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Representation of Roma Content in Curricula and Textbooks at the Initial Education Level in Serbia

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Abstract: The 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child guarantees all children the right to an education, and this paper focuses on Roma children and that right. The extent of Serbia's strategy documents was reviewed, particularly in light of their responsibility for guaranteeing equity, accessibility, and equal educational opportunities for all children. The study's objective is to assess how content related to the Roma is portrayed in current curricula (N = 16) and textbooks (N = 93) for the 2022–2023 academic year. It was discovered that despite the objectives in each of the analyzed courses (Serbian language, The World around Us, Nature and Society, Music Education, and Civic Education) clearly promote equality, diversity, and mutual appreciation, democratic values, inclusion, and anti-discrimination, none of them explicitly mention the words Roma or the Roma people. Only a few times do the Roma people explicitly appear in textbooks on nature, society, and music, and then only as a numerical representation of the national minority; no mention is made of the positive traits of the Roma people, who have their own identity, tradition, and culture as well as well-known members. The results highlight the need for textbooks to include specific content about the Roma people as fundamental teaching tools. This content should also be included in the curriculum because it would help students of Roma origin feel less excluded and more empowered to participate in school on an equal footing.

Keywords: right to education, initial education, Roma people, Roma students, non-discrimination.

Introduction

The Roma community, with over 10 million people, is the largest ethnic minority group in Europe, according to UNICEF data from 2011. Throughout Central and Southeastern Europe, mostly in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, North Macedonia, the Czech Republic, and Poland, there are primarily over 70% of Roma. Their academic achievements are much lower than those of other children in each of these nations. Even while it is highlighted that this scenario in Serbia has been worse over the past 20 years, they have even less probability of finishing their education (Apostolović, 2019). Numerous studies reveal that Roma children continue to be excluded from educational practices even in the modern era, despite the widely accepted doctrine of human rights, the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and the Millennium Development Goals, which explicitly stated that every child has a right to an education (Aleksandrović, Macura and Trikić, 2012; Baucal, 2012; Marković Čekić, 2016).

This paper focuses on Roma children and their right to an education in Serbia. Every child has the right to a high standard of education thanks to the ratification of the [Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1990](#), the passage of the Law on its ratification in 2001, and the Republic of Serbia's Constitution in 2006. In order to ensure that everyone has an equal opportunity to receive a high-quality education, the established policies of public documents in the field of education (Law on the Basics of the Education System and Education; Law on Preschool Education; Guidelines on the Basics of the Preschool Education - Years of Ascent, 2018) were established. As such, they can be used as a tool to end social inequalities. There is a good likelihood that this will not be sufficient to support further significant advancements in the problem of addressing the Roma population's general social and economic involvement in the currents of society, as well as their inclusion in the public school system. The majority of the Roma population is

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severely impacted by poverty and social exclusion, and they continue to be a victim of both overt and covert discrimination, especially in the area of education, according to [Serbia's strategy for the social inclusion of Roma and Roma women for the years 2022–2030](#).

The first section of this paper examines the educational opportunities for Roma students from the perspective of children's rights established by the 1990 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, with a focus on one of its fundamental principles: nondiscrimination (Article 2); and articles 28, 29, and 30 regarding education. The curricula for classroom subjects are then examined to get a picture of whether there is content in lessons about the Roma population. The textbook is then seen as a tool for the operationalization of curricula and one of the fundamental teaching tools in the Serbian education systems ([Law on Textbooks, 2018](#)), which can help reduce prejudice and stereotypes, influence the promotion of mutual understanding, respect for diversity, and tolerance, and help develop critical thinking about those who are different from oneself as a barrier against distance, division, and conflict ([UNESCO, 2017](#)). The aforementioned elements of textbooks for Serbian pupils in the first level of education were taken into consideration by assessing the content of 93 textbooks.

The [1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights](#) established, among other things, the right to education and mandated that states strengthen the observance of fundamental liberties and human rights. The significance of human rights education is reiterated in [the 2011 United Nations Declaration on Education and Training for Human Rights](#) (it covers all social strata and all forms of education - Article 3, paragraph 2). Every child has the right to education and the right to education of a sufficient standard under [the 1989 United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child](#), which states this specifically in Articles 28 and 29. Serbia committed to ensuring children's wellbeing through respect for their rights when it ratified the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) on December 18, 1990. The Committee on the Rights of the Child of the United Nations continuously monitors Serbia's compliance with this commitment (UN). According to the 2017 Report for Serbia, the government should launch campaigns at all levels and in all provinces to address negative social attitudes toward Roma. It should also take decisive action to stop violence and hate speech against Roma and ensure that all applicable laws prohibiting discrimination are fully implemented, which includes stepping up public education campaigns that address these attitudes.

