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# **The Roma Community of Zavidovići**

**A summary report of an assessment conducted by  
the Local Democracy Agency Zavidovići**

**Zavidovići, 2004**

**"Roma integration through confidence building actions"**

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## Introduction

This report presents the main findings of a Local Democracy Agency assessment of the Roma community in the area of Zavidovici. The assessment is based on a household survey conducted during the last trimester of 2003 and on interviews and additional research done during the first trimester of 2004.

In this report we keep to information that we could crosscheck in the extent of the possible, mainly the information most useful for our work, even though we also explore some issues that are less prone to final statements<sup>1</sup>.

This report is organized in 3 chapters:

**General outlook**, or the basic facts such as number of households and individuals, age structure, etc.

**Literacy and education**, where we try to present a full picture of the situation by using different sources.

**Issues**, an admittedly heterogeneous section, gathering subjects that we thought interesting but where the data available was not straightforward enough to state without analysis and nuances.

This said, we must underline that the acquisition of the knowledge and its partial publication in this report is only half of the objectives of this activity. To understand this we must go through a brief presentation of the origins of the project and its guidelines.

## The project's context

Since the beginning of its activities the LDA cooperated with the Roma association and tried to help it increase its capabilities in project implementation and in raising the general community awareness of the problems that Roma face in today's Bosnia and Herzegovina. Therefore several documentaries and radio broadcasts were organized by the association itself and funded by the Council of Europe, through the LDA or the Local Citizens Committee, a participative structure supported by the LDA.

The LDA also helped individual families with humanitarian deliveries of pharmaceuticals, clothes and school material becoming in this way known and trusted by the community.

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<sup>1</sup> - It should also be kept in mind that this report is a brief summary and we don't use all the information we gathered, mainly because of budgetary restrictions. For more information, please check the project's website at <http://www.roma-zavidovici.net/>

From these experiences, LDA staff concluded that by deepening the cooperation between the two organizations the Roma association would be able to develop its potential. The ideal situation being that the Association becomes the main actor in all that concerns its own community.

Thus, when proposing a new project to Council of Europe's Confidence-Building programme at the end of 2002, we decided to focus it on the integration of the Roma community. Our goal was to reunite under a coherent project some activities that had already taken place and where the cooperation with the Roma association proved very fruitful and lead its members to develop new skills, with new activities that would provide a solid foundation for new projects.

## **The assessment**

Regarding this last goal, we introduced in what became CBM 22(2003)<sup>2</sup> an assessment of Zavidovici Roma community.

Indeed, we felt that even though we worked daily with the Roma association and members of the community we were lacking a comprehensive picture.

Questions as simple as the mobility rate of the population were entangled in the stereotypes of the Roma as a people on the road, always moving, attached to nothing. Not taking in account the complex question of why such a stereotype is associated with the idea itself of the Gypsy - a longing for freedom from the rooted ones? -, the assessment provided interesting results. Yes, Zavidovici Roma move, but from one street to another street, or in some cases work far away as in Zagreb and come back. Crosschecking different sources over a period of one year we discovered a very stable population in 99% of the cases. So, to be nomad is not a characteristic of this population and if it moves is more due to a precarious social situation than due to some cultural trait.

Regarding another important issue, we knew that education of Roma people was a problem: non-enrolment in obligatory school, absenteeism, high failure and dropout rates. We knew that a high level of illiteracy existed, but how high? We had a lot of questions and only some guesses about the answers.

The need of a survey was clear, but also were the obstacles opposing its concretization. How many questions would the surveyed people accept to answer and from whom? Would people answer about stillborns, or about revenues? Should we enquire about legal status of property, when we have no way of crosschecking the results? After all, we are not an official census agency and have only the trust that we have built through the years of common work to confer legitimacy to our questions.

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<sup>2</sup> - For more information on the project, please check <http://www.roma-zavidovici.net/>

Another issue also influenced the design of the assessment. CBM's programme goal is to promote good relations between the majority and the minorities. So, the target of the project had to be not only the Roma population itself but also members of other ethnic groups working on the project, in this case a team of nine young people of different ethnic backgrounds.

The assessment was then designed and conducted with two main goals on mind:

- acquire the maximum of data about Zavidovici's Roma community, without stretching too far our capital of trust;
- increase minority problems awareness in a team of young people that will act as multipliers;

## **The questionnaire**

Having this twofold goal into account we knew that the questionnaire should be composed of:

- Questions targeted to hard facts: year of birth, number of children, etc
- Questions probing aspects that we were interested in but were not sure of getting exploitable answers or even an answer at all
- Open sections designed to prod the survey team to react to unexpected situations or information

The first step was then to identify the hard facts that we wished to get: mainly the general outlook of the population and education related figures. These last figures were very important to us not only to achieve a better understanding of the situation but also to prepare the tutoring activity of the project.

To this basic structure, we added elements from full-fledged questionnaires used by agencies such as UNDP in Albania and other SEE countries, cutting out whatever seemed to us irrelevant, impossible to obtain or overtaxing our exploitation capabilities.

Finally, during working sessions with all the team members, we added questions, suppressed others, reformulated some. This last step was very useful, not only to involve the team, but to really adapt the questionnaire to the local conditions. True, the final result is maybe less coherent than a census form produced by an official statistical body and some of the questions that came from this collective work are difficult exploitable in a database, but the lengthy discussions and the richness of the issues raised were well worthy. The redaction of the final questionnaire was already part of what was to be achieved by the activity.

## The fieldwork

We had a team, we had a questionnaire: now we needed to send the team to the field<sup>3</sup>. Logistical and transportation questions aside, we had to take in account the fact that it would be useless to have a nine strong team of different ethnic backgrounds and gender-balanced if that composition didn't reflect itself in the fieldwork proper. We divided the team in two groups of four with an overall coordinator in charge of tasks distribution and send them to different parts of town where the households surveyed were located.

