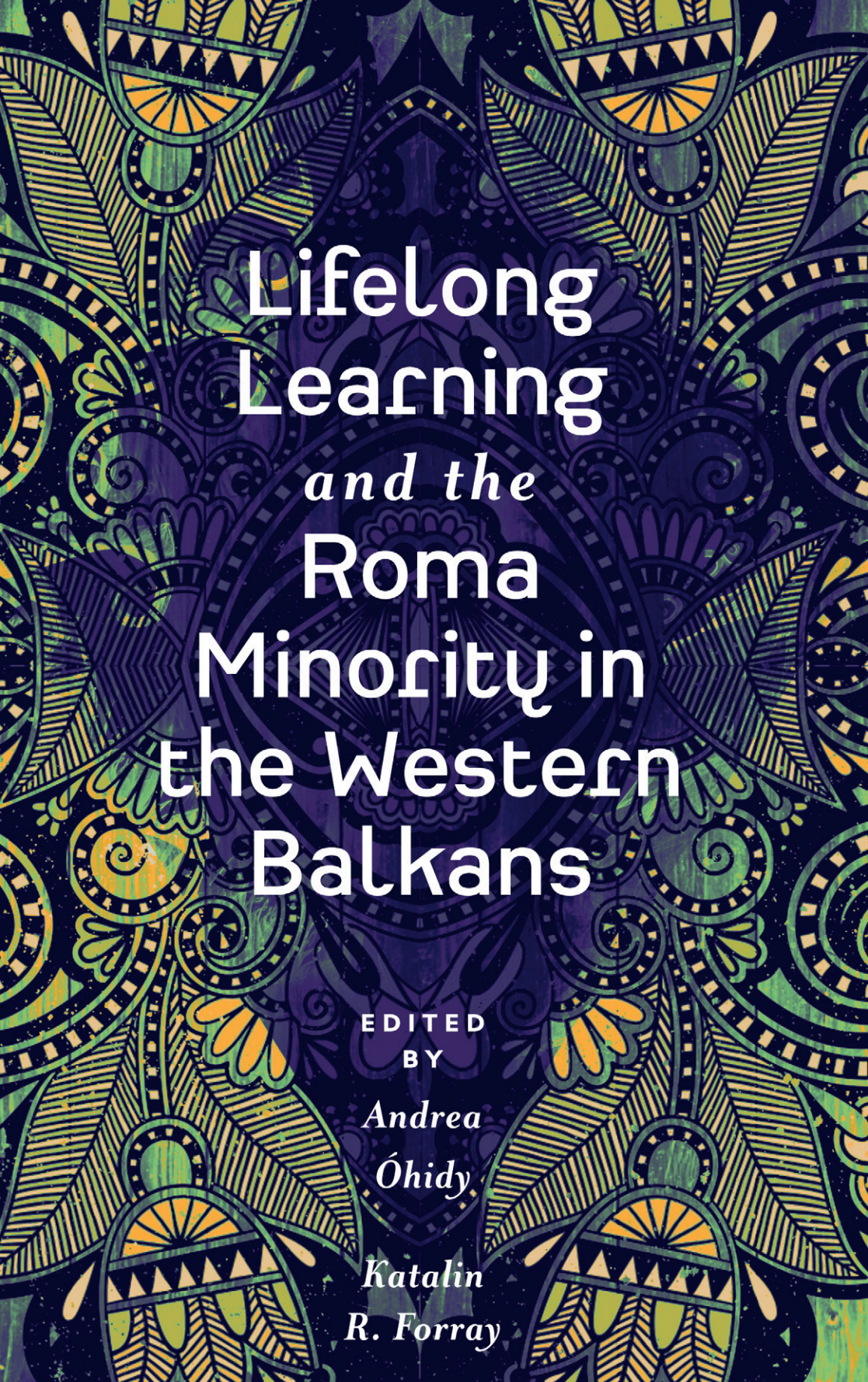
Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in the Western Balkans
EDITED BY
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We want to thank all contributors, especially the authors of the country studies. They are experts who often not only describe and analyze the (education) situation of the Roma minority in their countries but also take part in policymaking, program-developing and practical realization to improve it in the sense of the Roma inclusion policies.

