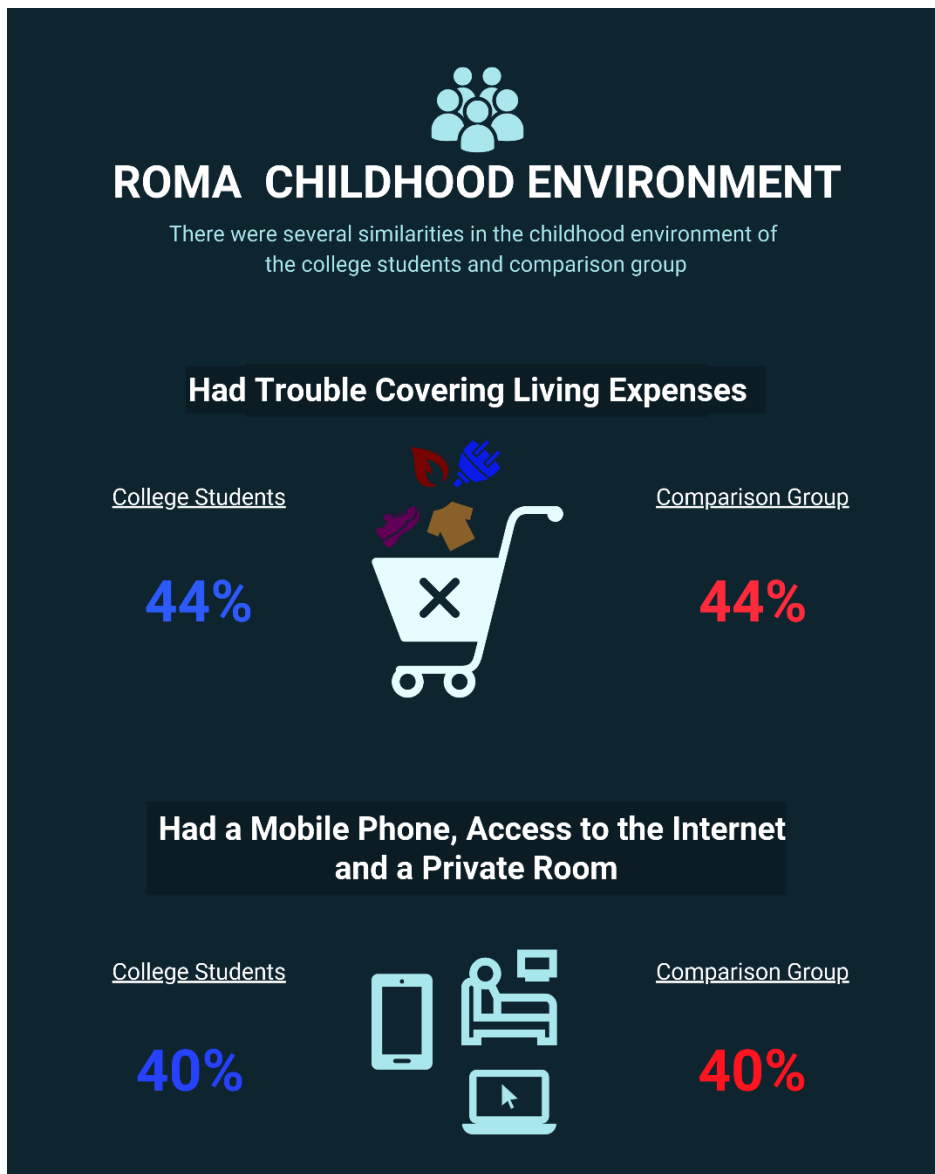
10. Arnold Sameroff, “A unified theory of development: a dialect integration of nature and nurture,” *Child Development* 81, no. 1, (Jan/Feb 2010): 6-22.

11. Institute of Medicine, *From Neurons to Neighborhoods: The Science of Early Childhood Development*, ed. Jack P. Shonkoff and Deborah A. Phillips (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2000). <https://doi.org/10.17226/9824>

12. J. Coleman, “Social capital in the creation of human capital,” *The American Journal of Sociology* 94 (1988).

Almost all of the respondents (93 percent) in the sample (both college students and comparison group) reported that their parents valued education for their children as a means to enhance personal development, future opportunities, and financial security. This finding mirrors the results from *Reclaiming Adolescence: A Roma Youth Perspective*, which found that all Romani parents interviewed in Serbia expressed a strong hope that their children would complete their education and find employment that empowered them to be independent.<sup>13</sup> These findings also contrast starkly with the dominant narrative, and the consequent policies and measures, that portrays Roma parents and Roma culture more broadly as being indifferent or even hostile to education.

**FIGURE 1. ROMA CHILDHOOD: SIMILAR ENVIRONMENTS**



13. Bhabha, Fuller, Matache, et al., *Reclaiming Adolescence*.

## Backgrounds

The two groups of young people in our study—the college students and the comparison group—came from similar historical, social, and economic backgrounds, as Figure 1 above shows. Most respondents in both groups had experienced poverty. Most indicated that their families could afford to buy food but close to half faced problems covering electricity and heating costs or buying clothes and shoes.

Only about 40 percent of each group said that when they were in school, they had a computer and access to the Internet, a cell phone, their own room, and a study corner.

A significant share of the respondents in the entire sample — 60 percent of the college students and 74 percent of the control group respondents—lived with their families of origin, including parents and siblings. Some of the students lived in a dorm or a leased apartment, while a significantly higher share of comparison group respondents lived with their newly formed families (including their spouse) or with their extended families.

But despite these similarities, several statistically significant differences stood out.

## Families

There were significant differences in the education levels of the parents of the respondents attending college by comparison with the respondents not attending college. On average, as shown in Figure 2, both parents of college students were more educated than the parents of the comparison group respondents. For instance, for 35 percent of the comparison group parents, the highest level of education was primary school; for the college students, this was the case for 17 percent. Furthermore, the college students had more close relatives attending or who had graduated from college: 64 percent in the college students group, compared with only 43 percent in the comparison group.

The lower level of education among both parents and close relatives seems to have had an impact on the Romani youths' educational attainment and trajectory. This finding is in line with results from studies concerning other populations showing that the level of a child's education is related to the level of education of parents.<sup>14</sup> A 2015 study shows that Serbian children of college-educated parents generally benefit from more years in school than those whose parents are not college educated.<sup>15</sup> Also, the SORS/UNICEF Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey shows that in Serbia “attendance to secondary education is more prevalent among children whose mothers have higher education (99 percent), than children whose mothers have primary education (84 percent).”<sup>16</sup>

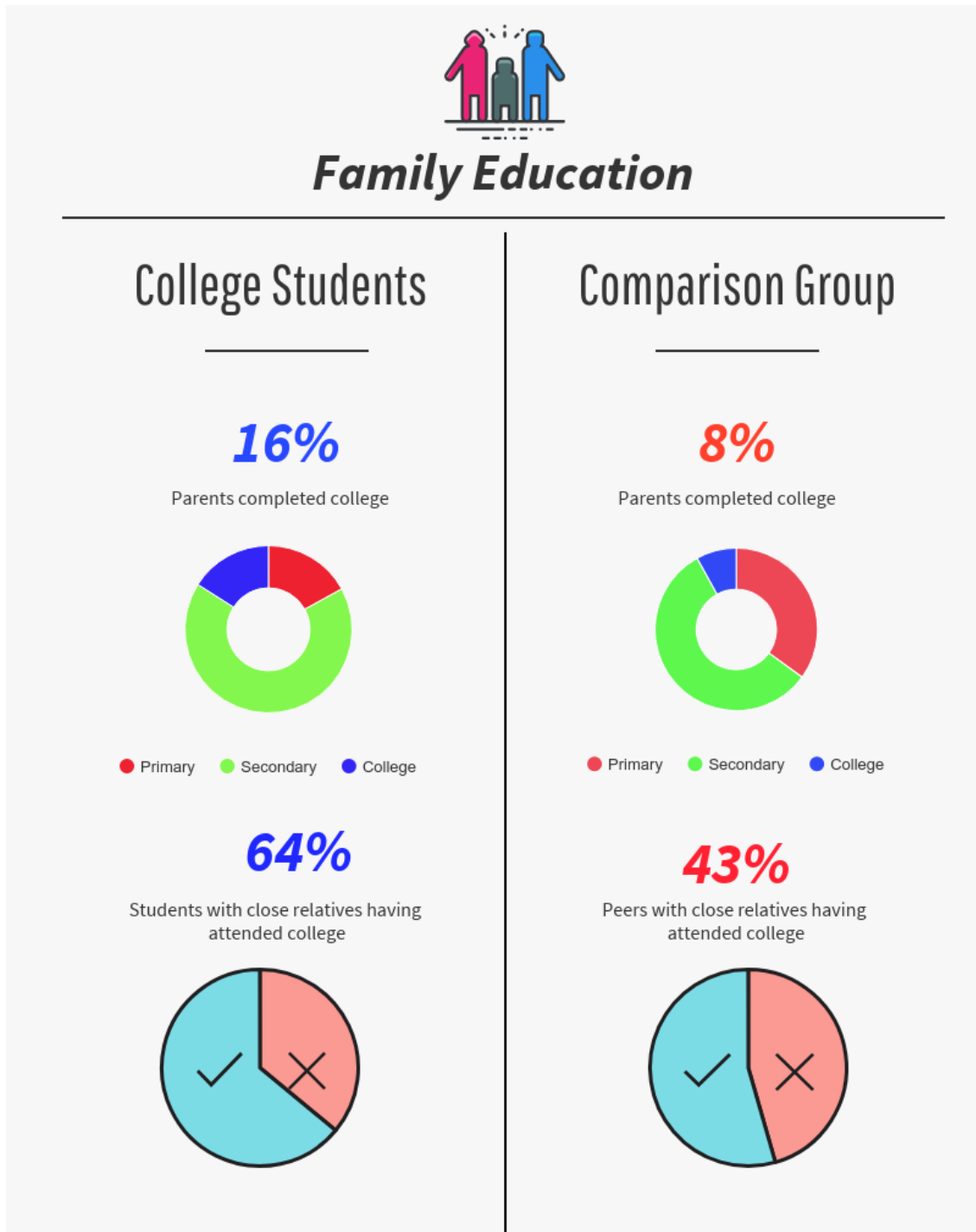
An authoritative parenting style dominated in both groups.

14. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), *Education at a Glance 2018: OECD Indicators* (Paris: OECD 2018). <https://doi.org/10.1787/eag-2018-en>

15. S. Tomanović and D. Stanojević, *Mladi u Srbiji. Stanja, opažanja, verovanja i nadanja* [Youth in Serbia: State, observations, beliefs and hopes] (Beograd: Friedrich Ebert Stiftung i SeConS grupa za razvojnu inicijativu, 2015).

16. SORS/UNICEF, *Serbia and Serbia Roma settlements MICS, 2014 Final Reports*, 180.

FIGURE 2. FAMILY EDUCATION MAKES A DIFFERENCE



Both the college students and the comparison group respondents participated regularly in their family activities. The college students had slightly lower mean scores on the family relation scale (4.0 versus 4.3,

with 5 being the highest number of the scale). The comparison group respondents reported having closer relationships with their parents, relatives, and family friends as compared to the college students.

The qualitative data yielded further insights into family life. Several college students mentioned problems while they were growing up such as the divorce of their parents, the death of one or both parents, frequent relocations, family quarrels, and parents' alcoholism.

*A college student from Kragujevac: "Our grandparents died much too early, and our Mom and Dad worked too much, so we did not have a relationship that would be based on talking to each other for long..."*

*A college student from Belgrade: "I was in charge of keeping cattle from the time I was 8 until I turned 13, from 7 am to 7 pm, and that took away a lot of my time, and I may have not had the freedom, and the childhood other children did, but actually, even at that age, I had to assume the responsibility for the cattle, which, I think, was way too much for my age and abilities. (...)"*

Overall, for first generation students, breaking the cycle of intergenerational non-college education, is key for the next generations in the family, extended family, and even community to thrive.

*"It's happened to others who went away to college and then came back to their small towns, and through these affirmative measures, you can enroll in any college you want if you're from a Roma family and back home, the people say 'Wow, you're studying, you're going to college, when you finish, when you graduate!'"*

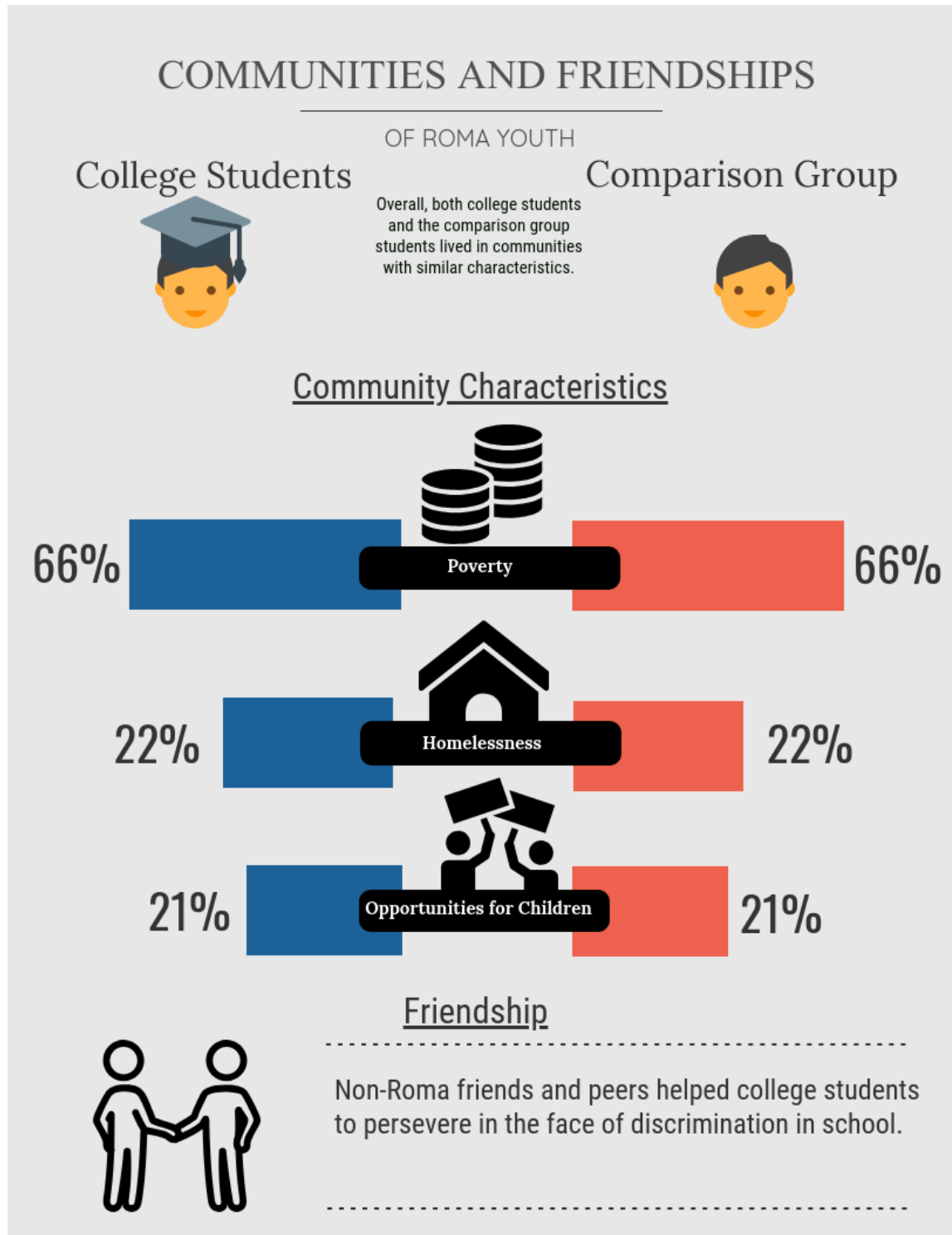
## Communities

There were no statistically significant differences between the groups regarding the availability of activities supporting children and young people in their home neighborhoods. These activities have been scarce in both cases: only 21 percent of all Roma youths interviewed lived in neighborhoods where there were such opportunities for children.

Both the college students and the comparison respondents felt safe in their neighborhoods. Two-thirds or more of each group felt safe or very safe in their neighborhoods growing up while about 4 percent of the entire sample felt very unsafe or unsafe. Neither group reported discrimination on ethnic grounds in their neighborhoods. However, both the students and the control group respondents mentioned problems arising from poverty in their communities; for example, prostitution was more present in the communities where comparison respondents lived. Overall, poverty in communities was reported by 66 percent in both groups and homelessness by 22 percent.

Comparison of the two groups showed that there were no statistically significant differences when it came to the language the two groups spoke at home. However, we found statistically significant differences concerning the language spoken in their home communities: Serbian rather than Romani was the first language in the communities where 91 percent of the college students but only 77 percent of the comparison group respondents lived. Assuming that communities where the first language is Romani are more compact Romani communities, it is likely that some of the students in the comparison group may have been placed in residentially segregated Roma schools and classes. Such communities tend to suffer from poorer quality

FIGURE 3. COMMUNITIES AND FRIENDSHIPS ARE SIMILAR IN THE QUANTITATIVE DATA; QUALITATIVE SHOW DIFFERENCE





education, a product of low teacher expectations, teacher absenteeism, and poor infrastructure.<sup>17</sup> It may also be that Romani children who grow up in Romani-speaking communities may have less contact with and proficiency in Serbian when they started school, and this may have impeded their educational attainment from the start.<sup>18</sup>

### Friends

In the questionnaires, we used an evaluation scale to assess interpersonal support. This scale assessed appraisal (offering advice), belonging (spending time together), and tangible help (assisting with obligations). The items reflecting these three types of support are respectively, “When I need suggestions on how to deal with a personal problem, I know someone I can turn to”; “If I decide one afternoon that I would like to go to a movie that evening, I could easily find someone to go with me”; and “If I were sick, I could easily find someone to help me with my daily chores.” We asked about the number of “real” friends, and about activities in the neighborhood supporting children and families. We found no statistical difference between groups on any of these subscales or questions.

The respondents in both groups reported having between three and four real friends on average. Both groups of respondents made friends throughout their school, neighborhood, and family experiences. More college students than comparison peers had met their real friends in high school, whereas more of the comparison group respondents had met theirs in their neighborhood or through their family friends. Over 40 percent of college students also made friends at college. Thus, college students are more likely to benefit from more educated and connected social networks, a potential support for their future careers.

The qualitative data provide us with additional insight that suggested a key difference. For many of the college students, a non-Roma ally—a peer or a teacher—helped them to persevere in the face of discrimination, as shown in Figure 3 above.

### Impact of Higher Education

In some of the areas we surveyed, we found it difficult to disentangle cause and effect. Significantly more college students are civically engaged, have a lifestyle based on learning, are pursuing socially engaged goals, and are more optimistic than their counterparts. For the most part, we posit these as the effects of higher education rather than the causes of the forerunners’ different trajectory.

### Higher Education and Civic Engagement

A significantly higher share of college students described themselves as civically engaged. Close to 60 percent of the students reported being both civically engaged and having a life philosophy in contrast to approximately 20 percent of their comparison peers. Having affiliations with higher education institutions, most college students have more opportunities to participate in educational activities in the NGO sector,

17. Harvard FXB, *Strategies and Tactics to Combat Segregation of Roma Children in Schools: Case studies from Romania, Croatia, Hungary, Czech Republic, Bulgaria, and Greece* (Boston: Harvard FXB, 2015). <https://cdn2.sph.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/5/2015/05/Roma-Segregation-full-final.pdf>; Romani CRIS, CURS, Roma Education Fund, *Inequity and Inequality: Teacher Absenteeism, Roma Pupils, and Primary Schools in Romania* (Bucharest, 2012).