It must be said that the work proceeded swiftly, even though the quality of the first filled questionnaires was uneven. This rapidly changed when we introduced daily quality controls and discussed the questionnaires with the surveyors. It was refreshing to watch how some stereotypes evolved in some cases. In other cases, much was learned from aside remarks a bit less graceful. The important issue is that everybody discussed and exchanged points of view about what they were doing.

We should also note that we've voluntarily limited the scope of this report. We'll not go into lengthy discussions of the issues facing Roma today as there's already an abundant literature on the subject.

So, what you are about to read is only part of what we could achieve in this activity, even though an important part. Behind this report there's the collective work of motivated individuals and an exhaustive database on the Roma of Zavidovici. The collective work allowed us to form a group of people with the necessary skill to implement other projects. The database allows us to be much more effective in the design and the implementation of projects targeting the Roma community. For instance, instead of speaking about the civil registration problems of Roma, we know exactly how many are concerned by this problem and can solve the problem – if funding is available... - in a very short time.

We want and hope that this report will be a tool in the design of new projects and activities, be it in Zavidovici, be it elsewhere.

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<sup>3</sup> - It should be noted that there was only one expatriate in the project and that his interventions were by design kept to the minimum possible.

# Chapter I - General outlook

## Counting problems

The lack of reliable information about Roma populations in SEE countries – as well in other countries - is widely acknowledged at each conference and in each document on the subject. In the context of BiH this situation is worsened by the lack of census information in general<sup>4</sup>, and the status of Roma in the constitutional frameworks of former Yugoslavia and succeeding states.

The consequences of this situation is that not only there's no reliable figures about Roma, be it in pre-1991 BiH be it now, but also that there's no reliable figures about the general population today.

In our case, the main problem is the lack of a reference frame. It is difficult to say that Roma are more this or that when we don't have an average to compare the Roma population to.

As we'll see later, it is not so much in counting Roma that we find obstacles, is in comparing that data to something. Indeed, in the lack of a reference frame how can we measure access of Roma to education, *as compared* to other groups of population?

This is a more important issue than what it could seem at first. Indeed, without a quantitative frame of reference, every case where a Rom hasn't access to an administration service can only be interpreted in terms of prejudice. This is not to deny that prejudice exists and we'll deal with this issue in Chapter IV.

Another consequence of this situation is that without a clear way of comparing groups, Roma will always be assimilated to the "lower" strata of their group while non-Roma will identify themselves with the "higher" strata of their group, when in several cases, the "middle "strata" of each group are closer then they could imagine.

In this regard, the expression *bijeli rom* or white roma is telling as it designates those that are perceived as "almost" non Roma. During the assessment, it was not unusual to hear someone say "Oh, she's Roma, I didn't know! She looks like us."

The problem works also the other way around, when Roma complain about living conditions that they unwittingly share with non Roma. Indeed, sometimes Roma display as much ignorance about non Roma as the later about them.

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<sup>4</sup> - See for instance, Simic, D. (2001). "How Many Inhabitants Does Bosnia Have? The Only Country Without a Population Census." AIM Sarajevo.

As said before, we'll try to deal with these aspects of the question further on. At this point, it was important to stress the lack of a frame of reference to which compare the quantitative data that we gathered in this assessment, before presenting the data that we do have.

## The population of Zavidovici municipality<sup>5</sup>

We have two sources of figures for the total population of Zavidovici municipality.

At the end of 2003, the LDAs<sup>6</sup> implemented Council of Europe's project *Development of Democratic Citizenship and Responsive Leadership at Local Level in Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro*. LDA Zavidovici sent questionnaires to all fBiH municipalities. The first part of this questionnaire concerned itself with population figures.

The second source of information is the *Estimation of population of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, December 31, 2003*, published by the Federal Office of Statistics<sup>7</sup> (FZS). The available information concerns population total by age and sex and population total by ethnicity. If we present the data from the two sources in a single table we can take a measure of the problem:<sup>8</sup>.

**Table I – Municipality and Federal Office of Statistics estimations of Zavidovici's population in 2003**

	Municipality	FZS
Croatian	2.232	90
Bosniak	40.295	35.913
Serbian	1.786	678
Others <sup>9</sup>	326	11
<b>Total</b>	<b>44.639</b>	<b>36.692</b>

The difference between the figures is such that it makes one wonder if they refer to the same municipality. Our experience in the field leads us to consider the Municipality's figures as more accurate, even though we know that they

<sup>5</sup> - When using the term "Municipality" we are referring to the administrative authority, when using the term "municipality" we are referring to all the administrative zone.

<sup>6</sup> - For more information on the network of Local Democracy Agencies please check <http://www.ldaaonline.org/>

<sup>7</sup> - Available at <http://www.fzs.ba/>

<sup>8</sup> - We've adapted the presentation of the data, but the categories and figures are those from the Municipality and the Federal Office of Statistics.

<sup>9</sup> - The category "Others" in post-Dayton BiH designates those that are BiH citizens but don't declare themselves as members of one of the three constituent ethnic groups, most of the time Roma. For more information see (2004). The Non-Constituents. Right Deprivation of Roma in Post-Genocide Bosnia and Herzegovina. Budapest, European Roma Rights Center.

are an approximation. The figures provided by the Municipality about the population repartition between urban center and rural areas also correspond better to our experience and will be needed further on.

Nevertheless, we cannot completely discard the FZS figures, and it's not our role to substitute ourselves to an administrative body. So, we will use particularly the breakdown according to gender and age. Indeed, we'll use them later to compare *percentages* between the total population and the Roma population, hoping that at that level of comparison the results obtained are useful.