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Chapter 1

Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in the Western Balkans – Introduction

Andrea Óhidy and Katalin R. Forray

Abstract

This introduction from *Andrea Óhidy and Katalin R. Forray* provides a brief overview of the social and educational situation of Roma in the Western Balkan region and the structure of this book. Like in the books *Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Central and Eastern Europe* (2019) and *Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Western and Southern Europe* (2020), Roma are here described as a 'hidden minority' (Cavioni, 2020, p. 68), because despite the great number and the century-long history of Roma people on the European continent, there is still only limited information and knowledge about them, both in public awareness and scientific research. Although most members of the Roma minority have been living for centuries in their European home countries, their situation is still different from the non-Roma populations: They often suffer from socio-economic disadvantages and hate-motivated harassment and discrimination (EU-FRA, 2020a). This is not only the case in the member-states of the European Union but also in the Western Balkan region. All across Europe, there are Roma groups, which are considered to be the most disadvantaged minority, regarding their health, employment and housing and also in education. To increase their situation, European Union member states have developed common strategies, which play a part in negotiations for an EU-membership status. The so-called Western Balkan states – Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia – might join the European Union in the coming years. The social inclusion of the Roma minority and the protection of their minority rights in these countries were formulated as a precondition for their application for EU membership. Therefore, several goals, policies and measures were implemented there to break the 'vicious circle of poverty and discrimination' (EU-FRA, 2020b). Participation in education and lifelong learning have become central elements of these political measures for Roma Inclusion.

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This book examines the education situation of Roma across the so-called Western Balkan region.

Keywords: Roma; Western Balkans; Europe; education; lifelong learning; EU Enlargement

As we in the *books Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Central and Eastern Europe* (2019) and *Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Western and Southern Europe* (2020) have already discussed in detail, to increase access, attainment and success of Roma people in education and lifelong learning is one of the most demanding public policy issues in Europe. Despite the great number of policy strategies, measures and projects across Europe, the goal of Roma inclusion has not been fulfilled yet. There is still a long way to go to achieve the integration/inclusion and the social advancement of the European Roma minority in education and beyond (Óhidy, 2020, p. 197). According to the surveys of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (EU-FRA) – although their education situation has improved in the last decades – Roma are still an under-represented and often discriminated minority group in schools and other educational institutions. The differences between Roma and non-Roma learners at all levels of the education system are still considerable (EU-FRA, 2014a, 2014b, 2020a, 2020b). This book examines the education situation of Roma in the so-called Western Balkans, a region that might become a part of the European Union in the coming years. In this introductory chapter, we provide a brief overview of the social and educational situation of Roma in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia.

The Western Balkans and the European Union

The term 'Western Balkans' was created as part of the Enlargement-discussion within the European Union, comprising the majority of the successor countries of the former Yugoslavia plus Albania in South-Eastern Europe, which could be the next member states after the Eastern Enlargement (Dabrowski & Myachenkova, 2018, p. 2). In 2013, Croatia joined the European Union and is no longer considered a Western Balkan state. In the parlance of the World Bank (1) and the International Monetary Fund (2), the region is called SEE6 (3) or WB6 (see chapter from Marc Reinbold in this book). There is also the name of 'Eastern Adriatics' (Bonomi et al., 2020, p. 4). This book uses the term 'Western Balkans' because Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia are discussed here from and within the EU perspective.

The Western Balkan region shares 'similar economic and social conditions, common aspirations for EU accession, geographical proximity to the EU, and the fact that most of them now are visa-liberalised for travel to the Schengen area' (Bisheva, 2022). Additionally, there are very similar migration patterns; the region is not only origin but also a transit area of migration. Since the 1990s, there have been high rates of migration into EU member states, especially to Germany

(Bisheva, 2022): In the time period 1996–2001, approximately 65% of the Roma population of Albania left the country to Greece. Between 2014 and 2017, there were around 59.000 Roma from Serbia seeking asylum in Germany. In 2003, around 35.000 Roma from Kosovo were registered in Germany as rejected asylum seekers and in 2014/2015, up to 10.000 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians left Kosovo (Müller, 2020).