[http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/ref\\_ta\\_screen\\_doublepages.pdf](http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/sites/default/files/publications/ref_ta_screen_doublepages.pdf).

18. Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley, *Meaningful Differences in the Everyday Experience of Young American Children* (Baltimore, MD: Brookes Publishing, 1995).

such as Roma student associations, homework support for children without parental care or with disabilities, organized workshops for young people, or humanitarian activities.

Compared to their non-college peers, the college students were more outspoken about the significant benefit of sports and cultural events and informal education for their communities. The college students reinforced similar trends during the *Writing Lives* workshop.<sup>19</sup> They did suggest there might also be some causal effects: they spoke about the formative effects of activism and NGO work, linking their success with opportunities to get involved in informal educational activities.

Almost 35 percent of the college students reported having a role model compared to 23 percent for the comparison group.

### Higher Education and Personal Characteristics

Participation in higher education also offered college students the opportunity to develop more priorities, hopes, and dreams and to steer their social competencies toward education. A significantly larger share of college versus comparison respondents (69 versus 44 percent) reported having a hobby. Twice as many college students as comparison peers reported a lifestyle based on learning, and many more of the students aspired to pursuing socially engaged goals. Moreover, college students (despite significant similarities with their peers with respect to early family experiences) reported higher odds of more optimism, hope, and empathy compared to their non-college peers. College students had greater odds of a significantly higher score on the overall measure of emotional competence and on the specific measures of emotional regulation and self-awareness compared to their peers.<sup>20</sup> Nevertheless, the survey data do not show that academic resilience or the other indicators of socio-emotional health predict college attendance.

In situations of stress, college students and comparison peers deployed similar coping strategies. Common positive strategies included seeking social support (48 percent college students, 46 percent comparison peers), active problem solving (33 percent college students, 34 percent peers), and cognitive restructuring (30 percent college students, 20 percent peers). Other strategies involved expressing emotions (33 percent students, 49 percent peers), problem avoidance (12 percent students and 20 percent peers) and self-criticism (13 percent students, 6 percent peers). Fewer than 10 percent of each group reported deliberate proactive problem solving (positive) or using alcohol or drugs (negative). More college students in the survey reported stressful events in the last few years (45 percent versus 34 percent), but the confidence interval did not rise to statistical validity.

In the *Writing Lives* workshop, we found that typical adolescent concerns— searching for the meaning of life and one’s life goals, questioning norms and values, forming a distinctive identity rather than solely building on that of one’s parents—were noticeably stressful for Roma college students. In a context of customary racism, most had problems reconciling different aspects of their identity, especially accepting their Roma identity. However, by the end of secondary school and beginning of college life, they felt that they had

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19. Additional information about the findings of the workshop here: Margareta Matache, Jacqueline Bhabha, and Arlan Fuller, “Writing Romani Youth Lives,” *Voices in Education: The Blog of Harvard Education Publishing*, June 21, 2017.

<http://hepg.org/blog/writing-romani-youth-lives>

20. This difference remained, even when we grouped respondents with similar early family experiences and compared the samples.

developed clear goals and a vision for their future life, which contributed to their acceptance of a sense of Roma identity. Some cited the specific impact of participation in NGO projects:

*“We mentioned the CIP Center because it actually helped us build our identity and realize who we really are and what we really want and to work on it. Not just think of how we will benefit, but how the entire community will benefit as well.”*

(Interview with Roma student from Niš)

### Romani Adolescents’ Educational Trajectories: Early Education Matters

The educational opportunities for the two youth groups differed, with the most significant gap being in preschool education. Across Europe, the access of Romani children to early childhood development services is lower than that of majority children, forcing many Romani children to start their school on an unequal footing.<sup>21</sup>

The study confirms this general finding.

A significantly larger share of college versus comparison respondents (63 versus 44 percent) attended kindergarten, on average spending 24 months there. Yet, only a few of the interviewed students and participants in the *Writing Lives* workshop mentioned their kindergarten experiences and, when they did, they linked it with the experience of discrimination.

The educational opportunities for the two youth groups differed, with the most significant gap being in preschool education. Across Europe, the access of Romani children to early childhood development services is lower than that of majority children, forcing many Romani children to start their school on an unequal

*“I experienced an unpleasant situation in kindergarten with two non-Roma boys. I had a problem with them. They hated me because I was Roma. They used to beat me up and insult me and this went on for a short while until I had it up to here. I hit both boys on the head with a heavy object. And, of course, I was punished and they weren’t, because they were allowed to do anything they wanted and I wasn’t,”* so one of the students told us.

In the comparison group, 11 percent of the respondents completed less than three years of secondary school. An additional 18 percent reported continuing on in secondary school, but not finishing. Not surprisingly, the high school grades of the college student group were significantly higher than those of the comparison group.

Both the college students and their peers faced challenging social and economic situations. However, college student gained advantages from the educational level their families had achieved and from kindergarten.

21. Open Society Foundations, Roma Education Fund, and UNICEF, *Roma Early Childhood Development. RECI overview report*, 2012. <https://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/Roma-Early-Childhood-Inclusion-Report-20120813.pdf>

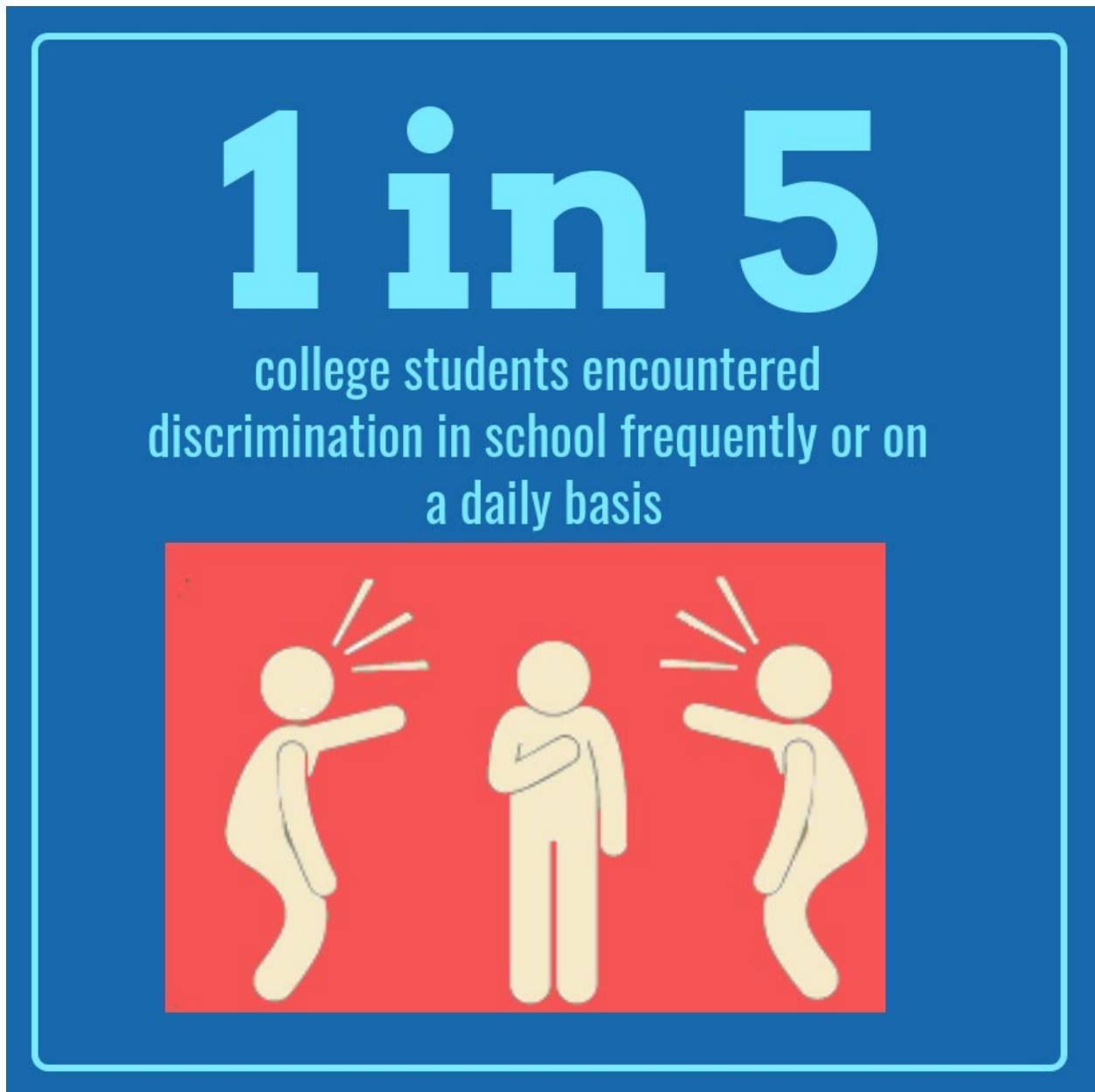
## The Experience of Discrimination

### Quantitative Measures

The two groups diverged in their experience with discrimination (or readiness to name it). Both groups reported different rates of discrimination, according to school level they were attending.

Overall, more college students (58 percent) than non-students (41 percent) said they had experienced discrimination in either primary or secondary school. More of the college student group said they experienced discrimination in school than their peers (57 versus 38 percent respectively for primary school,

**FIGURE 4. FREQUENCY OF DISCRIMINATION EXPERIENCED BY ROMA COLLEGE STUDENTS**



40 versus 25 percent for secondary school)—with respondents in both groups reporting a preponderance of discrimination in primary school compared to high school.

Figure 4 above shows a particularly troubling finding: overall 18 percent of the college students and 8 percent of the non-students reported experiencing discrimination at some point in school often or almost every day.

The frequency of reported experience with discrimination also differed for high school compared to primary school. Reflecting on primary school, 16 percent of college students and 6 percent of non-students said they experienced discrimination on a daily or frequent basis, an experience that generally tapered to “rarely or occasionally” in high school.

