Examination of the Participation of Roma Families in the Educational System: Difficulties and Successful Practices

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Abstract

Discrimination faced by Roma students leads to high rates of academic failure and school dropout while structural barriers continue to hinder their inclusion in the education system. Educational research shows that the engagement of families contributes to inclusion, academic success, and improvement of the quality of education. However, educational barriers and school segregation practices show the traditional deficiency of effective tools to promote family participation among the Roma population. Understanding the barriers that Roma families find to participate in the educational system involves the examination of complex processes and dynamics that we observe in practice and the role of the different actors in the schooling of Roma students. Schools as Learning Communities provide the democratic scenario to develop the type of relational and collaborative conditions that help both educators and families to participate in successful educational actions linked to school performance. The development of family engagement action plans connected to student achievement and the incorporation of the perspectives of Roma families can successfully increase their opportunities and expectations in the education system.

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Estudio de la Participación de las Familias Gitanas en el Sistema Educativo: Dificultades y Prácticas de Éxito

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Resumen

La discriminación que enfrentan los estudiantes gitanos conduce a altas tasas de fracaso académico y abandono escolar, mientras que las barreras estructurales continúan obstaculizando su inclusión en el sistema educativo. La investigación educativa muestra que la implicación de las familias contribuye a la inclusión, el éxito académico y la mejora de la calidad de la educación. Sin embargo, las barreras educativas y las prácticas de segregación escolar muestran la tradicional carencia de herramientas efectivas para promover la participación familiar entre la población gitana. Comprender las barreras que encuentran las familias gitanas para participar en el sistema educativo implica examinar los complejos procesos y dinámicas que observamos en la práctica y el papel de los diferentes actores en la escolarización del alumnado gitano. Las Escuelas Comunidades de Aprendizaje brindan el escenario democrático para desarrollar el tipo de condiciones relacionales y colaborativas que ayudan tanto a los educadores como a las familias a participar en actuaciones educativas de éxito vinculadas al rendimiento escolar. El desarrollo de planes de acción de participación familiar relacionados con el rendimiento de los estudiantes y la incorporación de las perspectivas de las familias gitanas pueden aumentar con éxito sus oportunidades y expectativas en el sistema educativo.

Palabras clave: población gitana, barreras educativas, participación familiar, actuaciones educativas de éxito, inclusión

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Data shows that Roma students and their families continue to face discrimination in the educational system (Carmona-Santiago et al., 2019; Mirga & Redzepi, 2020; Rutigliano, 2020). Specifically, stereotypes, prejudices and the widespread lack of knowledge and appreciation of Roma culture have been well documented in the European context (European Parliament, 2011; European Commission, 2019; EU-FRA, 2020) . Indeed, discrimination faced by Roma students leads to high rates of academic failure and school dropout while institutional barriers continue to hinder their inclusion in the educational system (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Kende, 2021; Flecha et al., 2022; Gallego-Noche & Goenechea-Permisán, 2022). Furthermore, ethnicity per se is not the variable that explains students' academic achievement (Richardson, 2019). Therefore, understanding the barriers that Roma face in education involves the examination of complex processes and dynamics that can be observed in practice, including the role of the different actors involved in the schooling of Roma students.

In the European context, data show different ways in which Roma students and their families face discrimination in society and education. For example, in some contexts Roma people are perceived as outgroup members of the society who must adapt to the conventions of the majority group (Cashman, 2017). Accordingly, an assimilationist perspective assumes integration as a hegemonic affirmation of the culture of the majority group and expects that minorities assume the culture of the main society relegating their own culture (Padilla Carmona et al., 2017). Ethnocentric perspectives also exhibit misconceptions about how Roma students are inherently unmotivated for education. These misconstructions indicate the lack of knowledge about the Roma culture by the predominant culture regarding issues as the motivation to continue in school; the perception of Roma families towards secondary school; the lack of role models and examples of educational success; the priority given to early marriage; or conceptions of Roma culture and gender relations (Padilla Carmona et al., 2017; Alvarez-Roldan et al., 2018; Symeou & Karagiorgi, 2018). Additionally, the negative social construction of Roma as dependents encourages stigmatization and limits the potential for inclusion and their future opportunities (Miškolci et al., 2017; Lukšík, 2019).