A quick glance at the map shows that the Western Balkan region lies in the middle of the European continent, surrounded by EU member states. The region has historical and geopolitical strategic importance for the European Union (Bojicic-Dzelilovic et al., 2013; Dabrowski & Myachenkova, 2018; Muś, 2008; Phinnemore, 2013), which became clearly visible in 2015 during the migration crisis but also through the influence competition with other interested countries like Russia and China. The EU-participation of the Western Balkan region is a 'long-discussed and controversial topic' (Mappes-Niediek, 2018, p. 29).

For the region a diversity of ethnic, religious and cultural traditions are characteristic that often lead to violence and wars in European history. Therefore, the Balkan Peninsula has had the image as the 'powder keg of Europe'. The developments during and after the disintegration of Yugoslavia in 1991, where most of the successor states suffered from violent conflicts and civil wars, reinforced this image. After the intervention of the United Nations and NATO, the European Union, driven by a desire to avoid further bloodshed (Phinnemore, 2013, p. 26), offered a membership perspective for the Western Balkan countries. 'The EU participated in preparation of the Dayton treaty, concluding in 1995 the first phase of the dissolution of Yugoslavia' (Muś, 2008, p. 8). In 2003, the EU declared the membership of these countries as its strategic goal: 'The future of the Balkans is within the European Union' (European Commission, 2003, p. 1). This declaration is often called the 'promise of Thessaloniki', because the summit took place in Porto Carras near Thessaloniki. 'In this joint statement, the EU unequivocally confirmed the European perspective of the Western Balkan countries. The language was ambitious and clear: the Western Balkans were promised full membership of the EU once they had met the established criteria' (see Prifti, 2013, p. 7). The Thessaloniki promise led to a prosperous time in the region: 'The prospect of the European integration helped to start the process of economic and political reforms, although at various speeds in different countries, and to largely normalise economic and political relations in the region' (Dabrowski & Myachenkova, 2018, p. 3). As a highlight of this development, in 2013, Croatia became a member of the European Union.

Today, 10 years later, the integration of the Western Balkan countries is considered a slowed-down process or a broken promise because the Western Balkan countries are still in the 'waiting room' ('Wartesaal') of the EU (Mappes-Niediek, 2018, p. 29) and their 'prospects for obtaining membership are less certain than was assumed when the SAP (4) was launched' (Phinnemore, 2013, p. 23). All Western Balkan states have Stabilisation and Association Agreements with the European Union (Albania and Montenegro are also NATO member states). The accession negotiations with Serbia were formally opened in 2014, with North Macedonia and Albania in 2022. Bosnia and Herzegovina and

Kosovo are potential candidates for EU membership (Council of the European Union, 2022; De Munter, 2022, for more information see the chapter from Marc Reinbold in this book). The main reason for this stagnation is that the 'legacy of past conflicts continues to overshadow regional politics and economics, and to create obstacles in Western Balkan countries to EU integration' (Dabrowski & Myachenkova, 2018, p. 3). According to the annual reports of the European Commission, which regularly assess the situation in the candidate countries regarding their implementation of EU acquis and standards, the Western Balkan region still suffers from 'secessional movements, unsettled borders, ethnic tensions, deficient state capacity and/or strong clientelistic networks' (Börzel, 2013, p. 174) and therefore do not fulfil the Copenhagen political criteria – the stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities (European Council, 1993) – necessary for EU membership. The social inclusion of the Roma minority and the protection of their minority rights in these countries were formulated as a precondition for the EU accession of the Western Balkan countries.