## **Counting Roma**

We hinted before that we had not so many problems counting Roma. Indeed, working with the Roma Association, we took the simple approach of counting as Roma everyone who declared himself Rom and was recognized by his pairs as such. As we had the means of visiting each and every household, we were not worried of overstretching our resources.

In this we were helped by the very practical approach that Roma can have of their identity – or more accurately when to declare it to others - and benefited of the trust built by former LDA actions. Indeed, after a while, we had Roma coming to us and saying that we had forgot to count them. In some cases, it was just because the family thought that there was something to gain from participating in our assessment – and we sincerely hope that there is! – in other cases it was simply a matter of community pressure – if all the others had done it they should do it. In some very gratifying cases, it was a matter of self-affirmation and identification with the activity goals.

During our fieldwork we surveyed a total of 131 households and accounted 566 individuals belonging to those households. From the basic questions in the questionnaires we produced a set of graphics, sometimes in a “naïve” approach to see what the data reveals, sometimes in order to answer to precise questions such as the civil registration status of the Roma population. Before going into those graphics, let's first deal with the issue of Roma as percentage of the general population.

## **How minor is the Roma minority?**

The Municipality data is, in absolute figures, more reliable than FSZ's, so we'll use it in this section.

**Table II – Municipality estimations of Zavidovici's population in 2003**

<b>Croatian</b>	2.232
<b>Bosniak</b>	40.295
<b>Serbian</b>	1.786
<b>Others</b>	326
<b>Total</b>	44.639

As mentioned above, the category "Others" refers to citizens that don't declare themselves as members of one of the three constituent ethnic groups. In this case, it's most probable that the 326 "Others" in the table are Rom. As we have a more precise counting and we ignore how the municipality arrived to this figure, not to mention that it's quite possible for a Rom to declare her or himself as a "Bosniak" or "Croatian" or "Serbian, we'll use our figure and compare it to the total.

**Table III – Roma population as percentage of general population**

<b>Total population</b>	<b>Roma population</b>	<b>%<sup>10</sup></b>
44.639	566	1.27

Seen like this, the Roma minority seems indeed a very small minority and people living in the town would be surprised by this figure<sup>11</sup>.

We must then qualify this figure. Zavidovici municipality is the largest one in the Zenica-Doboj Canton with 590 km<sup>2</sup>. The figure of 44.639 refers to its entire territory. Table IV shows a clearer picture of population repartition in the municipality:

**Table IV – Municipality estimation of Zavidovici's population repartition in 2003**

<b>Rural communities</b>	33.433
<b>Urban center</b>	11.206
<b>Total</b>	44.639

Indeed, the Roma population lives in a radius of 5 km maximum from the administrative center of the town. Even the farthest settlement is inside one of the urban administrative areas. It is then more accurate to compare the number of Roma to the general population living in these areas.

<sup>10</sup> - Using FSZ figures the percentage would be 1.54, an useful reminder that when dealing with such small figures percentages can be misleading.

<sup>11</sup> - This also due to the visibility of Rom activities as begging and collecting waste.

**Table V – Roma population as percentage of population living in the urban center**

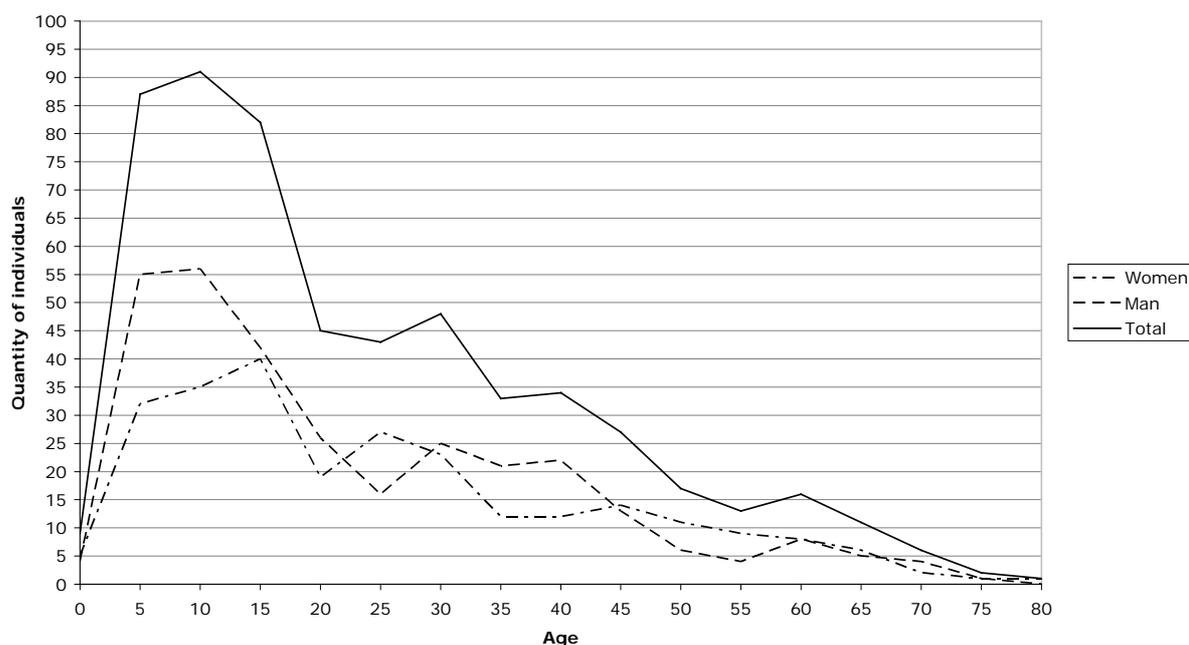
Total population	Roma population	%
11.206	566	5.05

This figure is more accurate than the one resulting from the comparison to the total municipality's population as there is virtually no Roma in the rural areas<sup>12</sup>

### The structure of the Roma population

As abovementioned, we'll use some graphics as a way of approaching the data we gathered without necessarily trying to answer precise questions. The first of these graphics represents the total Roma population distributed by age and gender.