In education, Roma children have traditionally been misdiagnosed with mental disabilities as a result of the use of culturally biased diagnostic tools and widespread prejudices among psychoeducational professionals (Amnesty International and European Roma Rights Center, 2017). Indeed, some teachers believe that segregation and the implementation of special programs with a reduced curriculum is positive for Roma students (Alexiadou, 2019). Hence, traditional measures for addressing the education of Roma involve segregation practices in schools or classrooms which are arranged to be mainly composed of Roma students (Lambrev et al., 2020). However, school segregation is a powerful generator of social exclusion, inequality and social injustice. These practices include the designation of students for separate educational paths based on their ethnic origin and socio-economic background. As a result, Roma students are exposed to a reduced curriculum content and guided to vocational training courses instead of higher education. Therefore, segregated schools limit the opportunities for young Roma to continue their education and have access to successful professional careers. Furthermore, the experience of being excluded has negative consequences for the development of the identity, self-esteem and social relations or Roma students with other peers (Messing, 2017).

Institutional barriers and school segregation practices show the traditional discriminatory approach to the education of Roma and the consequences of unequal access to resources and opportunities (European Parliament, 2011). Empirical research demonstrates that both direct and indirect forms of institutionalized discrimination continue to harm minority students (Brüggemann & D'Arcy, 2016). Particularly, institutional barriers lead to a deficient socialization among students from majority and underrepresented groups, creating social isolation and reducing the opportunities for peer interactions. Likewise, compensation programs that reduce curriculum contents contribute to the delay in learning and narrow the educational possibilities and future employability of Roma youth (Parra et al., 2017). As a consequence, these obstacles damage the coordination between students and their families, the teaching staff, and the school's management team (Segovia-Aguilar et al., 2020).

Other institutional forms of anti-Gypsyism include spatial segregation and land expulsions of Roma communities (Carrera et al., 2017). These

ghettos outside the urban area where the deprivation of basic services and lack of access to resources are frequent represents the naturalization of social inequality and leads to the categorization of Roma as a precarious population. This institutional analysis understands the phenomenon of poverty considering multiple dimensions and facets including the deprivation of resources and the disadvantaged reality in education (INCLUD-ED, 2021).

Family Participation: Current Legislation and Data

The analysis of educational law and data in countries with a high population of Roma people shows unequal socio-educational outcomes, as well as the persistence of prejudices, stereotypes and anti-Gypsyism (EU-FRA, 2018a). These circumstances negatively influence the opportunities of a high percentage of young Roma to succeed in education and access the labor market (EU-FRA, 2018b).

Discrimination faced by disadvantaged Roma students in school leads to isolation, absenteeism and early school leaving (Eurofound, 2017). Specifically, young Roma have higher rates of early school leaving than their peers of the majority group in almost all European countries (EU-FRA, 2018b). Even when attendance from Romani students is high they often have access to low-quality schools. Additional evidence shows that Roma people often have a lower corresponding educational level than at their age; and around 4% to 29% of them faced their educational experience in segregated schools or classrooms (Rutigliano, 2020).

Since the late sixties, the Council of Europe has been promoting analysis reports on the "situation of Gypsies and other Travellers in Europe" and developing recommendations for educational policies in favour of Roma. These initiatives for the development of national education policies for Roma children include objectives such as "Making schools more attractive, welcoming places for Roma children", "Preparing Roma children for schooling within the general education system" and "Instituting dialogue and cooperation between school and the Roma community" (Council of Europe, 2020), and Roma families are considered a key element to achieve these goals. For this reason, educational measures aim to promote effective relationships and communication with Roma families and communities and

include Roma families in governing boards. Additionally, the Language Policy Division is drafting a common reference framework for Romani language skills to facilitate communication. In each country involved, the responsibility needs to be shared by the Ministry of Education and its local councils, in collaboration with the ministry responsible for minority affairs, the education centers, teacher training and research institutes, non-governmental organisations and associations, Roma communities and mediators. The expected outcomes include the improvement of poor school attendance among Roma children; the reduction in discrimination against Roma children; the increase of participation in school life among Roma families; schooling made more accessible and attractive, and better geared to the educational needs of Roma children; the embracement of cultural diversity among the educational community and a significant number of teachers of Roma origin. However, the effectiveness of these measures can vary among the different members of the European Union as they might develop them with more or less success and intention.