While the [Strategy for the Development of Education](#) in the RS until 2030, for the following period, specifically emphasizes the need to strengthen the educational role of the school, the Constitution of the Republic of Serbia (2006), the country's highest legal document, stipulates the right to education under equal conditions (2021). Dedicated to the goal of Serbia as a society in which Roma men and women exercise their rights without prejudice, the [Strategy for Social Inclusion of Roma Men and Women in the Republic of Serbia between 2022 and 2030](#), and the leading principle for the overall education states that it is necessary to "...ensure that everyone has access to education and can exercise their right to it equally, without discrimination and in accordance with social justice and equal opportunity" ([Ibid: 33](#)).

According to Article 9 of the [Law on Primary Education in the Republic of Serbia](#) from 2019, the primary responsibility of the school is to ensure that each child and student receives a quality education under equal circumstances. Other objectives include the development of positive human values, the advancement of racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, and age equality, as well as tolerance and respect for diversity (Article 21). In order to achieve the desired results, students must be able to actively participate in the realization of human and children's rights, as well as recognize and respect other people's traditions, identities, and cultures and be able to work cooperatively with them ([Ibid: 6-8](#)). The teaching materials, which are chosen based on the curricula, are the foundation upon which the aforementioned is most fully realized. This paper presents a thematic analysis of the representation of Roma in curricula at the level of initial primary education in Serbian schools, and then in the textbooks from which they learn, in an effort to provide an answer as to what are the possibilities to contribute to the learning content to increase tolerance towards Roma, and help Roma students to reduce the problems that distance them from other children. The responses provided would guide efforts in identifying solutions so that the content's selection and didactic-methodological transformation could positively affect the motivation of Roma students on a personal level (learning, attendance, academic achievements), as well as in the course of their social integration into the school community. Seeing Roma education in Serbia from the perspectives of interculturality in raising, education, and inclusive teaching is necessary. The fact that the education of pupils from the Roma population is legally regulated in many ways in the Republic of Serbia illustrates how important it is to observe this process from the perspective of interculturalism ([Petrović, 2016](#)). These are also supported by the findings of various studies that have been published in prominent magazines around the world. They demonstrated how a distinct approach to the development and teaching of Roma students produces the desired educational results in the classroom. When teaching and learning are implemented with the goal of developing the identity belonging of Roma students to the

Roma people, better benefits are also achieved in the academic and social development of students of the Roma population. According to some studies done in the Republic of Serbia (Milenović, Lapat and Aleksandrović, 2011) and England (Gül and Eren, 2018), teaching the Roma population's students is more engaging when it incorporates material from their history, tradition, culture, folklore, and especially music. In these situations, they are also more interested in participating more in the teaching process and their learning. With this approach, the Roma in Serbia (as well as other national minorities and ethnic communities facing comparable challenges) can receive equal rights as well as the greatest possible conditions for education (Ilić, 2010).

By respecting some of their differences, educational needs, and interests, the aforementioned idea helps society to accept and value Roma as they are. This seems especially important in the beginning of education, as a proportion of Roma pupils self-segregate for a variety of reasons (Suzić, 2007). There is also an agreement that one of the causes of the Roma population's pupils' deficient participation in teaching and their learning is the Roma population's insufficient support for education, especially for education that is not required by law (Milenović, Lapat and Aleksandrović, 2011). Relationships in society, the social standing of the Roma population, the economic crisis, and other variables that inevitably have an impact on the entire society all play a significant role in this predicament. The situation is similar when it comes to other minority communities in Serbia, such as the Vlasi population in the area of Homolje and the Gorani population in Kosovo and Metohija, even though the subject of this study is the representation of elements and content about Roma and the Roma population in curricula at the level of initial education (Milenović, Lapat and Aleksandrović, 2011), including also places where the bulk of the population is Serbian, as in the area of the Gadžin Han municipality in Zaplanje region (Milenović, 2013), where there are likewise no elements and content in the curricula and textbooks at the primary education level. The findings of numerous studies conducted abroad (Bjartveit and Panayotidis, 2017; Otsuka and Jay, 2017) demonstrate the significance of textbook contents that present information about a particular society's concepts and are in line with the analyses presented in the theoretical approach to the problem under study in this paper.

Materials and Methods

The objective of this paper is to analyze teaching curricula in terms of the presence of components that relate to Roma and the Roma population and to identify teaching materials that at the primary education level include references to Roma and the Roma population.

The research was based on the general premise that, at the level of primary education known for self-segregation, elements referring to Roma and the Roma population are an important motivating tool for greater inclusion of Roma students in teaching. However, because they are not sufficiently represented in curricula and textbooks, the expected educational effectiveness in greater involvement of Roma students in teaching is lacking. Additionally, it was based on the specific supposition that the research would establish the content of the underrepresented Roma population-related teaching programs at the primary education level and in the textbooks for the subjects Serbian Language, The World Around Us, Nature and Society, Music Education, and Civic Education.