Roma as a 'Hidden Minority' in the Western Balkans

Despite their large number and long history on the European continent, there is only very limited information and knowledge about Roma in public awareness and scientific research. Therefore, Valeria Cavioni calls Roma a 'hidden minority' (2020, p. 68). This situation seems to have changed in the last decades because more and more national and international surveys shed light on their situation. Especially since the European Union put Roma inclusion on the political agenda, general lack of facts in the public consciousness has become smaller. However, there are still strong prejudices against Roma, who very often experience hate-motivated harassment and discrimination (EU-FRA, 2020a, p. 25ff). Hence, antiziganism is often interpreted as a part of European history (Agarin, 2014; Kóczé & Rövid, 2017; Óhidy & Forray, 2019, 2020; Selling et al., 2015; Tosi Cambini & Beluschi Fabeni, 2017) and can be seen as the main reason for the still existing manifold blind spots in scientific research and public discussion. These tendencies are characteristic not only in the member states of the European Union but also in the Western Balkan region:

In Albania, as *Merita Meçe* stated, the 'Roma population [. . .] is statistically hidden while it is believed that undercounts are high. Lack of comprehensive and accurate data about this community that lives in Albania for centuries is caused by a range of interconnected factors, including forced evictions, fear from institutionalised prejudice and stigma, lack of registration of vital events in the population registry because of their scepticism about being decently served and having any benefit from it, illiteracy, and lack of a permanent place of residence (European Roma Rights Centre [ERRC], 2018)' (see page 44 in this book).

According to *Anita Lukenda*, in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the Report of the Council of the national minorities of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Parliamentary Assembly (Council of National Minorities in BiH, 2015), 'the exact number of

Roma living in Bosnia and Herzegovina was not available' (see page 69 in this book).

Diterio Arifi & Ngadhnjim Brovina explain their research for the Kosovo country study in this book: 'We have tried to research materials only for the Roma community because, in most of the documents in Kosovo, the Roma community is treated together with the Ashkali and Egyptian communities (we can find them with the acronym RAE). We could not incorporate many other data in the paper because the data references were for the RAE community' (see Appendix (1) on page 107 in this book).

Srdjan Vukadinovic writes about the Population Census in Montenegro: 'It should be mentioned that the demographic indicators of the Romas' existence in Montenegro, just like in other countries, cannot be taken at first sight as completely accurate since they appear quite odd. Namely, the Population Census gives a much smaller number of the Roma than it really is; neither is the number given by the research true. The reason for this is that the Roma, when required to declare themselves at the Census, mostly declared themselves as members of other national groups, most often as Muslims and Montenegrins' (see page 112 in this book).

According to *Tinde Kovacs Cerovic, Jadranka Ivkovic, Mónika Kapás and Evgeny Ivanov*, there are similar problems in Serbia 'As in many other Western Balkans countries, the exact size of the Roma population is not clear. Approximations depend, among others, how census data is collected, community support for self-identification, and the perception of overall discrimination against Roma in the particular country' (see page 126 in this book).

Based on the country studies in this book, we can state that Roma can be considered a 'hidden minority' in the Western Balkan region as well. This book, like our two former books on this topic too, wants to help change this and gives an overview of retrospective and prospective tendencies in the situation of the Roma minority in education and lifelong learning in the Western Balkans.

The Roma Minority in the Western Balkan Countries

This book discusses the education situation of Roma in five Western Balkan countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. (5) Because the Roma communities do not have a mother country, they can be found almost in every state on the European continent. According to the latest estimates, about 10–12 million Roma live in Europe, about 6–7 million in the European Union (European Commission, 2011, 2020a). In the Western Balkan region, 'many sources from international organisations as well as estimates from national organisations suggest that the share of Roma in the national populations [...] varies from 1.98% in Bosnia and Herzegovina to approximately 9.7% in North Macedonia' (Skenderi, 2021, p. 2). The number and share of the Roma population have significantly changed in the region: After the disintegration of Yugoslavia and during the war in 1998–1999, many Roma left their home

countries and migrated to Central and Western European countries (see more in Óhidy & Forray 2019, 2020). (6)

The Albanian Roma community is considered one of the oldest in Europe – there are documents from the thirteen century showing their existence – their number is estimated between 8.301 and 150.000 (Avery & Hoxhallari, 2017, p. 465).