According to the European commitment, the political agenda in Spain developed a National Strategy for the Social Inclusion of the Roma Population (Ministry for Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda, 2020). The educational targets of the strategy are aimed to (a) increase Roma pre-school education completion; (b) promote universal schooling and increase academic success among Roma pupils in Primary school; (c) increase the completion of Compulsory Secondary Education and increase the academic success of Roma students at this stage; and (d) increase the education level of the Roma adult. In order to accomplish these goals, strategic lines of action have been established from pre-school to post-obligatory education and training programs, including actions such as the development of mediation programmes between families and schools, and family awareness and support for their participation in school. Hence, family participation has been considered a strategic element for educational development. Furthermore, the Roma associative movement has contributed to improve the realization of their rights and opportunities. Similarly, the European network for Roma cohesion has made a relevant progress in the use of EU Structural and Investment Funds, increasing the promotion of social inclusion, equal opportunities and non-discrimination of Roma (Red EURoma, 2020).

However, the access to a quality education for all students remains deficient. Despite scientific evidence on family involvement and its positive relationship with quality of education and the academic success of students (Alvarez-Roldan et al., 2018; Alexiadou, 2019), educational legislation in Spain has traditionally provided for the collaboration of parents and teachers in a succinct manner, delegating to the educational administrations the adoption of measures that promote and encourage effective collaboration between family and school (Spain General Parlament, 2020). Specifically, the Spanish educational system includes the possibility of creating two representative bodies for family participation in limited decisions: The Association of Parents of Students, and the School Council Center which is mandatory for each educational center. Those are examples of consultative participation bodies (INCLUD-ED, 2011) which would require contextualized intervention programs aimed at teachers to optimize family participation (García-Sanz et al., 2020). This type of formal family participation is significantly higher in the stage of Primary Education and in public schools. However, effective family participation in schools could be improved both in intensity and diversity (Gomariz-Vicente et al., 2019). This legislation has proven insufficient to meet the needs and expectations of families leading to low levels of family involvement and commitment among the members of the educational community. Alternatively, the promotion of flexible and open channels may restore the balance and strength of relationships between students, families and schools (Spain General Parlament, 2013). Nevertheless, the lack of effective and real tools to promote family participation remains their implementation complicated.

In Romania, where the percentage of Roma population is one of the highest in Europe, research reveals the lack of a favourable and safe environment for Roma children; the absence of cultural sensitivity; discriminatory dynamics towards children; and an inequitable pedagogy (Lauritzen, 2019). Accordingly, the European Commission (2019) reported a deterioration in early childhood education and care in Romania. Specifically, data shows that only 38% of Roma children participate in early childhood education; 78% of compulsory school age Roma children are included in education; up to 77% of Roma aged 18-24 have only completed lower secondary education or less, compared to 19% in the majority group

(EU-FRA, 2016). As discussed previously, the participation of families would be a bridge to improve the quality of education in Romania. Nevertheless, this participation is not prescribed in the main fields of interest for the Roma community, it is merely named in one of the directions for action as designing and implementing programs and activities of parental education and encouraging the participation of the Roma parents in the education process within and outside the school (European Commission, 2019).

Family engagement in education is also a matter of political interest in the United States (US). The federal role in education is restricted and most education policies are decided at the state and local levels, multiplying the outcome differences in diverse contexts. However, general guidelines were designed regarding family engagement becoming an integral part of education reform efforts (Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), 2020). For example, the actions taken to promote parent involvement in school-related activities include attending a general school or parent-teacher organization or association meeting; attending a school or class event; and attending a parent-teacher conference (National Center for Education Statistics, 2021). In addition, there is an inter-office group, denominated the Family Engagement Team, that is dedicated to strengthening the voice of families by focusing on the needs of students to allow each student to reach their full potential (Family and Community Engagement, 2021).