**Graph. I - Age and gender distribution of Roma population**



This simple graphic allows us to draw already two conclusions. The first is that the Roma population is in its majority young - an age structure normally associated with underdevelopment.

<sup>12</sup> - Or, indeed, with an agricultural occupation. There's a possible exception concerning a Karavlasí community on the outskirts of the municipality, but even the Roma status of this community is not clear.

The second conclusion is that there's an uneven distribution of genders between age categories, specifically that as younger a Roma is greater are the chances that it's a male. This unbalanced relationship is particularly sharp between 0-10 years old males and females (only 38.5% of total population of that age range is female<sup>13</sup>).

It would be difficult to use the 1991-1995 war as an explanatory factor for these variations between genders. The only age periods where the number of men drops under the number of women is 22-28 years old and 45-60 years old. The former were teenagers during the war and the latter were already mature men. Concerning the men that would have been of fighting age during the war, in the range 28 to 45 years old, they are clearly more numerous than the women of the same range of age. This could be because of the vulnerability of women as a group in wars. Or, because women have married in other families that are not in Zavidovici and men are more difficult to marry out when their families have not the means. But, again, we have no way of knowing it.

The FSZ figures – as explained above – allow us to compare to a certain extent, the age and gender repartition of the Roma population to that of the general population. We say to a certain extent, as we must conform to the less comprehensive data provided by FSZ as shown in Table VI.

**Table VI – SFZ estimation of total Zavidovici population by age and gender**

<b>Age</b>	<b>Male</b>	<b>Female</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>0-4</b>	1199	1116	2315
<b>5-9</b>	1932	1744	3676
<b>10-14</b>	1732	1329	2701
<b>15-64</b>	-	-	25065
<b>65+</b>	-	-	2935

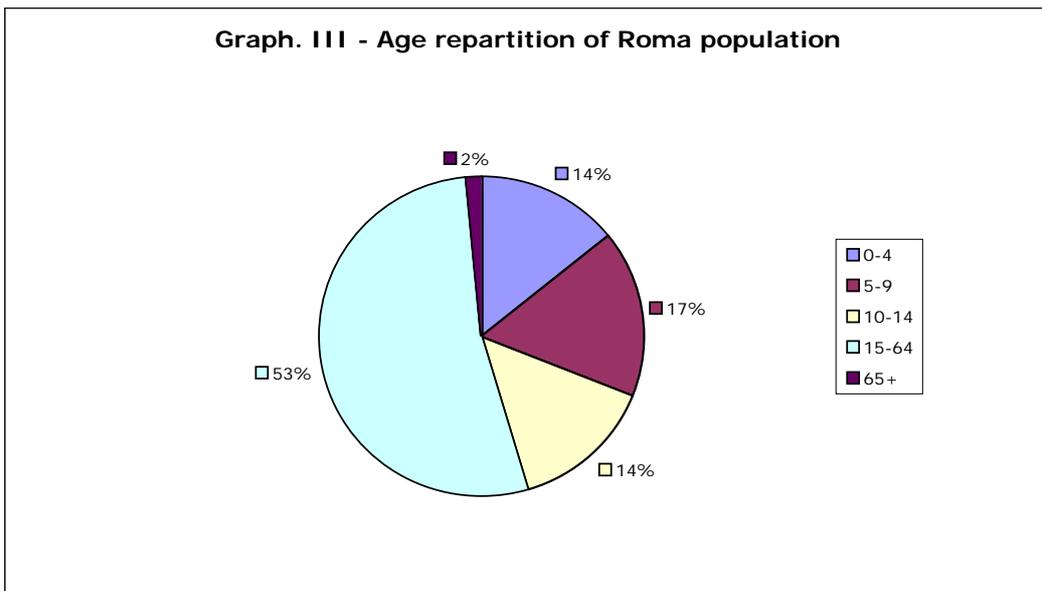
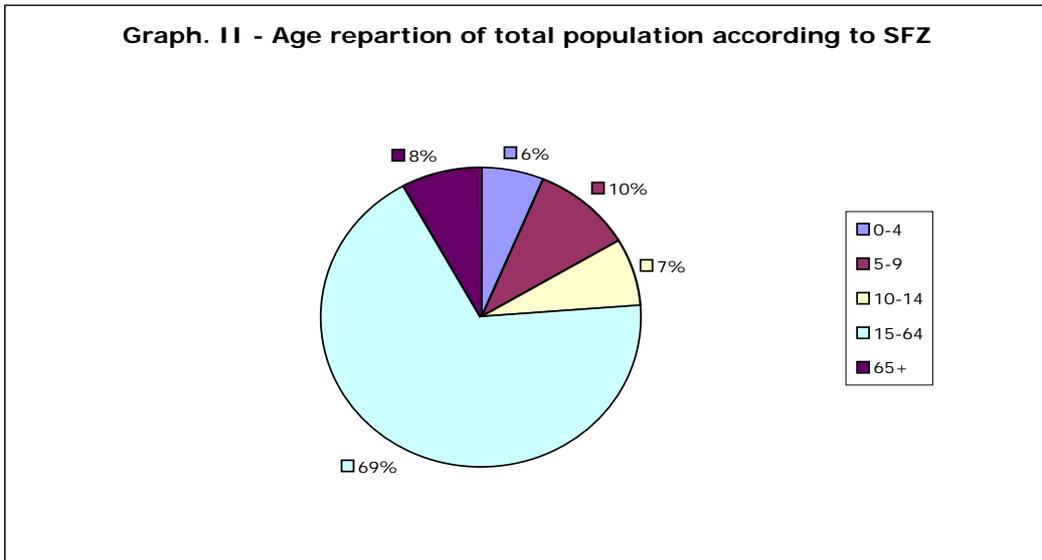
Converting these figures into percentages we can extract from our database a set of data we can compare to SFZ's. Graphics II and III compare age distribution and allow us to depict very clearly the two main variations between the age structure of the Roma population and that of the total population:

- The percentage of young individuals (0-14 years old) in the Roma population – 45% - is much higher, almost double, than in the total population – 23%;

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<sup>13</sup> - The reasons for this are unclear and conjectures can be dangerous, especially if we consider the high percentage of stillborns and miscarriages.