Male college students reported having experienced discrimination more than female college students in both primary and secondary school, a statistically significant finding. For the comparison group, reports of discrimination in primary school were similar for male and female students but more boys than girls reported having experienced discrimination in secondary school, a result with borderline statistical significance.

Overall, the college students had over twice the odds of having reported discrimination in both primary and secondary school compared to their peer respondents. This may reflect greater confidence and awareness in reporting discrimination, rather than objectively higher levels of discrimination. Our analysis of the open-ended questions in the questionnaire showed that fewer respondents from the comparison group complained or reported episodes of discrimination to teachers, psychologists, or parents at the time they happened. Overall, one-third of the college students and one-half of the comparison group who noted discrimination indicated they had not reported those experiences to anyone.

### Discrimination as “Normal”

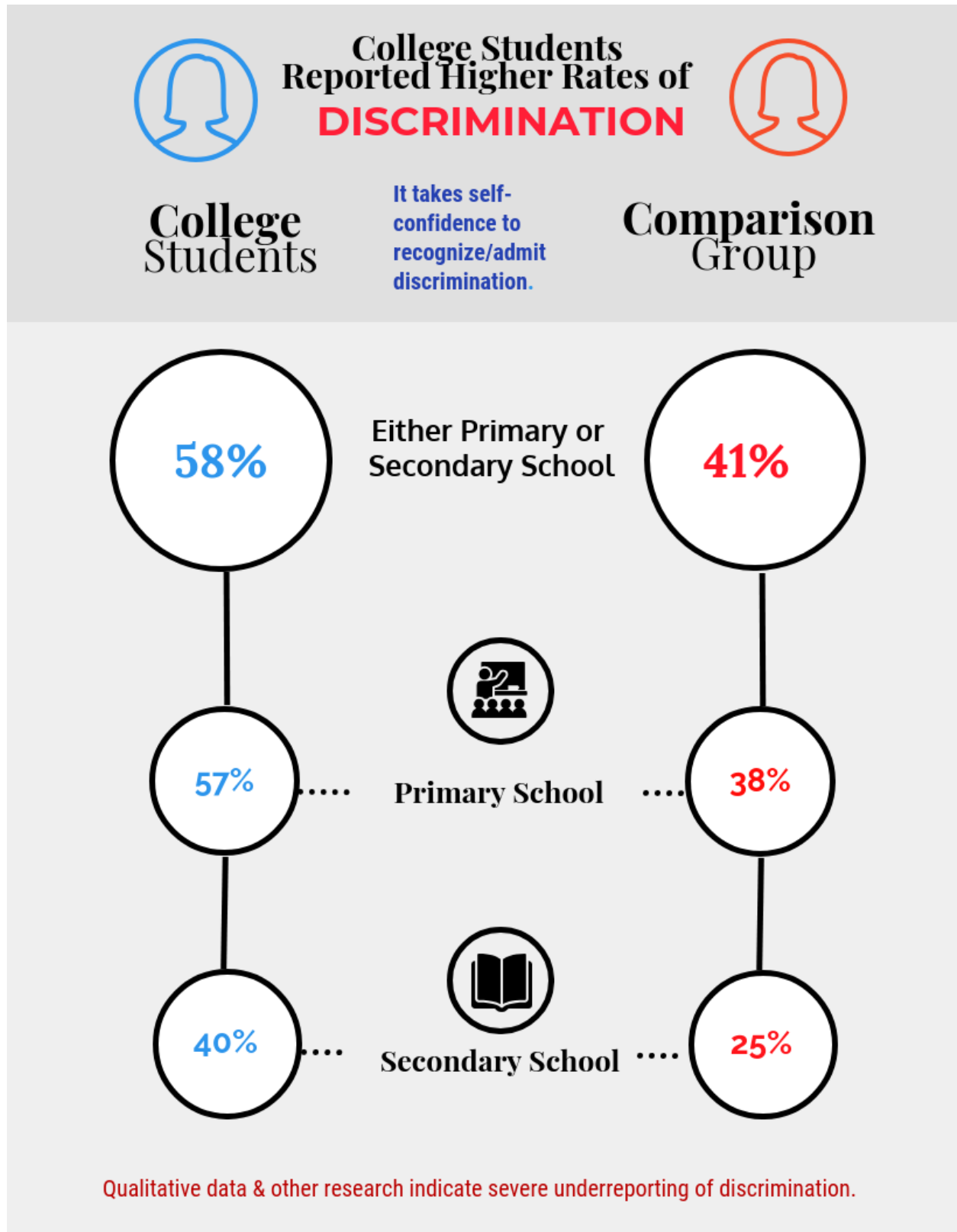
Discrimination is such a commonplace feature of Roma life that young Roma accept it as “normal.” In *Reclaiming Adolescence*, the qualitative data showed a tendency of Roma youth to normalize and internalize discrimination in their lives, often as a resilient coping strategy. In interviews for that study, some parents and institutional representatives added that some Roma adolescents interviewed miss signals of discrimination because they do not adequately grasp the notion of discrimination or properly understand the behavior associated with it. Indeed, some young people are not always aware of the discrimination and implicit biases they have encountered.<sup>22</sup> A participant in the *Writing Lives* workshop confirmed this: “I just realized it yesterday. Now when I think about it, I realize no Roma children took part in competitions, and there were quite a lot of us who were top of the class.”

In the quantitative data for this study, more college students than non-students said they had experienced discrimination, as Figure 5 shows. Even so, more than one-third of the college students did not mention any such experience. Yet, in the *Writing Lives* workshop, almost all participants told painful stories of discrimination, lending further credence to the idea that discrimination is vastly underreported.

Our working interpretation is that the non-college group may have experienced similar levels of discrimination, but lack the tools, safe spaces, or resources to allow them to name it or call it out. The college students also felt more confident to speak about discrimination in the safe container of the *Writing Lives*

22. Bhabha, Fuller, Matache, et al., *Reclaiming Adolescence*.

FIGURE 5. FORERUNNERS REPORTED HIGHER RATES OF DISCRIMINATION



workshop. Some adolescents have internalized racism, so that they no longer see it as oppression, but think of it as “deserved.” In addition, experiencing discrimination is not the same as being able or willing to talk about it, another phenomenon that leads to underreporting. Some students emphasized a sense of shame in speaking of the humiliating experience of discrimination. One student described how she felt like crying every time she talked about her experience of discrimination, and how proud she was when she managed not to cry. These reports suggest that finding tools to give an effective voice to “silenced” “subaltern” groups such as Roma should be an urgent priority.<sup>23</sup>

### Qualitative Data: Discrimination in the School Environment

We learned more about the discrimination experienced from both the qualitative interviews and the *Writing Lives* workshop. During the workshop, we heard that the majority of the young Roma students had experienced peer bullying, rejection, and isolation. They also talked about not fully understanding, from a very young age, why teachers treated them worse than their non-Roma peers, which reconfirms the findings above about the lack of enough awareness about implicit bias and discrimination.

#### Peers

In the questionnaire, both groups reported experiencing the most discrimination from their peers. Student interviewees described being excluded from games, activities, and company, coupled with disparagement and name-calling. During the *Writing Lives* workshop, the Roma students shared and detailed a range of such experiences:

*“I spent a lot of time alone; the kindergarten teacher would sometimes come over to play with me for a little while, but that was it. There was a lot of discrimination in general, from kindergarten onwards,”* said a student from Niš.

Another student from the same university also recalled:

*“Yes, there were around ten of us. All of us were assigned seats in the back row. We were discriminated against by our peers. They avoided us and called us names; they avoided all interaction with us.”*

*“They called me a Roma, said I lived in a garbage container and these are some of the reasons why I withdrew into myself...”*

Roma students frequently encountered dehumanizing and racialized verbal messages in primary school. Such messages reflected their peers’ disbelief in Roma intellectual abilities and their uncritical acceptance of prevailing stereotypes about Roma hygiene and criminality (from pick-pocketing to more serious offences). Some students said during the workshop, *“You could hear the word ‘Gypsies’ all over the place.”*

23. G.C. Spivak “Can the Subaltern Speak?” cited in A.F. Frey, C. Cross “Overcoming poor youth stigmatization and invisibility through arts: A participatory action research experience in greater Buenos Aires,” *Action Research* 9, no. 1 (2011): 65-82.

Many described experiencing derogatory and dehumanizing language, insults, name-calling, taunting, and teasing.

*“‘Little Gypsy girl’ was the only way they described me in class. I just felt humiliated, I was fifteen, and I just felt miserable and humiliated.”*

*“They called me a Roma, said I lived in a garbage container and these are some of the reasons why I withdrew into myself...”*

*“I had a problem with a boy, I mean we didn’t have a problem, we stopped communicating because, it had to do something with our grades, I got an A and he got an F and he said: ‘Look at that Gypsy’.”*

Some were bullied and rejected by their peers in school no matter what they did to be accepted, and they were constantly reminded of how different they were.

*“We had an assignment to draw ourselves in art class. Then we hung our signed drawings on the wall with our teacher. A 7<sup>th</sup> grader later walked in, looked at the drawings and turned to me and said: ‘Why are your hands and face colored orange when you’re black?’”*

*“Simply, I didn’t have good friends, they saw the teacher disparage me and then they started to disparage me, so that my worst experiences and memories are those from elementary school, especially the lower grades...”*

*“In elementary school, non-Roma girls used me as a prop to hold the elastic [a game that involves jump rope patterns], but, when it was my turn, they’d give up, say they were bored and didn’t want to play anymore.”*

They also remembered offensive jokes and comments about Roma, when their friends were unaware of their ethnicity:

*“They told me there was a Roma resident assistant in the dorm they called ‘Gypsy’ who made sure the house rules were complied with and that the students didn’t like him. They call him names although they know I am Roma. I feel very uncomfortable at such times.”*

Some participants described another major disappointment: they experienced rejection by their friends’ parents because they were Roma.