Despite the current educational legislation, these measures do not allow overcoming the difficulties that Roma families and other ethnic minorities face to participate in school and take part in decisions about the education of their children. From a theoretical perspective, different countries establish lines of action for family participation, but reality shows that they are barely applied in practice. Furthermore, the policies designed are usually vague descriptions of family participation and lack of concrete measures that make possible the types of family participation linked to the increase of the quality of education and academic achievement of schoolchildren. These descriptions are generic and show an isolationist approach, ignoring in most contexts the situation and specific needs of vulnerable groups including the Roma population.

Family Participation That Increases The Quality Of Education And Academic Success Of Roma Children

The European Commission funded investigation INCLUD-ED identified Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) that improve the inclusion and academic performance of all students regardless of their socioeconomic background and available resources (CREA, 2018). Some of these SEAs include heterogeneous interactive groups to increase inclusion in the class; the extension of spaces and times for learning and participation in school; and the training of families and the community to improve the coordination between school and home (INCLUD-ED, 2011). The effects of the implementation of these SEAs involve the improvement of coexistence, family participation and social cohesion thus increasing the opportunities of vulnerable groups to live included in society.

Regarding the analysis of family and community participation in the educational system, the multinational study identified different types of participation in European schools. Conventional models of participation include a mere provision of information to families and the possibility for family members of taking a limited advisory role in the governing bodies of the school. These examples of informative participation which allows a unidirectional communication and consultative participation based on mere advice usually represent the traditional hierarchy of the school organization. Nevertheless, these types of family participation are commonly implemented in many schools across Europe. A related example of consultation in Romania shows that the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports allows consultative participation of representative family associations and social partners to develop national educational strategies (Romania Ministry of Education, 2021). On the other hand, the study analysed inclusive models of family participation that have demonstrated to be effective in the development of a quality relationship between schools and families resulting in significant improvements regarding collaboration and shared responsibility. These models include the involvement of families in the decision-making process of the school; the evaluation process of students, school organization and its procedures; and in children's learning progression and their own educational training.

Accordingly, the inclusive role of families in decision-making participation, evaluative participation and educational participation provide the scenery for the development of a quality coordination between families and teachers.

The study examined the link between SEAs and the educational participation of families. Specifically, family training and educational participation of the community in SEAs have demonstrated to effectively contribute to inclusion, academic success, and improvement of the quality of education (Macías-Aranda, 2017). Therefore, quality training that responds to the needs of families and the community, and the availability of shared spaces for real decision-making and democratic participation highly benefits the intercultural coexistence in schools.

The discourse on parental involvement as an effective measure to increase the educational success of disadvantaged children has gained ground in the academic and political field of preschool education. Effectively, partnerships between families and school within a democratic and inclusive atmosphere facilitates equity and belonging (Van Laere et al., 2018). Systematic review identifies models of best practices in school which are based on inclusion, interculturality and an active role of families in the educational inclusion of their children (López-Azuaga & Suárez Riveiro, 2020; Carmona-Santiago et al., 2019). Furthermore, research shows successful results of inclusive schools that bring together inclusive policies, inclusive culture and inclusive practice with the collaboration of the different agents involved in the educational community: families, teachers, students, management team members, government, and other social representatives. Accordingly, the involvement of families and other members of the educational community is a strategic action that facilitates the teaching-learning process and increases the quality of education (Pavlović Babić et al., 2017; López-Azuaga & Suárez Riveiro, 2020).

Learning Community Schools are educational institutions where participation and democracy prevail. This type of learning environment favors the inclusion and academic performance of all schoolchildren regardless of their situations of vulnerability (Flecha, 2014). Specifically, the involvement of Roma families in Learning Communities is driven by consistent collaboration through equal dialogue and actions such as parents

volunteering in the classroom. This dynamic contributes to increasing and diversifying children's interactions, enriching their learning experience, improving their social skills and generating confidence and trust-based relationships. Further strategies are focused on reducing the social isolation of Roma families and improving their living conditions, providing culturally sensitive meaning to the educational process, and promoting role models among the Roma population (Parra et al., 2017).