Sample and Procedure

A sample of textbooks and teaching materials made up the research sample. The initial education sample of teaching programs included 16 curricula for the following subjects in all four grades: Serbian language, The World Around Us, Nature and Society, Music Education, and Civic Education. The study examined four curricula from the group of compulsory subjects as well as one optional course (Civic Education) for the first four grades of primary school. The analysis excluded the optional subject of Roma language with national cultural aspects. The phrase Roma, Roma people, or syntagms were specifically used as the program's analytical unit: Roma song, story, legend, music, and dance (in words or pictures). Content on the following subjects, which the textbook would implicitly support: children's rights, filial piety, democracy, equality and tolerance, diversity, respect for the other and different, would assist the teacher in explaining these concepts in class from the perspective of the Roma population (in words or pictures).

The textbook sample consisted of approved textbooks (For all subjects in the first and second cycles of initial education, new textbooks have been approved, and curricula have been restructured as of the 2018–19 academic year (author's note)) published by the publishers that are most frequently used in schools (Table 1). A sample of 93 textbooks were examined for the textbook study. Textbooks describe each lesson—or portion of a lesson—in which the Roma are depicted in verbal or visual form, either

explicitly or implicitly—as a unit of analysis. The selected textbooks were reviewed in their entirety. The presence of the terms “Roma,” “Roma people,” or syntagms such as “Roma song,” “Roma tale,” “Roma music,” or their equivalents was identified during the quantitative review.

Table 1

List of analyzed textbooks - publishers

No.	Publisher	Year of publication	Place of publication
1.	Zavod za udžbenike	2020	Belgrade
2.	Kreativni centar	2019	Belgrade
3.	Novi Logos	2020	Belgrade
4.	Klett	2019	Belgrade
5.	Vulkan izdavaštvo	2021	Belgrade
6.	Freska	2020	Belgrade
7.	Eduka	2021	Belgrade
8.	BIGZ-školsstvo	2020	Belgrade
9.	Nova škola	2021	Belgrade

With these information, typical descriptive statistical techniques were applied as well as an examination of their frequency. The techniques of analysis, comparison, and generalization were all incorporated in qualitative analysis. The current information regarding the Roma was taken into account, and the way in which they were specifically portrayed in the textbook lessons was examined. Answers to the following questions: How are Roma people portrayed? What types of stereotypes exist, if any? What other situations could the Roma still be included in textbooks, and in which thematic contexts are the Roma mentioned? (friendship, empathy, mutual help, togetherness). Research matrices (for textbooks and programs) made specifically for the examination served as the research instrument.

Instrument

The study was carried out during the first semester of the 2022–2023 academic year. Historical, descriptive, transferal and comparative methods were used. By examining the material in textbooks and curricula, research data was gathered. Standard record lists created for the needs and scope of the research are known as research instruments.

Statistical analysis

By calculating frequency (N) and percentages (%), descriptive statistics were used to analyze the research data. Tables are used to present the research findings.

Results

The research findings are provided according to the calculated frequencies and percentages based on examined curricula and textbooks.

Curricula

According to the curricula at the level of primary education in Serbia, it is found that the following objectives are clearly positioned among those of primary education: offering a stimulating and safe environment for students' total development - with nonviolent behavior and zero tolerance for violence; thorough development of each student in accordance with age, needs, and interests; developing solidarity, understanding, and cooperation; and fostering friendship; development of positive human values; developing competencies for understanding and respecting children's rights, human rights, civil liberties; development and respect for racial, national, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender and age equality, tolerance and respect for diversity; as well as the development of personal and national identity, tradition and culture of the Serbian people and national minorities ([Law on the Fundamentals of Education, 2019](#)). The objectives are accomplished with the help of curricula, which are viewed in this paper from the perspective of compulsory subjects. These are: the Serbian language; The World around Us; Nature and Society; Music Education; and Civic Education, which is an elective subject. The goal of the paper was to find content that will aid in achieving the stated objectives and mention or make reference to students from the Roma population. The study discovered that none of the curricula for the aforementioned subjects explicitly mentions the terms “Roma” or “Roma people” (Roma song, story, legend, music, or game).

First grade. The word “Roma” or any materials on this subject are not included in the Serbian