*“My girlfriend’s parents forbade her to go steady with me because I am a Roma.”*

Someone else said that her friend, who was not a Roma, told her: *“You should pick flowers from your own garden,”* meaning that she should date Roma people, not someone from the non-Roma population. Another described as the most painful the situations in which his non-Roma friends were saying insulting things about Roma people, unaware that he, too, was Roma.



*“The first thing that springs to mind are the people around me who, unaware of my ethnicity, used hate speech and discriminated against my compatriots.”*

In *Reclaiming Adolescence*, Romani youths also pointed to correlations between peer discrimination and leaving school. A participant in that project recalled how:

*“Students from the general population discriminate . . . and [the Roma] are forced into dropping out of school. This is what happened to me. I was discriminated against and I dropped out of school because of them.”<sup>24</sup>*

### Teachers

In contrast to the findings from the quantitative data, the *Writing Lives* workshop suggested that the college students had experienced more discrimination from their teachers than from their peers, a reflection of their willingness to disclose painful and humiliating experiences in a relatively safe space. Those who mentioned their teachers shared experiences of being isolated—assigned to seats in the back row, being unfairly graded, or being accused of things they had not done. They were the “scapegoats” for everything bad that happened:

*“By grading me unfairly, excluding me from their company and calling me names.”*

*“The other children laughed at me because of the color of my skin. My grade teacher made me sit in the back row.”*

Dejan was one of the best soccer players in his primary school. When the time came for the school team to play in a regional competition, Dejan had no doubt he would be selected to join the squad. He was wrong—the coach did not choose him. Dejan recalls feeling sad and not understanding the coach’s decision. “Look at them; don’t you see any difference? They are white, you are black,” the coach explained to him. It was not his only encounter with discrimination.

Some participants also mentioned that teachers discriminated against them by looking down on and/or underestimating their abilities and efforts. Others reported that their competence and successes were ignored because they were Roma. No matter how well they did in school, they were not selected to participate in a competition or voted Student of the Year, and they had to work twice as hard as non-Roma students did.

*“There was a competition and they were to select the class representatives to take part in the competition. I was definitely among the best pupils in class. But I ultimately wasn’t selected.”*

A more hidden form of discrimination was lower teacher expectations of academic achievement from the Roma students:

24. Bhabha, Fuller, Matache, et al., “Reclaiming Adolescence,” 187.

*“I noticed that the teachers applied less exacting grading criteria to me precisely because I was Roma, that I got better grades although I knew I didn’t really deserve them.”*

The discrimination by teachers continued in secondary school and college.

*“No knowledge in this world would change my skin color.”*

*“I started in secondary school and the first thing one teacher asked me – do you cut wood, do you pickpockets, do you steal? Stuff like that. I immediately changed schools. In the other school, they would say to me – what do you need school for, you’re not a full-time student anyway, you’d be better off married or doing something else,”* said a student from Kragujevac.

Some college students mentioned that the professors deliberately stressed their ethnicity in front of the whole class/group:

*“I’m in my freshman year, and the professor is reading out the students’ names during the first class. He gets to my name, reads it out and asks me whether I am a Roma.”*

Others said that professors, too, made offensive, even dehumanizing allusions and comments about Roma:

*“The professor was always talking about collectors of secondary raw materials during his lectures and disparaged and made fun of Roma.”*

These anecdotes accord with the findings of many studies that have shown how discrimination distresses a large number of Romani children and youth across Europe. The tiny percentage of Romani youth who manage to access higher education are not protected from such experiences. Despite their sacrifices, strengths and resilience, young Roma students still feel a sense of doubt in the racist society they inhabit:

*“No knowledge in this world would change my skin color.”*

As discussed later, teachers could also influence Roma students positively, with most of the college students reporting encouragement from one or more teachers being vital to their success.

### Consequences & Coping Mechanisms

Like their peers pushed out from school prematurely, some college students remembered moments when they wanted to drop out from school or had done so, to avoid the toxic school environment. They also talked about feeling sad, rejected, unappreciated and insecure, and of having no services to turn to for support or guidance in the school setting.

As for their emotions, most said that when they felt discriminated against and humiliated, they experienced almost the same emotional cycle: from confusion (*I didn’t know what was happening and why; I didn’t expect that, I didn’t know what to think; Why me, why that person*) through hopelessness and despair (*As if I were all*

alone. As if a part of me disappeared, at least as far as school, recess, our talks were concerned; Like a mouse in its small hole, trapped; Lost, in a labyrinth) to anger provoked by being subjected to the experiences at all.

*“I was angry and quite surprised how academic citizens, university students and professors, could afford to do things like that—that is, to show their feelings and thoughts, let some of their current frustrations cloud their professionalism.”*

For many, anger was the beginning of a healing process because it gave them the impulse to find their inner strengths, stand up for themselves, and resist discriminatory, even violent behavior.

*“But it all began to encourage me to struggle even harder, with even greater ambition. I saw each defeat as winning another part of my freedom.”*

*“But it all began to encourage me to struggle even harder, with even greater ambition. I saw each defeat as winning another part of my freedom.”*

Some reported that they developed more sophisticated coping mechanisms and resilience through the painful experiences:

*“In time, I learned to turn every situation that befell me well, if not into what I wanted it to be, then to make changes in it that would make it better than just tolerable.”*

One respondent has decided to study psychology as her major, hoping to find ways to help herself and younger children feel better about themselves and their identity.

Many students had not always done well in school, in part as a result of the influence of interactions with teachers and peers.

*“When I think about the past and reflect on it I feel that they took something away from me,”* concluded one of the students.

Most college students participating in *Writing Lives* said that they felt relieved to share their struggles with discrimination:

*“I feel lighter in a way, as if a burden was lifted off my chest.”*

They said it was transformative to notice similarities between their experiences and troubles and those of others.

*“This is the first time I talked about these things, the first time I talked about all of this. I felt better, knowing there were people with the same experiences more or less. I realize every one of us here had a problem. That I’m not the only one.”*

Finally, they hoped that by sharing those humiliating experiences in a safe space, they could “*turn a negative experience into something positive*” and get closure. Reflecting on the experience of participating in the workshop, one participant said:

*“I reproach myself for not sharing some of my experiences with the group at the start, and I feel stronger in this group. My impression – the wish to cope with it successfully and make the best of it. Totally positive, since we turned some traumas into successes and relaxed in the process, it’s easier.”*

No child deserves such demeaning treatment. No teacher or child should be allowed to use such a dehumanizing, painful, and brutal treatment against Romani children and any other children in the school environment and elsewhere.

### What makes the difference?

The quantitative data show that parents, financial support, scholarships, mentors, and affirmative action all contribute to the educational achievements of Roma students—a finding similar to many other minoritized communities and individuals.

In primary school, study support from parents helped Roma youths: “*Mom and Dad helped me do my homework and, afterward, when we were already a bit older, with the more complicated homework, e.g., math problems,*” said a female student from Kragujevac.

A significantly higher number of students in the college group (48 percent) compared to the other group (18 percent) received some form of support during secondary school, much of it financial. The impact of financial support or stability is also shown for all students at the national level. In the case of non-Roma, as the SORS/UNICEF report in Serbia shows, parents wealth makes a difference: “[i]n the richest households, the proportion of children attending secondary education is around 97 percent, while it is 74 percent among children living in the poorest households.”<sup>25</sup>

Moreover, in secondary school, scholarships and teachers helped college students considerably with their academic achievements, as is suggested by Figure 6 and Table 1. In addition, once in college, many students mentioned psychological support from their parents, along with affirmative action, and scholarships.

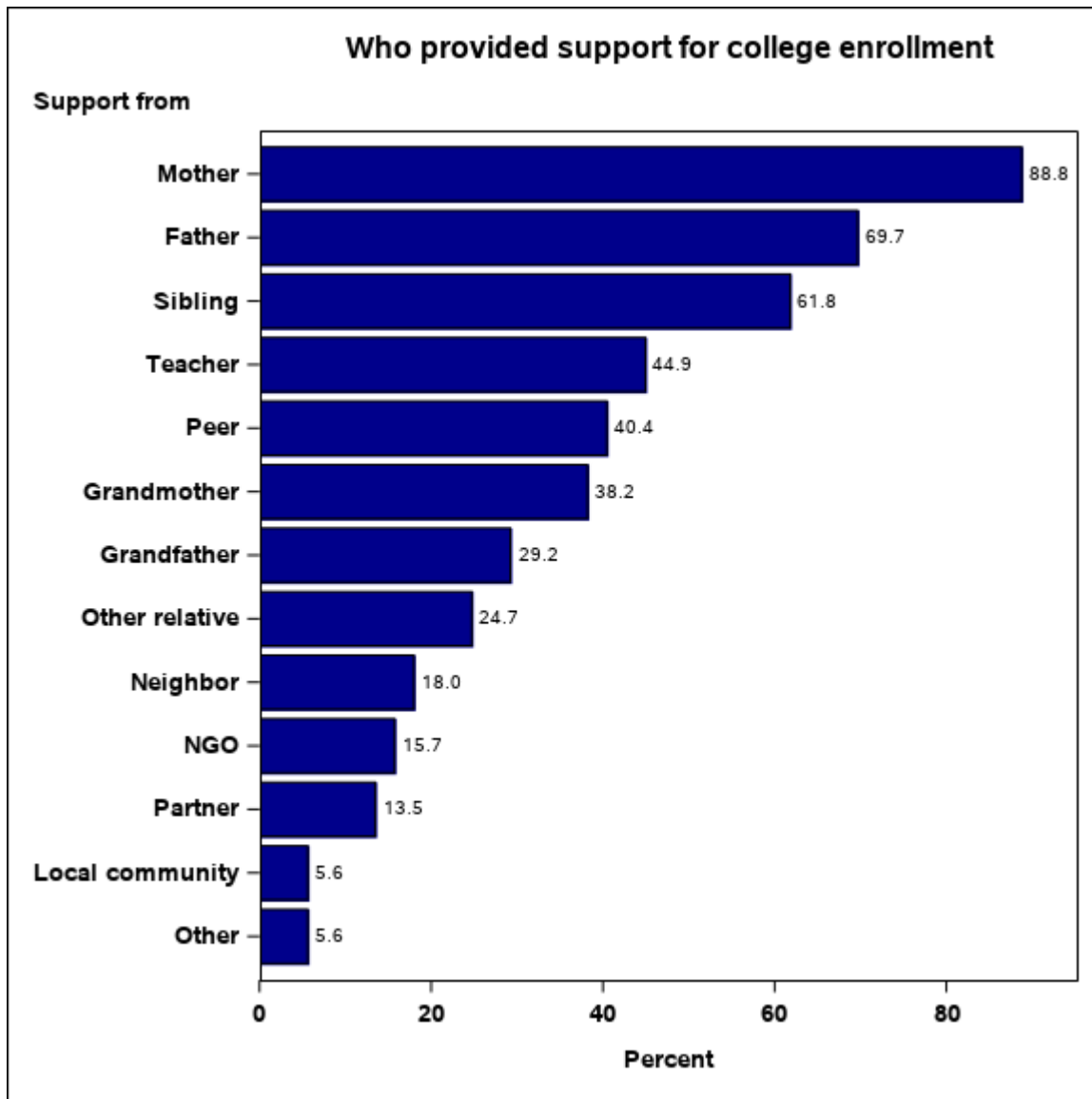
Finally, the analysis of the replies to the questionnaire indicates that the college students’ families, peers, and teachers as well as financial opportunities played a major role in extending support to enroll in college and pursue their studies.