The engagement of Roma families and other community members in decision-making processes in schools contributes to the development of a shared commitment to provide a quality education for all children (INCLUD-ED, 2011). This type of participation has demonstrated to be effective to prevent early school leaving during primary education, implement compulsory secondary education in the same school, and increase the percentage of students who graduate from secondary school (García-Carrión et al., 2017). Additional good practices involve actions that increase awareness and respect for diversity as a relevant part of school learning processes (Antúnez et al., 2017).

Increasing the responsibility of families in education and their participation in school is considered as a key element for school transformation and the development of equal opportunities for all (Paniagua-Rodríguez & Bereményi, 2017). However, some established participatory formulas have traditionally approached diversity from an assimilationist perspective that legitimizes the existing status quo in the educational system, leaving Roma underestimated and not included. Alternatively, students and their families increase their trust towards school and their collaboration with teachers when the institution is highly committed to the inclusion and academic success of all students, offering high quality education to most vulnerable students and a path to transform their reality (Díez-Palomar et al., 2013). Accordingly, school practices such as greeting each family at the school entrance every day have demonstrated to increase the willingness of Roma families to propose ideas and to strengthen solidarity dynamics, improving school climate (Garcia-Yeste et al., 2019; Khalfaoui et al., 2020). For these reasons, actions that promote inclusive democratic environments can foster a sense of trust among school staff and families.

Successful Practices For Family Participation Among Roma And Other Ethnic Minorities

Inequality and social exclusion of Roma and other ethnic minorities in the educational system have been extensively reported (Cross et al., 2017; Gattamorta et al., 2019; George Mwangi et al., 2019; Silver, 2019). Contributions that aim at overcoming institutional barriers and alleviating the consequences of unfair treatment and discrimination toward ethnic minorities have increased over the last decades (Council of Europe, 2020; Ministry for Social Rights and the 2030 Agenda, 2020; Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2022). Specifically, this contribution examines successful practices based on inclusion and interculturality where collaboration with families plays a decisive role in the educational inclusion of vulnerable children.

Traditional ways of approaching the education of Roma have been based on segregation, low expectations and the reduction of contents of the curriculum (Garcia-Yeste et al., 2019; Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2022). These measures are grounded on biased judgment, giving rise to unfair outcomes for Roma people in the educational system and therefore, reducing its socioeconomic and employment possibilities (Macías-Aranda, 2017). Recent research informs about evidence-based actions promoting educational inclusion, academic success and education quality for all children. These actions include the democratic participation of families in educational activities, decision-making and evaluation of the school and its processes (Apple & Beane, 2007; Segovia-Aguilar et al., 2020; Abad-Merino et al., 2022).

In the US context, the Comer School Development Program (SDP) aimed to enhance the educational experience of vulnerable minority youth by building supportive connections and collaborative relationships in a harmonious climate (Yale School of Medicine, 2021). Similarly, the program Success for All was developed in cooperation between Johns Hopkins University and the Department of Education of Baltimore (Slavin et al., 2022). Additionally, Accelerated Schools were oriented to provide enriched study programs to vulnerable students with the participation of their families who were included in decision-making processes (Levin, 2005; Levin, 2017). Those programs aimed to improve the levels of educational success of

children in disadvantaged circumstances, and included staff collaboration, parental involvement, and high expectations regarding student achievement. Parents could be involved at all levels of school activity, from volunteering in the classroom to participating in the governing activities of the school.

In Europe extending to Latin America, including Spain, Portugal, Brazil, Peru, Mexico, Chile, Ecuador, Colombia and Argentina, Learning Community Schools aim at social transformation in socially disadvantaged areas (Flecha, 2014). Its implications include overcoming school failure, and ensuring equity and quality of learning for all students regardless of their deprived background. This project was developed and led by the sociologist Ramón Flecha and later by the Research Center on Theories and Practices that Overcome Inequalities (CREA) of the University of Barcelona. The educational practices of Learning Communities specifically promote the co-responsibility of families in school management as a democratic strategy to participate in the educational experience of their children and enhance the quality of education (Flecha, 2014; Girbés-Peco et al., 2015; Abad-Merino et al., 2022). Some of the outcomes involve academic progress, social cohesion and the improvement of social relations and coexistence motivated by the participation of the community in the school (Soler et al., 2019). There have been identified different strategies that outline the extent to which these communities achieve the inclusion of families improving the quality of education. These strategies are based on scientific evidence and therefore considered as Successful Educational Actions (SEAs) that involve an explanatory paradigm shift. This model implies a transformation of the expectations and participation of families, the commitment and self-esteem of students, and the increase of teachers' motivation, as well as the improvement of coexistence, learning and academic success.