language curriculum for the first grade. The student will be able to behave in a way that respects the diversity of his peers and other people after finishing the first grade, according to the program for the World around us, which lists this as one of the outcomes ([The Guidelines on the Curricula for the First Grade of Primary School, 2017: 28](#)). The following thematic units' material make this possible: Me and Others (Similarities and Differences by Gender, Age, Ability, and Interests), as well as the topic Family Home, School (Groups of people: family, school community, class, neighbors; Rights and obligations of group members; Rules of conduct for individuals and groups; Holidays: family, school). Also, the document expressly omits any references to the Roma and their population. The word "Roma" does not appear in the Music Education curriculum, and neither do any of the songs or dances (although, for instance, in the Musical Dance section of the curriculum, there is a Slovak song: Pisma u kolu [Singing in a circle dance]) ([Ibid: 38](#)). The curriculum for the mandatory elective subject Civic education defines as learning objectives (among others): "...that, after completing the course, the student will be able to notice mutual differences and similarities with other students in the class, will be able to behave in a way that does not endanger the needs, rights and feelings of others, recognizes examples of respect and violation of children's rights in their environment, stories, films" ([Ibid: 47](#)). These learning objectives are made possible especially by Areas/Topics: Human rights: Me and others in the class (through content about the talents and interests we possess, as well as our similarities and differences, the needs and rights of the child - recognition of rights, as well as recognition of their violation); and Democratic society: Class/group as a community (contents on equality, responsibility and solidarity in the class, respect and concern for others, tolerance, fairness, honesty, as well as respect for diversity). It can be said that the curricula for the subjects The World Around Us and Civic Education through specific topics enable the inclusion of some content about the Roma, which would contribute to the realization of the set outcomes, even without the stated explicit presence of the word Roma/Roma song, story, legend, music, or dance.

Second grade. In the second-grade Serbian language course's curriculum, the term "Roma" is not mentioned. [The Guidelines on the Curricula for the Second Grade of Primary School \(2018: 48\)](#) state that one of the learning objectives of the subject "The world around us" is that the student will be able "...to behave in a way that respects the differences of other people." However, there are no specific contents that mention the Roma. Through individual and group musical experiences, which foster the growth of creativity, aesthetic sensibility, and a sense of community as well as a responsible attitude towards the preservation of one's own and other nations' musical heritage and cultures, the teaching and learning of music aims to foster students' interest and love for music ([Ibid : 60](#)). The word "Roma" does not appear in the Music Education curriculum, and neither do any of the music or dances. One of the learning objectives of the Civic Education curriculum is that "the student is able to state and explain in his own words the basic rights of the child contained in the [Convention on the Rights of the Child](#); as well as to accept and explain with examples from life that every child has the same rights regardless of differences" ([Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, 2020](#)). Certain Areas/Topics are used to meet these objectives: Human rights - I and others in different groups (contents about expressing our own feelings, feelings of others, how we recognize and appreciate them; connections of feelings with thoughts and behaviors; convention on children's rights - we are different, but our rights are the same; human rights apply everywhere and for everyone; violation and protection of rights - I am not an observer, I react to situations of violation of children's rights in the class and school).

Third grade. The third-grade Serbian language curriculum does not include any required books about the Roma. Understanding and appreciating the similarities and differences between individuals and groups is one of the tasks in the Nature and Society course ([The Guidelines on the Curricula for the Second Grade of Primary School, 2019: 76](#)). The topics of Human activity - population of our region (similarities, differences, coexistence), children's rights, and group norms (knowing, respecting, and living in accordance with them) were stated as the contents with which it is realized ([Ibid: 76](#)). One of the three learning objectives of the Music Education curriculum is to "develop sensitivity to musical values by getting to know the musical traditions and culture of one's own and other nations," which is accomplished by "getting to know the traditional and artistic music of one's own and other nations," according to the program ([Ibid: 85](#)). Nevertheless, not a single piece of content makes any reference to the Roma community. Developing students' awareness of the importance of respecting diversity and individuality, identifying and eradicating stereotypes related to gender, age, appearance, behavior, and origin, and empowering students to understand and respect children's rights and be able to actively contribute to their realization are all tasks that are explicitly mentioned in the Civic Education curriculum ([Ibid: 119](#)). The specific learning contents which allows these objectives to be met refer to: appreciating diversity and uniqueness; recognizing and overcoming stereotypes related to gender, age, appearance, behavior, and origin; the occurrence of exclusion from the group (considering differences that do not

please them - exchanging experiences and reasons for exclusion from the group); behavior that deviates from the expected (observing the effects of a sympathetic or judgmental attitude); and the occurrence of exclusion from the group (exchange of sanctions for breaking agreements between children, whether revenge is a moral offense, what is fair, how to resolve a conflict of needs non-violently).