- Inversely, the percentage of individuals 65 years and older in the Roma population is much inferior to that of the total population, 2% to 8%, a 1/4 ratio;

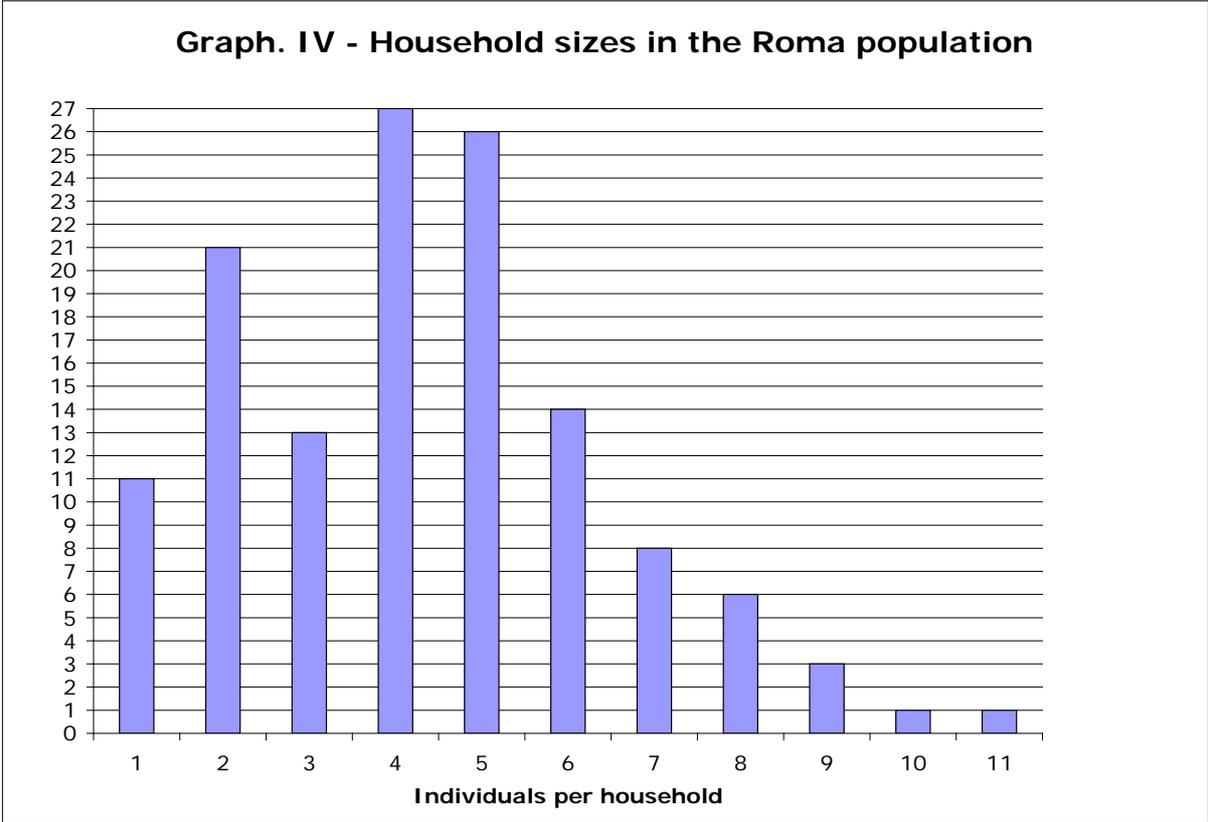


The comparison between gender distribution in the Roma population and the total population is practically useless. On the one hand, as we've seen in table VI, SFZ data on this matter covers only a very limited age range. On the other hand, the numbers concerning the Roma population are too small to allow an easy translation into percentages<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>14</sup> - In the total population aged 0-14, the male-female repartition is 51.81% - 48.19%. In the Roma population, the same repartition is 58.98% - 41.02%. In absolute figures, the difference is meaningless.

### Household composition<sup>15</sup>

Having showed that indeed the Roma population has a higher growth rate than the total population, it's interesting to see if this rate applies to all the Roma population or only to part of the households. The simple average (individuals/households) is 4.3, an average higher than what is normally observed in Western European countries<sup>16</sup>. In our case, we have means to picture more precisely the composition of Roma households in Zavidovici as shown in Graphic IV.



It is clear looking at this graphic that if there are indeed some large households, the *majority* of Roma households is much closer to the average than not. For instance there's one household with eleven members that contributes as much to the total population figure than the eleven households with one member. Table VII will allow us to analyse further the participation of each type of household to the total Roma population.

<sup>15</sup> - After analysing the data, we decided to treat each household as a family unit: parents, children. It's not always the case, but the variations were so minimal in the final presentation of the data that we decided to not take them in account.

<sup>16</sup> - It's true that this notion of average is somewhat arbitrary, but we use it here only as a way of measuring in the lack of some reference in Bosnian statistics.

**Table VII – Roma households in absolute figures and in percentage of total Roma population**

Size of household	Number of households	% of total households	% of total population
1	11	8.40%	1.94%
2	21	16.03%	7.42%
3	13	9.92%	6.89%
4	27	20.61%	19.08%
5	26	19.85%	22.97%
6	14	10.69%	14.84%
7	8	6.11%	9.89%
8	6	4.58%	8.48%
9	3	2.29%	4.77%
10	1	0.76%	1.77%
11	1	0.76%	1.94%

If you consider that the average household is between 3 and 5 members – again, an arbitrary measure, but close to the values observed in Western European countries – we come to the conclusion that these “normal” households constitute 50.38% of all households *and* 48.94% of the total Roma population.