Currently, there are other initiatives that support and promote the development of SEAs in European schools and their positive effects. For instance, the SEAS4ALL project, within the European framework of Erasmus+ projects, is a program that aims to expand the number of schools implementing and sharing SEAs in Europe (EnlargeSEAS, 2021).

Further research considers the interaction of students with people outside the classroom as a principle of intercultural citizenship, and supports the role of same ethnicity teaching assistants in the learning process of students

(Salgado-Orellana et al., 2019). Specifically, assistants can provide the feeling of cultural belonging through educational interventions of familiar ethnic context. Roma children and youth who belong to the same cultural background as teaching assistants feel understood, included and not pressured to follow the dominant culture. Particularly, the participation of Roma women in educational interventions either as a teaching assistant or as an intercultural mediator in schools and communities, provides concrete examples of inclusion and cooperation among cultures. Likewise, teacher training, cooperation across the curriculum, and intercultural competence are strategies that lead to the development of methodologies adapted to the cultural needs and potentialities of Roma students. Precisely, the training of professionals in education requires specific knowledge and effective competences to foster collaborative actions with families and the community (Gomila et al., 2018), and this approach demands policies that address the development of curriculum contents, competences and formal organization of the initial training of teachers.

The analysis of further strategies for family involvement in schools where students are predominantly Black and Latino shows a positive impact of increasing the opportunities, resources and incentives to support and encourage participation in education. Furthermore, the role of teachers is a key element to support school measures that prioritize and invest in parent involvement (Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021). For example, the development of critical citizenship among the educational community promotes an inclusive environment that facilitates the implementation of practices that bring cohesion and embrace all cultures (Sanahuja et al., 2020).

Literature review shows scarce visibility of Roma population living in vulnerable and excluded contexts, stating the need to show the diversity of current family models and the heterogeneous spectrum of ethnic minority groups. Specifically, the link between social microsystems and its influence in school inclusion needs to be further examined (Carmona-Santiago et al., 2019; Battaglia & Lebedinski, 2022). Accordingly, research shows the need to evolve to a greater flexibility of the educational structure and investment on new teaching-learning methodologies that effectively respond to the diversity of school children and their families (Anson et al., 1991; Branch, 2020).

Democratic Schools are considered as an alternative to hierarchical institutions which provide an excellent breeding ground to implement improvement projects and good practices by applying democratic principles in the organization of their structure and functioning (Apple & Beane, 2007). These educational organizations favor attention to diversity and inclusion and encourage shared consideration of the educational community on curriculum, methodologies, socio-emotional and relational aspects.

The attempts to desegregate schools and its impact on different ethnic minorities are well documented internationally (EU-FRA, 2019; Hellgren & Gabrielli, 2021; Gallego-Noche & Goenechea-Permisán, 2022). There is a growing interest in the development of new strategies to avoid this phenomenon where an unequal distribution of students in schools is based on their personal characteristics or social and cultural origin.

For example, it has been extensively argued the need to include training on the exploration of ethnic identity in teacher preparation programs as well as specific training related to classroom practice and awareness on the lack of knowledge that is needed to work in multicultural school settings (Symeou & Karagiorgi, 2018; Branch, 2020). In Spain, strategies to address cultural segregation in schools include the incorporation of Roma mediators who facilitate intercultural dialogue and promote transformation. This community of mediation brings the opportunity to create a motivational atmosphere with the absence of prejudices and the promotion of positive language and the participation of families in open schools (Márquez-García et al., 2017). Similarly, the introduction of Roma assistants in countries like Serbia and the UK helped to overcome cultural barriers that the Roma population have traditionally faced to participate in early education. These examples show the decisive role of Roma staff in building trust between families, the community and the school. Furthermore, this collaboration has proved positive impacts on the educational experience and academic success of Roma children: improved attendance, learning, language proficiency in both dominant and Roma languages and socio-emotional development (López-Azuaga & Suárez Riveiro, 2020; Klaus & Siraj, 2020). Additional measures in Slovakia show a democratic approach to family participation that takes into consideration the voices of families to create favorable conditions for the education of

Roma children, gradually reducing their social exclusion and marginalization (Lukšík, 2019).