Fourth grade. The Serbian language curriculum for the fourth grade includes no texts that mention Roma. It is advised to select at least three more, and no more than five more, literary works to cover as supplementary ones, therefore, it might be possible that some of these texts may be used in the lesson plan (although there is not much optimism for that, and in any case, their eventual presence cannot be traced). One of the objectives for the course Nature and Society is that the student "...will be able to accept national and cultural variety as a basis for the coexistence of all inhabitants of the Republic of Serbia" after completing the course ([The Guidelines on the Curricula for the Second Grade of Primary School, 2019: 42](#)). Specific topics include interculturality, Serbian nationals' rights and obligations, and societal aspects of Serbia (Topic: Natural and social characteristics of Serbia). For example, "...developing interest and love for music through individual and collective musical experience that encourages the development of creativity, aesthetic sensibility, and the spirit of community, as well as a responsible attitude towards the preservation of musical heritage and culture of their own and other peoples" is one of the objectives of Music Education course in the fourth grade ([ibid: 47](#)). The Roma are not specifically mentioned in any of the compositions for listening, singing, or performing within the curriculum, nor are the Roma people's representatives the compositions' writers. "...The ability to argue the benefits of the common life of people belonging to different cultures, while citing elements of their people's traditions and culture and showing interest and respect for other cultures and traditions [...] giving examples from everyday life lives that illustrate the meeting of different cultures, and discusses how ignorance of other cultures affects the emergence of stereotypes, preconceptions, and prejudices," is one of the objectives of the Civic Education elective course ([ibid: 55](#)). In this way, the following concepts are learnt through the thematic unit Democratic society - culture and tradition: cultural identity (cultivating one's own traditions and culture while respecting the traditions and culture of others); multiculturalism and interculturality (living next to or together with people of different cultures); and meeting cultures (meeting and permeating different cultures without losing cultural identity).

Textbooks

This section of the paper evaluates the material on the Roma in the Serbian language, the World around Us, Nature and Society, Music Education, and Civic Education textbooks.

Table 2

The presence of the terms Roma, Roma people/Roma song, story, legend, music, game in reading books from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary school

Grade	Number of reviewed reading books	Overall number of texts	Explicitly				Implicitly			
			Text		Image		Text		Image	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I	7	338	0	0%	0	0%	1	.29%	3	.88%
II	6	294	0	0%	0	0%	2	.34%	2	.34%
III	8	322	0	0%	0	0%	4	1.24%	1	.31%
IV	8	442	0	0%	0	0%	5	1.13%	2	.45%
Total:	29	1396	0	0%	0	0%	12	3%	8	1.98%

Serbian language. Roma are not directly mentioned in any of the 29 reading materials from first to fourth grade that were examined; instead, they are only mentioned indirectly through certain textual issues in percentages ranging from .29% to 1.24%. (Table 2). In order to preserve the traditions and culture of the Serbian people and promote intercultural understanding, one objective of Serbian language subject curriculum at the primary education level, among others, is to enable students to interpret chosen literary and other artistic works from the Serbian and global heritage. The investigation of the reading materials reveals that not a single piece of content in them overtly features the Roma, either directly or through a Roma tale, legend, tradition, or myth. Two required texts about the Roma were eliminated from the new third and fourth grade curricula (The fairy tale about the white horse, i.e. The Gypsy praises his horse), so there are no contents about the Roma population from the 2019 editions and onwards. This indicates that these items may appear if they fit inside the parameters of the aforementioned additional (supplementary) programs (at least three more, and at most five more works to be used). As a result, a third-grade reading book contained the amusing folktale *Da imamo masla* [If we had butter]. Three gypsies—a gypsy woman, a gypsy boy, and a gypsy man—serve as the story's main characters and all have fantasies involving pie. The family imagines butter, flour, a bakery oven, and a dinner that will make them feel better, with the

humorous educational lesson that one should not eat everything by himself. Although other peoples, races (Chinese, Africans, Eskimos), and children with disabilities (According to the new Guidelines on detailed instructions for identifying the right to an individualized education program, its application and evaluation from 2018, the term persons with additional support needs in education is used.), do feature in some of the reading books that were analyzed (in certain contexts), there is not a single photo or depiction that, in any context, clearly portrays a member of the Roma people. If we are talking about texts that encourage tolerance, understanding of diversity of any kind (in terms of age, interest, behavior, etc.), democratic values, and respect for others, then the following examples may be taken as implicitly encouraging the Roma issue as an issue of one of the groups of people that has issues with the majority.

If we are talking about texts that in reading books promote tolerance, understanding of diversity of any kind (in terms of age, interest, behavior, etc.), democratic values, respect for others, then the Roma issue as an issue of one of the groups of people that has problems with the majority, can implicitly perceive prompted by the following few examples. One reading book for the fourth grade includes supplementary reading Socializing, going out and having fun, the part of which explains how to act when you find yourself in the company of a person with developmental disabilities or a person with a disability. In the same reading book, there is also the text I am different from others, which instructs the student that the image of ourselves often leads to a loss of self-confidence, and offers solutions in the form of avoiding mean people, talking to those we trust and strengthening personal abilities. Another publishing house has included Check if you are a good friend - Test for a student in the reading book for the fourth grade (a friend should be listened to and understood, a friend should be helped), one also contains the title Etiquette - about tolerance; or for example the supplementary text About the Button and Happiness, which talks about the situation when children with developmental disabilities are avoided by other children. The analysis reveals that there are no Roma texts in reading materials, despite the fact that they are a teaching tool with a significant capacity for educating students with the help of texts and the didactic-methodological apparatus (which accompanies them in the analysis). However, there are no such mentions within the context of themes like unity, good manners, tolerance, diversity, etc., which might at least obliquely include the Roma people.