Many college students point to support from their mothers and fathers. However, we cannot conclude that the support and encouragement they got from their parents during schooling made the difference, as the analysis of the questionnaires of the comparison respondents shows no differences between the two groups of respondents in terms of their perceptions of the quality of social support, parenting styles, or the value parents attach to education.

25. SORS/UNICEF, *Serbia and Serbia Roma settlements MICS, 2014 Final Reports*, 180.

In the qualitative interviews, the college students pointed to particular forms of support, from primary school to college (see Table 1 below). The college students highlighted their parents' and teachers' moral and academic support during their primary school years. They also pointed to their teachers' support during secondary school, including mastery of the curriculum, preparation for their college entrance exams, and general encouragement and advice. College students also stressed the importance of financial aid, mostly in the form of scholarships and affirmative enrollment measures, which helped them persevere with their schooling. Most college students singled out greater financial aid, motivational workshops, study support, and free foreign language courses as factors that would have been additionally helpful. Lack of information about the availability of these potential supports requires correction.

**FIGURE 6. SUPPORTERS OF COLLEGE ENROLLMENT**



All the participants in the *Writing Lives* workshop had at least one person who especially supported them as they addressed their problems; they mentioned parents, teachers, friends, and grandparents, as well as their

non-Roma peers. In the *Writing Lives* workshop, in addition to their parents, the participants also spoke of support from other family members. Some mentioned their grandmothers' wisdom and how much they had learned from them. They also mentioned uncles who provided constructive feedback and support and siblings who gave them advice, a sense of security, and motivation to achieve their goals.

**TABLE 1. TYPES AND FREQUENCY OF SUPPORT EXTENDED TO COLLEGE STUDENTS AT DIFFERENT LEVELS OF EDUCATION (INDIVIDUAL MENTIONS BY THE 20 RESPONDENTS)**

Types of Support/Temporal Context	Primary School	Secondary School	College
Study support, by parents	7	2	0
Private lessons	2	0	1
Attendance of workshops for Roma children	2	1	0
Teachers' support	6	11	1
School psychologist's support	0	1	0
Psychological support by the family and relatives	4	4	13
Friends' support	1	3	1
Affirmative enrollment measures	0	2	11
Scholarship	0	11	8
Material assistance extended by the school	2	1	0
Financial aid - individual	0	0	4

The students also mentioned friends as a source of significant support, primarily in acquiring social competencies. Friends helped Roma students establish contact/networks with others, overcome their timidity in communication with other peers, and reframe their priorities in life. Friends also encouraged Roma students and advised them on how to protect themselves from being hurt by discrimination.

Many of those in the *Writing Lives* workshop spoke about the importance of the support they got from their non-Roma peers, especially in overcoming shyness and identity insecurity and acquiring specific competencies. *"She meant very much to me, because she thought I was a good person, first and foremost,"* said a female college student from Novi Sad. Some participants highlighted their non-Roma peers as critical allies who supported, protected, and defended them against discrimination, particularly during their first years of schooling. They also talked about the support their peers extended to them in coping with discrimination in secondary school.

Many of those in the *Writing Lives* workshop spoke about the importance of the support they got from their non-Roma peers, especially in overcoming shyness and identity insecurity and acquiring specific competencies.

In the *Writing Lives* workshop, some participants mentioned the critical role their teachers played in their lives. Some students looked up to teachers as role models whom they could identify with, such as those had managed to finish college and become teachers despite poverty. One participant in the *Writing Lives* workshop said: *“I remembered a college teacher, who had come from a poor family and made it.”*

Other participants stressed the teachers’ influence and the difference they could make by creating a climate where all children felt welcome and felt a strong sense of belonging. Several students mentioned a particular teacher who had carefully mentored them and invested time and trust in their education. Teachers’ support turned out to be particularly crucial in secondary school. Some said that their teachers had helped them study, mostly when they were preparing for college entrance exams, by extending moral support and by motivating and encouraging them. Some teachers had given them advice on what college they should enroll in. Teachers provided support by setting high expectations and trust in the participants’ capacities.

*“They believed in my potential and always wanted to find out whether there was any problem underneath what was happening.”*

Teachers also helped students remain proactive and persistent, and importantly, taught them to respect their Roma identity and heritage and be proud of who they were:

*“She attached a lot of importance to the preservation of the culture and tradition I carry in me, because she knew I was Roma, her message was never to be ashamed of my nation, because no money can buy what we have inside us.”*

For the college students, non-Roma peers and teachers have had a key supporter role at different levels of education.

More college students than the comparison group highlighted the importance of resolve and a commitment to succeed educationally and pursue one’s dreams, despite the suffering involved. Respondents not attending college highlighted the importance of kindness while college students emphasized the importance of hope. The comparison group exhibited some pessimism with respect to the current state of affairs whereas a fighting spirit dominated the attitude of college students.



## CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

Anti-Roma policy and practice across Europe continues to generate a heavy burden for Roma children and youth. Historical legacies, ideology, structural racism, and discriminatory attitudes drive an atmosphere of isolation, stigmatization, and marginalization for Roma across much of the continent. Serbia, as this study shows, is no exception. Along with other consequences, this enduring human rights failure dramatically affects Roma education. Just one in every hundred Roma adolescents makes it to university.

The fact that only one in one hundred Roma youth makes it to college, in an age when tertiary education and technology skills are an increasingly essential tool of future employment and social flourishing, stands as a dramatic signpost of the sizeable political and social challenge facing policy makers at regional, national, and local level.

This project aimed to secure deep and personal insights into the schooling experiences of Roma college students and non-students, to elicit testimonies that might be painful, to permit the disclosure of buried memories, and to generate a sense of collective achievement and solidarity in the face of devastating adversity and rejection. By using a diverse set of research tools, we sought to construct a safe and supportive environment where young Roma people could build trust and share traumatic experiences, experiences that are of critical importance for Roma and non-Roma alike in understanding current rights failures that continue to generate lifelong harms.



At the outset of this report, we point out that educational achievement is a product of multifactoral influences. School environment alone, decisive though it is, will not completely correct the ongoing legacy of structural discrimination and exclusion in housing allocation, in employment impartiality, in skill training opportunities, and in public displays of hostility.

We found several determinants of higher education among these Roma youth. Our quantitative data emphasize the importance of three factors as determinants of positive higher education outcomes: access to early childhood development services, robust teacher and peer support systems in school, and parents' and other relatives' levels of education.

Our quantitative data emphasize the importance of three factors as determinants of positive higher education outcomes: access to early childhood development services, robust teacher and peer support systems in school, and parents' and relatives' levels of education.

The college students had better chances of improving their competencies and skills because they had access to higher education, and consequently had a network of friends from a larger range of contexts and more opportunities for civic engagement. These strengths manifested themselves in greater self-awareness and confidence, leading to higher rates of reporting discrimination. By contrast, we infer that non-college respondents regularly suppressed their exposure to discrimination, one aspect of the pervasive "normalcy" of these negative experiences. Rejected by their schools, the comparison respondents shifted their efforts and socioemotional competencies to other domains (e.g., family, community, health).

The data also underline the reluctance of Roma youth—students and non-students—to admit (in some cases even to themselves) searing experiences of verbal insult, of social stigmatization, of institutional racism as a self-protective coping strategy. This study builds on the findings of our previous research, *--Reclaiming Adolescence--* showing how, because of unrelenting life exposure to discrimination, many Roma youths do not fully grasp the concept of equal opportunity, overestimate the role of individual perseverance for achieving a successful life, and underestimate the systemic generation of inequalities. In contrast, their parents and many members of the educational establishment have a more accurate perception of the subtle but manifold forms of anti-Roma discrimination. One consequence is that public reports by young Roma of anti-Roma discrimination rates are likely severe underestimates.

The data also underline the reluctance of Roma youth—students and non-students—to admit (in some cases even to themselves) searing experiences of verbal insult, of social stigmatization, of institutional racism as a self-protective coping strategy.

Paradoxically, a poisonous environment makes it more difficult to know and name the poison. We interpret their silence on discrimination as an indicator of it, given the results of the *Writing Lives* workshop. From Roma children's earliest encounters with the educational system, an oppressive atmosphere of persistent

stigma, negative stereotyping, and explicit racism from peers and teachers exposes Roma children, to searingly painful, rights-violative experiences.