Institutional barriers explain unequal and unfair outcomes for Roma people (Messing, 2017; Paniagua-Rodríguez & Bereményi, 2017). Hence, the commitment to recognize the heterogeneity of minority groups in policymaking is emphasized in countries such as the United Kingdom with the aim to improve the socio-educational outcomes of Roma fostering accommodation without assimilation (Levinson, 2014). Broadly, there is a call for public institutions and educational actors to become a platform for racial discourses to resolve cultural boundaries (Lambrev et al., 2020).

The consideration of further successful actions requires evidence about their positive impact on developing significant improvements in the academic results of all students. Furthermore, these actions need to be transferable to diverse contexts and incorporate the views of the different members of the educational community (CREA, 2018).

Discussion

Traditionally, Roma people have faced discriminatory practices that have diminished their social inclusion and opportunities to succeed in the educational system (EU-FRA, 2017). The normalization of hierarchical intergroup relations between the majority social group and the Roma population has perpetuated the negative social construction of Roma people and the lack of knowledge of their culture, contributing to extending their disadvantaged situation over time. Consequently, educational segregation, academic gap and early school leaving continue to characterize the situation of Roma in the current educational system (Fundación Secretariado Gitano, 2019).

This situation of chronic social and educational disadvantage has also hindered the participation of families in school, preventing the benefits of the socio-cultural transformation associated with their educational engagement. Specifically, scientific evidence shows the impact of family participation on increasing the quality of education, the academic performance of students and overcoming situations of social and educational disadvantage of vulnerable groups (Arza et al., 2020).

Schools as learning communities provide the dialogic relational conditions to develop the competencies of educators, families and members of the community to perform collaborative work aimed at improving student performance (Segovia-Aguilar et al., 2020). Furthermore, these democratic schools facilitate the possibility of incorporating the contributions of families and accessing the knowledge funds of the Roma community, increasing the opportunity to develop culturally appropriate curricular content (Abad-Merino et al., 2022).

The involvement of the academic and political community in the inclusion of Roma families in the education system facilitates the development of systematic action plans for school, families and community partnerships that allow collaborative actions aimed at the inclusion and educational success of Ro ma children. Furthermore, the development of an intercultural paradigm that responds to the needs of all children requires institutional support and a school culture based on inclusion and trust-based relationships. For this reason, higher education institutions can contribute to the development of evidence based guidance for school leaders and teachers aimed at the development of family engagement action plans linked to student success, and the incorporation of the voices and knowledge of Roma families, increasing their opportunities and expectations in the education system. Specifically, good practices that positively impact the academic success of students include the incorporation of families in the evaluation of learning processes and school programs; decision-making processes; and successful educational actions (European Commission, 2021). Additionally, an effective organization of family participation in school includes planning, implementation of family engagement strategies and shared evaluation that leads to continuous improvement (Kende, 2021).

The examination of the institutional barriers that hinder the participation of Roma families in the education system brings attention to the need of specific policies that integrate strategic actions for the incorporation of intercultural formulas for family participation in schools. Accordingly, the current education system can promote actions that facilitate broadening knowledge of the perspectives of ethnic minorities and traditionally excluded groups in heterogeneous and culturally diverse contexts (Branch, 2020; Gallego-Noche & Goenechea-Permisán, 2022). These actions can contribute

to the identification of alternative ways to promote strong partnerships between families, schools and communities throughout the different educational stages and challenging periods of school transition.

Culturally responsive activities need to include family training on effective ways to participate in the education and academic success of their children as well as teacher learning sessions with and from families and communities to better understand home lives and circumstances (Girbés-Peco et al., 2015; Khalfaoui et al., 2020). The institutional support to this education in both directions in which the individual needs of children and the beliefs and culture of families are taken into account influences the development of positive attitudes toward school and impacts school achievement.

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