Table 3

The presence of the terms Roma, Roma people/Roma song, story, legend, music, game in the textbooks "The World Around Us" and "Nature and Society" from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary school

Grade	Number of reviewed textbooks	Overall number of texts	Explicitly				Implicitly			
			Text		Image		Text		Image	
			f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
I	6	268	0	0%	0	0%	2	.74%	0	0%
II	6	239	0	0%	0	0%	1	.41%	1	.41%
III	7	322	7	2.17%	1	.31%	12	4.03%	2	.62%
IV	8	354	11	3.11%	1	.28%	15	4.23%	6	1.69%
Total:	27	1183	18	5.28%	2	.59%	30	9.41%	9	2.72%

The World Around Us and Nature and Society. The subject World around us in the first and second grade textbooks does not explicitly include Roma. The analysis of the textbooks revealed the implicit representation of the Roma population. This is consistent with the established fact that the first grade World Around Us subject curriculum includes content about the individual and the group, the observation of similarities and differences, relationships within the group, and behavior. Out of a total of 268 lessons, there was text on good behavior and feelings in two lessons (.74%). The student is guided by their methodological apparatus to address the issue of When Nobody Understands Me, that is "how can I help a friend who is withdrawn and always by themselves in class", which provides the opportunity to discuss Roma students in class and open up other significant topics for them. A dark-skinned child is shown in one of the images from the lesson Others and Myself. The percentage of even implied mention of the Roma issue in second-grade textbooks is much smaller (.41%). (Table 3). The analysis of 322 lessons from the 7 textbooks under review revealed that Roma explicitly appear 7 times, while in one textbook, in the lesson titled Residents and peoples of the region, a picture of the town square with various people was presented. This is in accordance with the thematic units of the Nature and society subject curriculum in the third grade, which talks about the population of the region, children's rights, and group rules. Look at the picture, says the assignment in the textbook. Do the actions of the persons depicted on it strike you as having any striking parallels or differences? and the pupil ought to recognize a young Roma musician, among other things.

The textbooks in this grade provide the opportunity for discussion about others and those who are different from oneself (implicit appearance in 12 courses), and the teacher may also discuss many facets of the Roma population. Students learn about Serbia's social characteristics and evolution in the

fourth grade, including its population, democratic way of life, rights, and respect for one another. Roma are specifically mentioned in 11 lessons (3,107%) of the lessons regarding Serbian residents. Out of the 8 textbooks reviewed, on had no explicit mention of the word Roma (it was stated that various peoples live in Serbia, some were listed, and then it was written “and others”), while in two textbooks this name appeared more than once.

As a result, in one lesson on Serbia’s population, there is also a line like this: In the regions of southern and eastern Serbia as well as in Vojvodina, Roma are the most numerous. The following phrases about the Second World War were only intentionally included by the author’s team in one textbook: The executions that took place at the end of 1941 were among the largest. Then thousands of Serbs, Jews, and Roma were killed by the Germans. Based on the texts in the textbooks, lessons on diversity (“The diversity between peers is an opportunity to get to know other people, customs, and traditions”), mutual appreciation, and respect could be used in the classroom to discuss issues pertaining to the Roma population (“Other people should be respected and appreciated”; “Respecting the rights of members of all nations living in Serbia means that we respect those rights without prejudice and giving unverified opinions”). In the first two grades, there was some evidence of the implicit presence of several subjects that might serve as a catalyst for conversation about Roma; however, in the third grade, the highest percentage is 4.03% (text) and .62% (picture), and in the fourth, it is 4.23% (text) and 1.69% (image) (Table 3).

Although they only list the Roma as a minority people in Serbia, with only two illustrative examples, the textbooks from the subjects The World around Us and Nature and Society contain numerous examples in contrast to the reading books that do not explicitly mention the Roma. However, these textbooks lack any accompanying apparatus, such as tasks for thinking, further independent research, interesting things, etc.

Music Education. Only one of the 26 analyzed texts from Music Education course material specifically addresses the Roma (Table 4). In particular, the co-authors assigned the student the following challenge in the fourth-grade textbook’s lesson on Treasures of my homeland: Listen to the track Gypsy Dance from Georges Bizet’s opera “Carmen”; does the music gradually quicken or slow down in this section? There are a total of 20 lessons in these textbooks, the content of which may indirectly include examples of Roma music, dance, and traditional clothing. Thematic sections that make reference to it include Children and Friendship, Music of My Homeland, and Traditions of Other Peoples.