The evidence of profound humiliation and shame associated with exposure to persistent discrimination is another powerful indictment of current European reality. That members of a population of over 12 million Europeans should be reluctant to report incidences of overt discrimination in a region that prides itself on its unsurpassed commitment to human rights norms of nondiscrimination and prohibition of degrading treatment is evidence of a substantial unfinished set of inclusion obligations.

The evidence of profound humiliation and shame associated with exposure to persistent discrimination is another powerful indictment of current European reality.

Therefore, we suggest research methods and spaces designed with psychological safety in mind to give voice to Roma youth experiences with discrimination and with other delicate topics. Moreover, a prime target of research, including anthropological research should be anti-Roma racism, its profound and widespread influence, rather than a perseverance of sociological and anthropological approaches to the distinctive, often implicitly pathologized specificity of a “Gypsy life style.”

Our study documented the paradoxical role of non-Roma peers and teachers: they were either perpetrators of discrimination or, much less frequently, key supporters at different levels of education. Our study shows the dramatic impact that dedicated teacher mentorship, belief in Roma intellectual capacity, and teacher and peer support against discrimination can have on Romani youth and the difference it makes to the 1 percent of Romani youth who persevere to enroll in higher education. In this study, Roma students cited as critical support from several peers and teachers from the majority community, as friends, mentors, and supporters. Several Romani students mentioned an exceptional teacher in school who mentored them and invested time and trust in their education, as well as non-Roma friends who had supported and comforted them in the face of explicit discrimination. The non-college youths in this study as well as the 30 percent of Roma college students who did not cite acts of discrimination and stigma were likely not the beneficiaries of supportive school environments.

Our study shows the dramatic impact that dedicated teacher mentorship, belief in Roma intellectual capacity, and teacher and peer support against discrimination can have on Romani youth and the difference it makes to the 1 percent of Romani youth who persevere to enroll in higher education.

As the discussions in the *Writing Lives* workshop, the quantitative data, and the qualitative interviews demonstrate, non-Roma peers and their families, teachers, and other members of the majority communities have absorbed and internalized the idea of anti-Roma inferiority. Discrimination against Roma endures as a pervasive European ailment, a form of racial stigmatization that policy makers, practitioners, and citizens have not adequately addressed or even acknowledged. While this legacy continues without effective redress, Roma communities and individuals will

continue to experience intolerable discrimination and its manifold and life-long legacy of painful dehumanization and exclusion, including exclusion from education.

Rates of differential educational achievement are not likely to change until non-Roma teachers confront and change their implicit or explicit biases, until the school environment is as welcoming to and supportive of Roma children and adolescents as it is of their non-Roma peers.. Non-Roma teachers must reject anti-Roma stereotypes and substitute them with inclusive, confidence building approaches, and with vigorous prohibition of anti-Roma abuse, bullying, and stereotyping within and outside the classroom. Such changes need to be addressed explicitly through dedicated teacher formal training, teacher-community exchanges, sanctions, and anti-racist, diversity and inclusion activities in schools. In the absence of such measures, one of the most dramatic instances of pervasive contemporary European racism, and its powerful rights-violating legacy, will continue to cast its long and pernicious shadow on future generations of Roma children and adolescents.

What emerges most forcefully from this study, then, is the imperative of radically re-orienting the emphasis of current European policies designed to improve Roma access to education. Instead of the biased focus on changing Roma “behavior” to improve educational performance, the focus needs to shift to the deeply prejudicial and rights-violative conduct of the majority community, the key determinant of Roma educational underperformance. As long as Roma children experience relentless hostility and mockery in school, and as long as their “normal” experience relegates them to lower teacher expectations, segregated play spaces, disadvantageous classroom location to say nothing of classroom and school segregation, their collective educational achievement is unlikely to improve. Good schools and progressive, unbiased teachers are the solution to Roma equal access, participation, and attainment in education.

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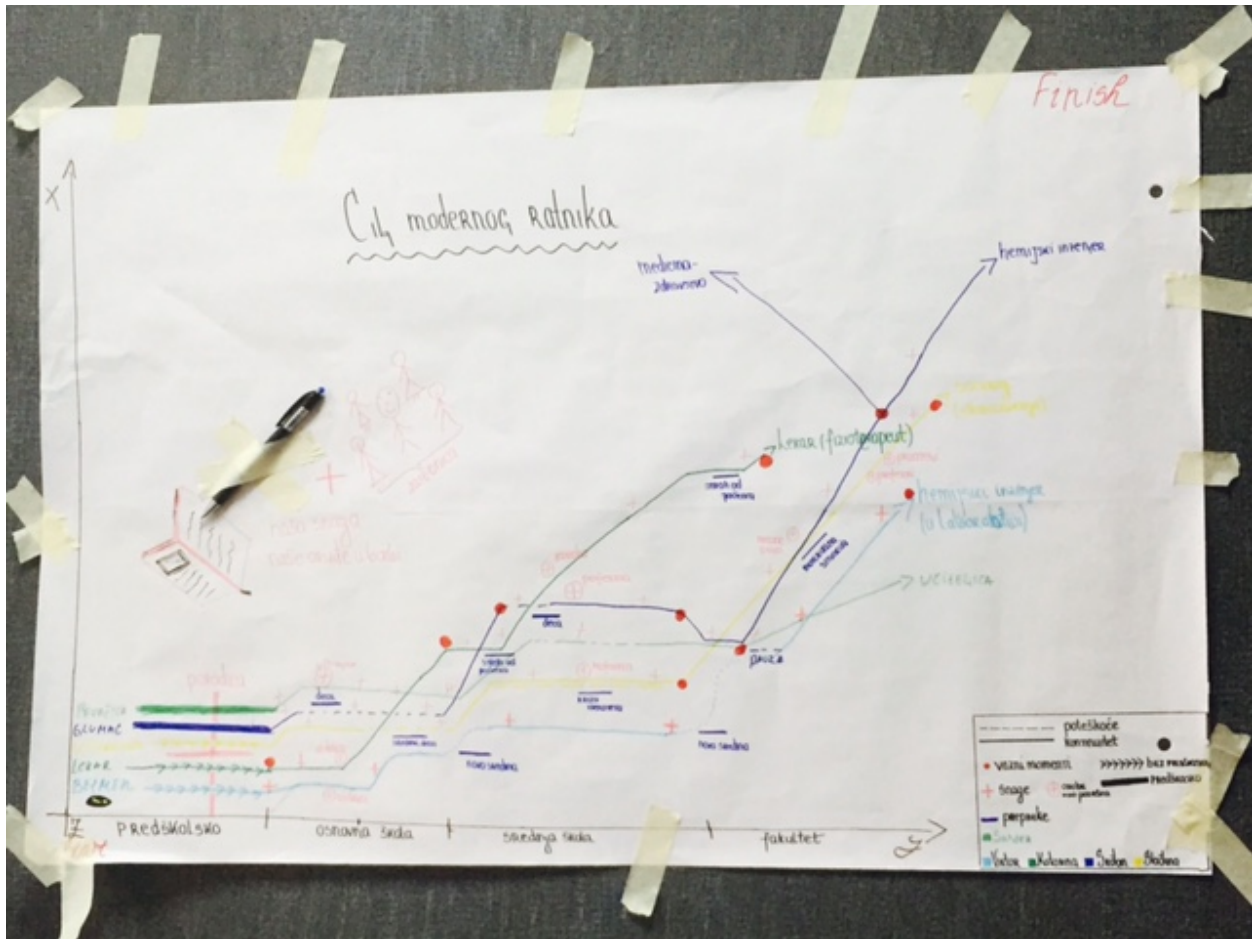
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## APPENDIX: DETAILS OF THE METHODOLOGY

*One in One Hundred* is an observational mixed methods study of 89 Roma college students and 100 peer comparison youths living in Serbia. The project explores the drivers of success and resilience among Romani adolescents in Serbia who have succeeded in gaining access to a college education.

Before we began the study, four Roma students were recruited as members of the research team and three others provided logistical support, in conformity with the commitment of both the Harvard FBX Center and the CIP Center for participatory research. The students, enrolled in social science programs at one of the four leading state universities in Serbia, contributed to the questionnaire and interview guidelines design and were trained in research methodology, interviewing, and ethics. They also participated in Harvard’s Catalyst Community Partner Human Subjects Training.<sup>26</sup> The four student researchers, with the support of the study tutor and the three Roma students that had networking experience and established linkages with Romani youths conducted the data collection. In the first phase of the research, they administered questionnaires, whereas in the second phase, they conducted semi-structured interviews with Roma college students.

26. Harvard University, Office of Human Research Administration (OHRA), “Human Research Training,” March 22, 2017, <https://www.hsph.harvard.edu/ohra/investigator-manual/human-research-training/>.

The study used a mixed-methods approach to identify the factors that enabled Romani adolescents to enroll in college. In the quantitative part of the study, we administered questionnaires to 89 Roma college students and a comparison group of 100 non-students. Most of the questions and scales in the two questionnaires were identical to facilitate the comparison of the answers of these two groups of respondents. The questionnaire was comprised of several thematic sections, which involved both internationally used psychological inventories and questions specifically designed for this research. The first section included mostly general questions on the socio-demographic features of the respondents and their families. The next section included questions on the respondents' family relationships,<sup>27</sup> values and practices, friends and the neighborhood in which they had spent most of their childhood and adolescence. The third block of questions focused on the respondents' experiences in elementary and secondary school.<sup>28</sup> The fourth section involved scales and questions assessing some personal characteristics, such as self-esteem,<sup>29</sup> academic resilience,<sup>30</sup> hope,<sup>31</sup> socio-emotional status,<sup>32</sup> subjective wellbeing,<sup>33</sup> lifestyles,<sup>34</sup> and coping strategies.<sup>35</sup> Additionally, the questionnaire for Roma college students included questions regarding their college experiences, while the questionnaire for the comparison group included open-ended questions about why they had dropped out of high school (if they had), whether they planned on enrolling in college one day and why (not).

The student researchers administered the questionnaires to Romani students enrolled in the University of Belgrade, the University of Novi Sad, the University of Niš, and the University of Kragujevac.