Following the same logic, households of 1 to 2 members constitute 24.43% of all households but only 9.36% of the total Roma population. As to the households of 6 and more members they represent 25.19% of all households *and* 41.70% of total population<sup>17</sup>.

This is an interesting observation when we think of the stereotypes surrounding Roma as a “profligating” population. Indeed, in Zavidovici at least, 74.81% of the households have a size that non Roma would find perfectly “normal”. This shows also that the Roma are not as homogeneous as the stereotypes present them.

### **Conclusions:**

- Although Roma represent only 1.27% of the total municipality population, they constitute 5.05% of the total population of the areas where they live, i.e., the three local communities (MZ) in urban areas.
- The Roma population is in average younger than the general population and has a shorter life expectancy than the later.

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<sup>17</sup> - In some cases, households of more than 8 members, it's not a parents – children simple structure, that's why we use the range 6 and more. See note 15.

- The stereotype of large Roma families is not confirmed by the facts as more than 70% of the Roma households conform to average household sizes.

## Chapter II – Literacy and education

As mentioned before, we wanted to focus on education issues during our research, even though we collected a wide range of information. The reason for this focus is simple and practical: the largest part of the global project<sup>18</sup> is concerned with education and we needed the most accurate possible data to implement the activity. On the other hand, education is one of the main exclusion factors concerning the Roma community and we felt that we needed a clear picture of the situation.

To accomplish this we introduced some straightforward education-related questions in the questionnaire:

- For each individual, what level of education: a) Can't read, can't write b) No formal education, but able to read and to write c) Compulsory education attendance and for how many grades<sup>19</sup> d) Post-compulsory education (general high-school or the two technical secondary schools) e) Post-secondary vocational school d) University;
- For each individual between 3 and 18 years old, we asked if he or she were enrolled in some institution of formal education and, if not, why not;
- For each individual we asked if what kind of knowledge of Romani language does she or he has, i.e., none, passive, active.

As in order to implement the tutoring activity we needed to know exactly who is enrolled in formal education, we used also other sources of information, mainly, lists of pupils from the Roma Association, the Municipality and the schools. These lists were verified and crosschecked and provided us with an exact picture of enrolment in formal education. We also collected qualitative information from interviews and the work of the tutors with the children, the parents and the schools. These different sources allows us to present the data in the following pages and guarantee its accuracy.

### Education level of the Roma population

One of the most usual things said about Roma is that they are uneducated<sup>20</sup>. Having the means to judge if this is true or not concerning the Roma population of Zavidovici, the first thing we wanted to know is if this stereotype is confirmed by the data.

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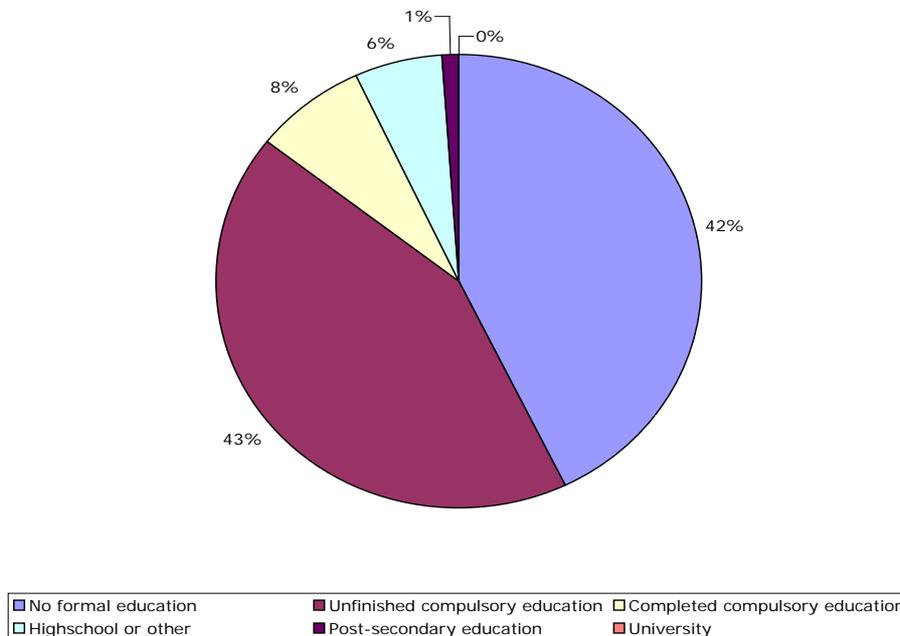
<sup>18</sup> - For more information, <http://www.roma-zavidovici.net/>

<sup>19</sup> - Compulsory education in BiH is provided by the primary schools (Osnovna Skole) and lasts eight years from 7 to 15.

<sup>20</sup> - In this case, the Bosnian word – neobrazovani - used in this common sentence refers strictly to formal education, not to social behaviour.

In Graphic V<sup>21</sup>, we provide a visual answer to this question by representing the formal education level of the Roma individuals born in 1985 and before, i.e., roughly 18+ old.

**Graph. V - General education level of 18+ years old Roma population**



At a first glance we can already see that in this case the stereotype is accurate. Only 15% of Zavidovici Roma in this age range ever finished primary school and only 7% attended some kind of post-obligatory school. A full 42% of the 18+ Roma living in Zavidovici never had any kind of formal education and another 43% dropped out of compulsory education without ever finishing it.