As *Merita H. Meçe* (see page 44 in this book) explains that in the last census from 2011, 8.301 people declared themselves as Roma (Institute of Statistics, 2015), while a study of the Open Society Foundation for Albania estimated the size of the Roma population to be between 18.276 and 120.000 (Open Society Foundation for Albania, 2014). According to estimates of the Council of Europe, the Roma minority constitutes 3.59% of the total population in Albania, which means around 115,000 people (European Commission, 2023a, p. 12).

Anita Lukenda shows (see chapter 4 in this book) that while the latest census from 2013 counted 12.583 Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina (Popis stanovništva Bosna i Herzegovina, 2013), the Special Report on the Roma situation in Bosnia and Herzegovina in the same year mentioned 50.000 Roma. The OSCE Mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina spoke about 35.644 Roma people living in the country (Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice Vijeća ministara Bosne i Herzegovine, 2017). Roma NGOs estimated the Roma population between 80 000 and 100 000, and the Ministry of Human Rights and Refugees of Bosnia and Herzegovina between 30 000 and 35 000 (Ministarstvo za ljudska prava i izbjeglice Vijeća ministara Bosne i Herzegovine, 2020). According to the estimates of the Council of Europe, 58,000 Roma are living in Bosnia and Herzegovina, which is approximately 1.54% of the total population (European Commission, 2023a, p. 12).

Kosovo has about 0.5% Roma citizens (Berxulli et al., 2018, p. 42), which according to the European Roma Rights Centre means about 15.696 Roma (Berxulli et al., 2018, see page 86 in this book). The census from 2011 counted only 8.824 Roma (Kosovës, 2018) because 'a part of the Roma have exiled from Kosovo after the war [in 1998–1999], and the rest have boycotted the census' (Berxulli et al., 2018, p. 42). The Council of Europe counted 37,500 Roma in Kosovo, representing 2.07% of the total population (European Commission, 2023a, p. 12).

According to *Srdjan Vukadinovic*, there are also big differences in Montenegro between the data from the latest census in 2011, which counted 6.251 Roma, about 1.01% of the total population, and the results of (Roma) organisations, which counted many more. He works with the estimated number of 21.000 permanently settled Roma inhabitants in Montenegro (see page 113 in this book). The Council of Europe speaks about 20,000 Roma in the country, which is 3.17% of the total population (European Commission, 2023a, p. 12).

Tinde Kovacs Cerovic, Jadranka Ivkovic, Mónika Kapás and Evgeny Ivanov show that in Serbia too, the number of the Roma according to the census (from 2011: 147.604) and to Roma organisations are very different: 'Roma civil society claims the number of Roma is 3–4 times higher than the 2011 CENSUS data' (see

page 127 in this book). They work with the number 400.000–600.000, estimated by the Council of Europe. (7)

There are several reasons why it is impossible to collect and distribute exact data on the Roma minority: 'Firstly, in official statistics, the category "ethnicity" is mostly not recorded because, in many European countries, ethnic registration is forbidden. Secondly, even if there is empirical data about them, it is often unclear how the identification with the category "Roma" is operationalised. Are we speaking about "nationality", "ethnicity" or "mother tongue"? Thirdly, a host of Roma attempt to conceal their membership to this minority because of the negative experiences they have had and the resulting stigmatisation and discrimination which they face. Hence there are big differences regarding the number of Roma according to their internal terms and based on external designation' (Forray & Óhidy, 2020, p. 2).

The inner heterogeneousness of the Roma minority is also very rarely visible in official estimations, statistics and scientific studies. As shown in our two former books on the topic, the European Roma minority is very diverse and colourful. The different groups might have different names, languages, cultural, historical and religious traditions, social–cultural backgrounds or settlement forms. This is also the case in the Western Balkan countries discussed in this book. Regarding these differences, the question about a common 'Roma identity' is not rhetorical. The basis for that is a Sanskrit-rooted common language, Romanes or Romani/Chib, which has a wide variety of dialects and the acceptance of a common origin from India (Halwachs et al., 2006). Roma people define themselves as a non-territorial nation (8). There are many internal and external terms to name them, which might differ in the here discussed countries regarding the criteria used for creating these names:

According to *Merita H. Meçe*, 'The official name of this community in the Albanian language is 'Rom', but in daily life, there are various pejorative words used to identify it including 'Gabel', 'Kurbat', and 'Arixhi' (Koinova, 2000)' (see page 44 in this book). There are five main tribes and sub-groups 'that show differences in lifestyles, skills, traditional occupations, customs, and linguistic dialects: Çergars, Meçkars, Kabuzis (9), Kurtofs, and Bamill (Hasluck, 1938; Kovacs, 1996)'.

In Bosnia and Herzegovina, skin colour and religion seemed to be the most important criteria for building categories: differentiating Black or Gurbet and White Roma (Softić, 2019), which accepted Muslim religion (see page 70 in this book). '[. . .] the Turski were the largest group of Roma among whom the biggest group were Arlije or White Roma and that among Vlaški Roma the biggest group were Gurbeti' (Softić, 2019). Some of the Roma identified themselves as 'Bosniak Roma', Ciganin', 'Muslim Roma', 'White Roma', and 'Egyptians' (Civil Rights Defenders, 2018; Softić, 2019).

In Kosovo, Roma people are considered part of the so-called Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) community (see page 87 in this book). In Montenegro, the different occupations played a role in naming them Cergar i (Romanies Nomads) and the Romanies Blacksmiths (see page 112 in this book).

In Serbia, our authors differentiate between the following language dialect groups: Balkans, Central, Vlachian and Northern dialects, Gurbet, Arli, Kalderash, Lovári and Romani, Lejaš, Arlij and Tamar (see page 130f in this book).

In this book, like in our former ones, we use the term 'Roma' or 'Roma people' because the first World Romani Congress (1971) (10) and the Council of Europe (2012a) (11) reached a consensus to accept and use this term. According to the definition of the Council of Europe, the term 'Roma' 'refers to Roma, Sinti, Kale and related groups in Europe, including Travellers and the Eastern groups (Dom and Lom), and covers the wide diversity of the groups concerned, including persons who identify themselves as Gypsies' (Council of Europe, 2012b, p. 3). The different country studies might use other terms according to their own national and/or regional tradition.

Caught in a 'Vicious Circle of Poverty and Discrimination' (12)

Roma people are considered the most disadvantaged minority group in the European Union and in the Western Balkan region (European Commission, 2004; EU-FRA, 2012; EU-FRA, 2014a; European Commission, 2020a, 2020b; Skenderi, 2021). They seem to be caught in a 'vicious circle of poverty and discrimination' (EU-FRA 2020b): Although most of them have been living for centuries in different countries on the European continent, their situation is still different from the non-Roma population; they often suffer from poverty and exclusion (Kamberi et al., 2015; Avery & Hoxhallari, 2017; Óhidy & Forray, 2019, 2020). 'The livelihoods of the Roma in the Western Balkans is worse than in other parts of Europe due to many intersectional problems leading to a poor quality of life, limited access to basic rights and services, lack of economic opportunities and structural discrimination, and other deprivations that result in the exclusion of the Roma population from social welfare and development' (Skenderi, 2021, p. 2). Their disadvantaged situation is well documented and often criticised, e.g. regarding their (1) health situation, (2) employment, (3) housing and (4) education:

(1) According to research findings on a national and international level, the health situation of the Roma minority is considerably worse than that of the non-Roma population regarding life expectance, infant mortality and chronic diseases. In Albania, '[. . .] [e]ven though the new National Health Strategy (2021–2030) aims to strengthen the health system by improving and promoting the health status of all population, there are no statistical data about the health situation of Roma people. Studies have found that the Roma population (especially those who reside in segregated areas) does not benefit from programs and policies (RCC, 2020a)' (see page 46f in this book). According to *Anita Lukenda*, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the health situation of Roma people is especially bad: 'The mortality rate among Roma newborns is 24% compared to 8% of the children of the total population. The mortality of Roma children younger than five is 27% compared to 8% of the