The research team also administered 100 questionnaires to a comparison group (convenience sample) of adolescents who did not enter college; they had also come from the same communities as the 89 college students. Though we endeavored to attain equal gender and age distribution, there were proportionally

27. "Interpersonal Support Evaluation List – Shortened Version": S. Cohen, R. Mermelstein, T. Kamarck, and H.M. Hoberman, "Measuring the Functional Components of Social Support," in *Social Support: Theory, Research and Applications*, ed. I. G. Sarason and B.R Sarason (Dordrecht: Springer, 1985).

28. Elementary School Ethical Climate Index: K. A. Keiser and L. E. Schulte, "The Development and Validation of the Elementary School Ethical Climate Index," *The School Community Journal* 17, no. 2 (2007): 73-88.

29. Self-Esteem Scale: Morris Rosenberg, *Society and the Adolescent Self-Image*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1965.

30. Academic Resilience Scale: Andrew J. Martin and Herbert W. Marsh, "Academic resilience and its psychological and educational correlates: a construct validity approach," *Psychology in the Schools* 43 (2006) 267–281.

<https://doi.org/10.1002/pits.20149>

31. The Hope Scale: C. R. Snyder, C. Harris, J. R. Anderson, S. A. Holleran, L. M. Irving, S. T. Sigmon, L. Yoshinobu, J. Gibb, C. Langelle, and P. Harney, "The will and the ways: Development and validation of an individual-differences measure of hope," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 60, no. 4 (1991): 570-585. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/0022-3514.60.4.570>

32. M. J. Furlong, S. You, T. L. Renshaw, M. D. O'Malley, and J. Rebelez. "Social Emotional Health Module – Middle & High School Questionnaire" in "Preliminary development of the Positive Experiences at School Scale for elementary school children," *Child Indicators Research* 6 (2013): 753–775. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12187-013-9193-7>

33. International Wellbeing Group, *Personal wellbeing index—Adult* (Melbourne: Australian Centre on Quality of Life, Deakin University, 2006).

34. Adaptation of the instruments designed by different authors: G. W. Allport, P. E. Vernon, and G. Lindzey, *Study of Values* 3rd ed. rev., (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1960); N. Havelka, "Vrednosne orijentacije učenika i njihova očekivanja od budućeg zanimanja" [Students' value orientation and their expectations of the future profession], *Psihološka istraživanja* 7 (1995): 89-125; B. Kuzmanović, "Društvene promene i promene vrednosnih orijentacija učenika" [Social changes and changes in students' value orientations] *Psihološka istraživanja* 7 (1995): 17–47; D. Popadić, "Uzrasne i generacijske razlike u preferenciji životnih ciljeva" [Age and generational differences in life goals preferences], *Psihološka istraživanja* 7 (1995): 71-88

35. Adaptation of the COPE instrument: C. S Carver, M. F. Scheier, and J. K. Weintraub, "Assessing coping strategies: A theoretically based approach," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 56 (1989): 267-283.



more female participants in the college student group than in the comparison group (see Table A1) and, on average, the enrolled college students were two years older than the comparison group.<sup>36</sup>

**TABLE A1. GENDER BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS IN BOTH SUB-SAMPLES**

Group	Gender		Total
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	
College Students	39	50	89
Comparison Group	56	44	100
<b>Total</b>	95	94	189

Roma youths who had completed secondary school accounted for most of the respondents in the comparison group. Table A2 presents the breakdown of the respondents in both sub-samples by the type of secondary school they completed (or attended).

**TABLE A2. BREAKDOWN OF RESPONDENTS IN BOTH SUB-SAMPLES BY TYPE OF SECONDARY SCHOOL**

Group	Type of Secondary School		Total
	<i>Vocational</i>	<i>High School</i>	
College Students	79	10	89
Comparison Group	72	28	100
<b>Total</b>	151	38	189

We also endeavored to ensure that the number of respondents attending specific types of college proportionally reflected the share of students of those colleges in the entire college population. Students of social and humanistic sciences dominated (51 percent), while the fewest respondents were studying art (2.2 percent). Almost half of the participants were freshmen or sophomores.

We had piloted the survey instrument before the data collection, conducting a small-scale pilot (including three college students and three of the comparison group) to ensure the reliability and validity of the survey tool.

Following the quantitative survey and preliminary analysis, the student researchers conducted semi-structured interviews as one of two additional information sources. The 20 interviewees were selected from the 89 students: every fifth questionnaire respondent on the list or the next one if the fifth declined to take part in this stage of the research.

<sup>36</sup>. All our interviewees were 18 and older.

The second qualitative research activity was a *Writing Lives* workshop, a methodology developed by Professpr Sharmila Rege of the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, University of Pune (KSP) in Maharashtra. This methodology was piloted in *The Champions Project* implemented by Harvard FXB Center for Health and Human Rights, together with the University of Pune and the Institute of Development Studies Jaipur in Rajasthan between 2012 and 2014.<sup>37</sup> We adapted the *Writing Lives* assignments to correspond with the circumstances of Roma youth.

Nineteen students, many of them respondents in the semi-structured interviews, participated in the workshop. *Writing Lives* had two goals. One was to elicit personal stories (visual, oral, and written) that documented the students’ personal journey to college. As our colleagues in India had done before, we used diaries, letters, thematic posters and discussions to capture the drivers of success and resilience as well as the barriers to education.<sup>38</sup> The workshop created a sense of solidarity between the respondents, who shared common experiences of discrimination and exclusion. A second goal was to generate an opportunity for the workshop participants to share their stories of resilience and success, and discuss strategies and tactics they might develop to contribute to challenging obstacles facing Roma communities and individuals, including as potential future leaders within their societies.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health approved this study on March 3, 2016. Serbian legislation does not require IRB approval for social science research, but local regulations and customs required informed consent. The CIP Center notified the Commissioner for Information of Public Importance and Personal Data Protection of the intention to collect and store data. In the absence of an ethics committee for social science research in Serbia, we established a Community Advisory Board (CAB) to supervise and advise on the ethical aspects of our study. The CAB included representatives of the Romani leadership in Serbia and other experts unaffiliated with this research project. One of the CAB members supported the preparation of the research instruments, the researcher trainings and the *Writing Lives* workshop.

We used thematic analysis to investigate the replies to open-ended questions. To examine the data obtained through the interviews and the workshop, we used MAXQDA software and applied thematic analysis.<sup>39</sup> Chi-square and *t*-tests (assuming unequal variance) were used to describe the personal and family characteristics of study participants and make initial group comparisons. We also applied logistic regression models in two ways modeling the probability of enrolling in college with educational attainment as the outcome. The purpose of both approaches was to ascertain associations between personal and family characteristics and educational attainment. In both, the probability of being a college student was modeled. In the first

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37. Harvard FXB piloted this methodology with the Krantijyoti Savitribai Phule Women’s Studies Centre, University of Pune and the Institute of Development Studies, as described on the Harvard FXB webpage, *The Champions Project – Unpacking Success*, <https://fxb.harvard.edu/research/adolescent-empowerment/gender-and-adolescent-ag>. More detail about the original *Writing Lives* is available from the several reports on that page, most relevantly, Jacqueline Bhabha, and Orla Kelly, *Child Marriage and the Right to Education: Evidence from India*, Evidence Submitted to the UN Office of High Commissioner of Human Rights, 2013.

38. Additional information about the findings of the workshop here: Margareta Matache, Jacqueline Bhabha, and Arlan Fuller “Writing Romani Youth Lives,” *Voices in Education: The Blog of Harvard Education Publishing*, June 21, 2017. <http://hepg.org/blog/writing-romani-youth-lives>

39. See U. Kuckartz, *Qualitative Text Analysis* (London: Sage, 2014); P. Mayring and E. Brunner, E., “Qualitative Inhaltsanalyse,” In B. Frierberthäuser, A. Langer, and A. Prengel, ed., *Handbuch Qualitative Forschungsmethoen in der Erziehungswissenschaft* (Weinheim und München: Juventa Verlag, 2010).

approach, we built multiple logistic regression models specific to the research hypotheses. In the second approach, we screened a wide variety of target characteristics for their potential association with educational attainment. Unless specified, the statistical tests were two-sided. Statistical significance levels of  $p=0.10$  were used for understanding trends and  $p=0.05$  for statistical significance. The data analysis was performed using SPSS software, version 20.0 and SAS and SAS/STAT software, Version 9.4 of the SAS System for UNIX.<sup>40</sup>

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## About the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University

The François-Xavier Bagnoud Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University (Harvard FXB) envisions a world that fulfills the health and human rights of all peoples and protects them from injustices imposed by discrimination, poverty, conflict, and disaster.

Harvard FXB is an interdisciplinary center that conducts rigorous investigation of the most serious threats to health and wellbeing globally. We work closely with scholars, students, the international policy community, and civil society to engage in ongoing strategic efforts to promote equity and dignity for those oppressed by grave poverty and stigma around the world.

Harvard FXB's Roma Program was established in 2012 with the goal of advancing research, pedagogy, and advocacy with and for Roma people. The Center has a particular focus on the realization of children and youth' rights and has incorporated the rights and participation of Romani children and adolescents as part of its research agenda. Harvard FXB has to date engaged in three major research projects in this area: *Reclaiming Adolescence: Roma Transitions to Adulthood*; *Strategies and Tactics to Combat Segregation of Roma Children in Schools*; and *One in One Hundred* (originally called the Champions Project).

## About the Center for Interactive Pedagogy

Since its founding in Belgrade in 1998, the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP Center) has established a long-term commitment to the social and educational inclusion of Roma. The Center contributes to the improvement of Roma's status through a comprehensive approach that includes conducting research, influencing policy development, and developing projects that aim to empower Roma parents, children, and youth, as well as publishing reports, manuals, brochures and other educational materials. Furthermore, a critical facet of the CIP Center is its work to empower teachers and collaborate with Roma NGOs. The CIP Center participated in introducing Roma Pedagogical Assistants into the educational system.

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