Table 4

The presence of the terms Roma, Roma people/Roma song, story, legend, music, dance in the “Musical Culture” textbooks from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary school

Grade	Number of reviewed textbooks	Overall number of texts	Explicitly				Implicitly			
			Text		Image		Text		Image	
			<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I	6	274	0	0%	0	0%	7	2.55%	0	0%
II	6	204	0	0%	0	0%	2	.98%	0	0%
III	7	297	0	0%	0	0%	3	1.01%	0	0%
IV	7	383	1	.26%	0	0%	8	2.08%	0	0%
Total:	26	1158	1	0,26	0	0%	20	6.62%	0	0%

Although a responsible attitude toward one’s own and other peoples’ music heritage is emphasized as one of the music education course objectives at the primary school level, the amount of content about the Roma people in the textbooks, who unquestionably made a significant contribution to Serbia’s cultural heritage, is utterly minimal.

Table 5

The presence of the terms Roma, Roma people/Roma song, story, legend, music, game in the textbooks for “Civic education” from the 1st to the 4th grade of primary school

Grade	Number of reviewed textbooks	Overall number of texts	Explicitly				Implicitly			
			Text		Image		Text		Image	
			<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%	<i>f</i>	%
I	4	84	0	0%	0	0%	6	7.14%	2	2.38%
II	3	73	0	0%	0	0%	2	2.73%	0	0%
III	2	63	0	0%	0	0%	4	6.32%	3	4.76%
IV	2	58	0	0%	0	0%	3	5.17%	0	0%
Total:	11	278	0	0%	0	0%	15	21.36%	5	7.14%

Civic education. In the textbooks of the mandatory elective course Civic Education, the lessons are structured by the topics of the curriculum. In the textbooks for the first grade, the lessons about our similarities and differences, friendship, tolerance and care for others in the class, as well as about the rights of the child (in textual form - in 6 lessons, 7.14%, in visual form/ as pictures - in 2 lessons, 2.38%). A co-author team designed their Civic Education textbooks in form of a journey through topics that explain two boys and two girls, one of whom is represented with a darker skin color, which could be an occasion for the teacher to talk to the students about the Roma people. This idea is constantly used by the authors in all four grades. Two lessons (2.73%) about children's rights were found in the second-grade textbooks. These lessons may have sparked students' interest in the right of children to an education in a setting that protects them, values their differences, and is free from discrimination. In the third grade, sentences in four lessons (6.32%), which state: "We are as rich as we are different", and pictorial content in three lessons (4.67%), could be used to subtly promote content about the Roma. In the fourth grade, three lessons (5.17%) were identified that could imply conversations directed at the Roma population. One of them is the Story of a New Student, which describes diversity, and the discrimination that often accompanies it, which is why the textbook indicates how these situations can be resolved in the classroom (Table 5). There is no explicit mention of the word Roma in Civic Education textbooks. Despite the fact that this subject in lower grades of primary school is structured around four areas (Human Rights, Democratic Society, Processes in the Modern World and Civic Activism) which together make it possible to achieve the following learning objective – "fostering in pupils a sense of responsibility for their own rights and the rights of others, an openness to compromise and cooperation, and a readiness to actively engage in school life while respecting the norms, practices, and values of a democratic society" ([The Guidelines on the Curricula for the Second Grade of Primary School, 2018: 92](#)), the analysis shows that the textbook still underutilizes its resources when it comes to including Roma content.

Discussion

It might be said that today's textbooks in Serbia missed the opportunity to include the Roma. Moreover, identical findings have been obtained by recent international studies using far larger samples. The findings of an analysis of the inclusion of Roma in European educational curriculum and textbooks were recently presented in a collaborative research report by the Council of Europe, the Georg Eckert Institute, and the Foundation for Roma Education. The study that included 22 countries revealed that, except from the mention of Roma as war victims and in lectures about the structure and size of the population, there is generally nothing more known about the Roma and their culture ([Spielhaus et al., 2020](#)).

The situation is similar with regard to the representation of some other minority communities in Serbia, such as the Vlasi population in the area of Homolje and the Gorani population in Kosovo and Metohija ([Milenović, 2012](#)), but also in some areas where Serbian population is the majority, for example in the area of the Gadžin Han municipality in Zaplanje region ([Milenović, 2013](#)) – the conclusion is that there is no program content in the curricula and textbooks from the first to the fourth grade of primary school in the Republic of Serbia.