The most important figures in this graphic are the last ones, as we present the education level of the Roma population *living presently* in Zavidovici. Mobility increases with the education level and there is the possibility that more individuals than depicted finished post-obligatory or higher level of education and moved out of Zavidovici. In this case, they are completely absent from our figures.

Table VIII presents a more detailed breakdown of the figures<sup>22</sup>. As we can see below, the first years of primary school are the critical ones, as more individuals dropped out then, than during the the later ones. We don't have quantitative data from other years to confirm this, but all sources agree on this point. This allows us to draw some interesting conclusions, as the first years

<sup>21</sup> - We aggregated some categories in order to have a more intelligible graphic.

<sup>22</sup> - For a breakdown by gender, see Chapter III.

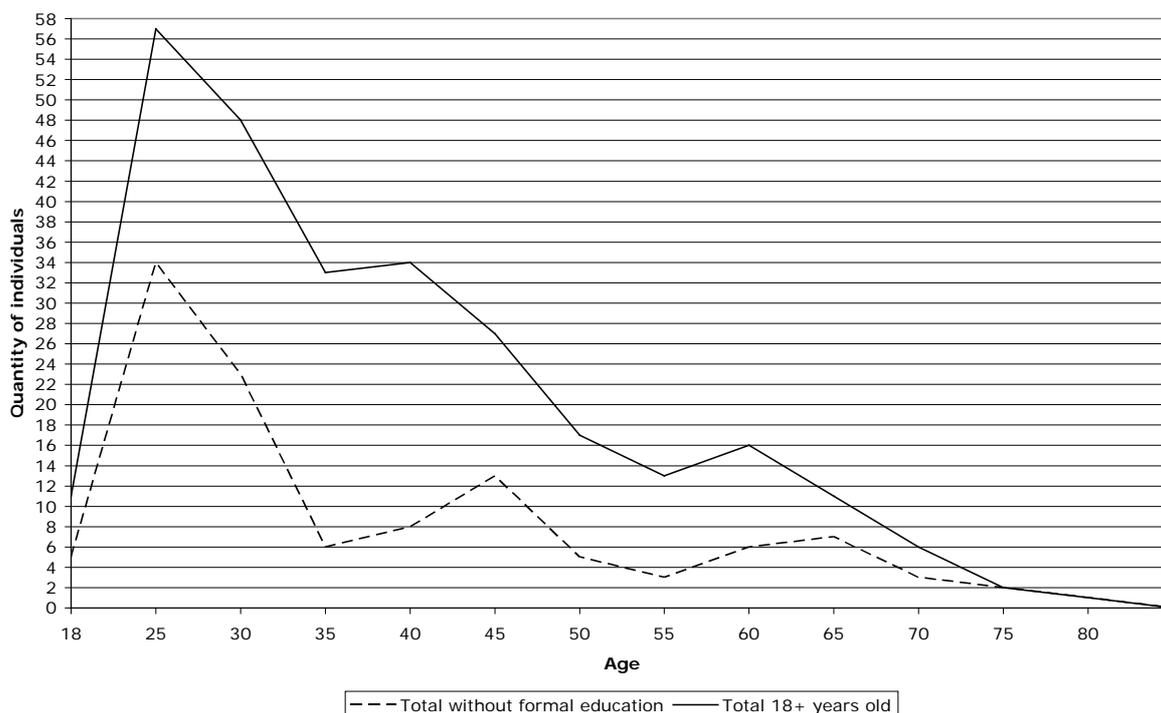
in primary school are the less exigent ones. The dropout rate in these years cannot then be attributed to an academic incapacity of the pupils but rather to other factors. Another conclusion is that if we consider that someone with only 4 years of primary school is barely literate, the impact of illiteracy among the Roma is even higher than the simple count of those without formal education.

**Table VII – Education level of the 18+ years old Roma population**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Individuals</b>
<b>Illiterate</b>	69
<b>No formal education, knows how to read and write</b>	49
<b>Primary school – 1<sup>st</sup> grade</b>	22
<b>Primary school – 2<sup>nd</sup> grade</b>	19
<b>Primary school – 3<sup>rd</sup> grade</b>	18
<b>Primary school – 4<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	28
<b>Primary school – 5<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	13
<b>Primary school – 6<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	8
<b>Primary school – 7<sup>th</sup> grade</b>	10
<b>Primary school – Completed</b>	21
<b>High school or other</b>	16
<b>Post-secondary education</b>	3
<b>Total</b>	276

Has we have no historical data, it is difficult to assess the evolution of the situation, i.e. if the percentages are worst or better than before. From the data we do have we produced graphic VI where we represent the number of individuals without formal education as compared to the total of individuals in the same age range.

**Graph. V - Lack of formal education in 18+ years old Rom compared to age range total**



This graphic shows clearly that the percentage of individuals lacking formal education follows roughly the demographic evolution, with the exception of the 35-40 years old<sup>23</sup>.

## Roma in the school system

The next question that interest us is to how many Roma that should be in school are indeed in school. In this section, as we use exact data from other sources than the assessment, we will present first that exact data.

At the present time, the only Roma in school are in primary school. There's no Roma in the post-obligatory school system. Table VIII presents the Roma that are enrolled in compulsory education and that we follow under the tutoring program. As it is clear from this table the overwhelming majority of these Roma are in the first two grades. This is somewhat gratifying in what concerns the efforts undertaken these last three years to enrol Roma children in the school. On the other hand, the fact that most Roma don't go further than the first years of primary school is confirmed.

<sup>23</sup> - The reasons for this are not clear and would need more specific research to understand.

**Table VIII – Roma in the education system**

<b>Level</b>	<b>Individuals</b>
Primary school – 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	17
Primary school – 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	13
Primary school – 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	3
Primary school – 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	0
Primary school – 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	1
Primary school – 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	4
Primary school – 7 <sup>th</sup> grade	0
Primary school – 8 <sup>th</sup> grade	1
<b>Total</b>	<b>40</b>

All these pupils are enrolled in the two primary schools in the urban center of Zavidovici municipality<sup>24</sup>. Those two schools have a total of 2275 pupils. Of these, 1.76% are Roma pupils. If we have in mind the percentage of 5.05% of Roma in the areas covered by these schools, we can appreciate how much the Roma are underrepresented in school.