This review of curricula and textbooks from 22 different countries revealed that, aside from mentioning and appreciating Roma as war victims, democratic ideals, inclusion, and anti-discrimination - they missed the chance to incorporate Roma. Indeed, identical findings have been found in international studies using far larger samples. There is little more information about the Roma and their culture in a recent research report and in the teachings on the population's structure and size ([Spielhaus et al., 2020](#)). It has already been established that the curricula and assessment models in Serbia are designed to conform the dominant culture in which a certain level of literacy and mathematical proficiency is expected, without respecting differences in culture, lifestyle and individual capabilities ([Baucal, 2012](#); [Marković Čekić, 2016](#)). According to reports from civil society organizations on the usage of the Committee for the Rights of the Child's (2017) recommendations, school curricula are not tailored to the culture of the Roma people, and there is no contextualization to help people understand how cultural diversity affects society as a whole. The authors hold that the curricula should direct teachers' efforts toward interculturality and introducing students to a sense of diversity through the teaching materials. This is made possible by incorporating a variety of examples into the teaching process, mostly from literature and the visual arts ([Jokić Zorkić, 2018: 176](#)), and particularly from music, which has been shown to play a significant role in the growth of multiculturalism, peace, and democracy ([Jeremić and Markov, 2015](#)). Despite the fact that experts concur that a successful educational concept takes care of all children, including Roma children,

providing them with quality in the process of teaching, education, and preservation of language, tradition, and customs (Jazbec, Čagran and Lipavic Oštir, 2013), specific components of the Serbian educational system do not set the foundation for the inclusion of Roma and their culture in actual school life.

All of the European Union's attempts to protect Roma people and promote intercultural dialogue fail at one point: fundamental mindset alterations that place a greater emphasis on respect for variety than on integration (Ferreira, 2019: 47). The European Union believes that we should work to include material about Roma, Roma history, and Roma culture in curricula as we design and implement new strategies to ensure the equality, inclusion, and participation of Roma from 2020 (both in the member states and in those that are in the process of joining) (Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers, 2020). It is advised to include information about the Roma in the curricula of already-existing courses as well as in teaching aids and textbooks. This information should cover things like the Roma's characteristics, legends, and stories, as well as their musical talent, traditions, and customs. It should also cover how the Roma contributed to the development of the Holocaust, how the Roma remember their past, and other topics that can help foster a climate of respect and tolerance. It is important to update textbooks to eliminate stereotypes and innovate with information that familiarizes readers with the Roma people, fosters mutual respect and understanding, and fosters positive social interactions between Roma and non-Roma students in the class and throughout the school community.

The development and education of society's youngest members are crucial to the goal of fostering a tolerant and inclusive society. Schools that implement programs on the value of interculturality and promote understanding and respect for various cultures, languages, faiths, skin colors, and nationalities are now important to provide education free from discrimination (Vučković Šahović et al., 2018). So far, the research findings indicate that Roma students are faced not only with discrimination by their peers, but also with discrimination by their teachers (Milenović, Lapat and Aleksandrović, 2011). Roma students often sit in the last row of classrooms, do not read their homework aloud, nor are they generally encouraged to learn in school (Battaglia and Lebedinski, 2015).

In the classroom, the teacher has the most influence over how equal students interact and collaborate. The key person in charge of assisting Roma pupils' study and social participation should be qualified teachers (Starčević, Dimitrijević and Milovanović, 2016: 88). Teachers are not only unprepared for working in diverse classrooms during their initial education, but they are also frequently at odds – on the one hand, there are inflexible curricula where the issue of teaching content automatization and rigid topic organization has been seen (Lazić, Maričić and Milinković, 2015: 681), as well as traditional textbooks, while on the other hand, the instruction teachers provide must be flexible and take into account how a child's cultural background affects their learning and worldview (Convention on the Rights of the Child). The strategic regulation mentions the need to print textbooks in the languages of national minorities from the perspective of the diversity of students at school, but nowhere does it mention the need to review the content of regular textbooks from the perspective of bias, stereotypes, and prejudice (Petrović, 2016).

Conclusion

There are no special materials that refer to the Roma and their population in the analyzed curricula. Nevertheless, the Roma are explicitly mentioned several times in the Nature and Society and Musical Culture textbooks, while they are absent in the reading books, the World Around Us and Civic Education textbooks. The representation of Roma is observed in limited thematic contexts: the population of Serbia, and suffering in the World War 2. The only thing that was noticed was the simple mention of the word Roma in connection with several minority peoples in population censuses or in connection with people who were war victims. The Roma are not the subject of separate lessons. The analysis of the theme of appearance revealed that there is no mention of the features of the people as an essential element of society; rather, the Roma are depicted as a national minority, or as a portion of society represented by numbers. Not only are there no lessons in the textbooks, but no sentences were found that would describe Roma communities, periods of history, or prominent people with names, biographies, or accomplishments.

Despite the fact that education policies are clearly focused on promoting democratic values such as tolerance, fostering one's own and others' identities, respect for diversity among people, respect for ethnicity, etc., Serbia does not exhibit any appreciable concrete changes toward the proclaimed social discourse through the educational system (at least in the reviewed portion for primary school). The only way to help foster a positive image, lessen feelings of exclusion and prejudice, and empower Roma children for more equal participation in school is by including information about Roma and their people in curricula and textbooks. In this regard, our findings highlight the need for the academic and scientific

communities, as well as the education sector, to finally and seriously consider the options for including information regarding the Roma into the teaching process.

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Conflict of interests

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Author Contributions

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