From the answers from our questionnaire we can extract the set for the 1988-1996 year of birth and, working by elimination<sup>25</sup>, establish a list of the individuals that should be in school. Table IX presents the results of this work.

**Table IX – Roma in the education system and outside the education system**

	<b>Individuals</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Total of school age individuals</b>	150	
<b>Enrolled in school</b>	40	26.67%
<b>Not enrolled in school</b> <sup>26</sup>	110	73.33%

From this table we can see clearly that the situation worsened during the last years, as 73.33 percent of the individuals that should be enrolled in compulsory education are not.

Table X presents a more detailed picture of this excluded population by distinguishing between those that never enrolled and those that dropped out of school. It is clear that there is a majority of individuals for which school,

<sup>24</sup> - There is six such schools in all the municipality and some have sections in villages.

<sup>25</sup> - Mainly by omitting the individuals with full invalidity or too young to be enrolled.

<sup>26</sup> - We included here individuals that declared during the assessment that they are enrolled but about who we learned during the tutoring that they are not.

even obligatory, was not an option. Again, the dropout rate for the first years is higher than for the later years, confirming that as longer an individual stays in school, after overcoming the obstacles of the first years, better are the chances that he or she finishes it.

**Table X – Roma outside the education system: dropouts and excluded**

	Individuals	%
<b>Never enrolled</b>	72	65.45%
<b>Total dropout</b>	38	34.55%
Dropped out – 1 <sup>st</sup> grade	19	
Dropped out – 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade	4	
Dropped out – 3 <sup>rd</sup> grade	10	
Dropped out – 4 <sup>th</sup> grade	2	
Dropped out – 5 <sup>th</sup> grade	0	
Dropped out – 6 <sup>th</sup> grade	3	

Even though this quantitative information is clear and presents the situation as it is with a very small margin of error, it is a much harder question to explain why the situation is as it is. As mentioned above, for each case where one individual should be enrolled in school and isn't, we asked why not. The answers were completely free, but do allow some degree of systematisation. Table XI presents the main categories of answers.

**Table XI – Main reasons for not being enrolled in school, as stated by the families**

	<b>Individuals</b>
<b>No material means<sup>27</sup></b>	58
<b>Inscription not accepted</b>	16
<b>No reason given<sup>28</sup></b>	10
<b>Parents against schooling</b>	8
<b>Foreign<sup>29</sup> diplomas not accepted</b>	5
<b>Frequent travel/moving</b>	4
<b>Health problems</b>	3
<b>War</b>	3
<b>Lack of documents</b>	2
<b>Total</b>	110

As we can see, the main reason stated for not being enrolled in school is the economical situation. Again, the answer to this question was free, meaning that we didn't control if it was accurate or not. In some instances, we did control the answers. For instance, the two cases without documentation concern two individuals that indeed whose birth is not even registered, i.e. they don't have birth certificates. We also checked the inscription problems and the acceptance of foreign diplomas. In some cases, the inscription was not accepted because the individual was too old for the grade where he or she should be placed – a vicious circle situation. In other cases, the reasons for the refusal are not clear. The same applies to the acceptance of the foreign diplomas.

Mostly, we noticed an incapacity of the administration to deal with some circumstances specific to the Roma population: a refusal of inscription motivated in writing and addressed to illiterate or barely literate parents that live in a precarious shelter without address; conditions for acceptance of foreign diplomas displayed in bureaucratic Bosnian displayed in the hall of the school and incomprehensible for the concerned Rom.

It is true that the Roma can display an abysmal incapacity to live in a modern bureaucratic state, but it is not by keeping them in that situation that society will further their integration.

<sup>27</sup> - Including three cases where discrimination is also mentioned.

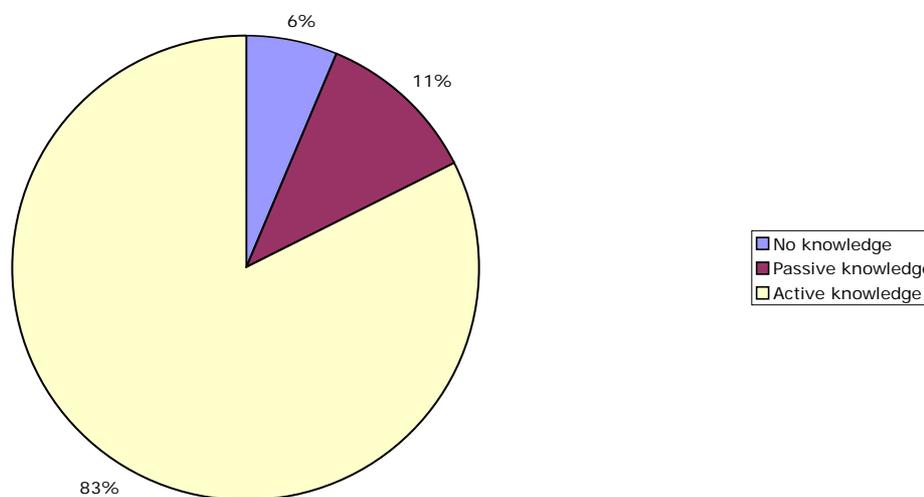
<sup>28</sup> - Including five that declared incorrectly to be enrolled in school.

<sup>29</sup> - Diplomas acquired in Germany where the families were refugees.

## Knowledge of Romani language

From our fieldwork, we were aware that there is virtually no Rom that can read and write in Romani language and that there is differences between the oral Romani that most of the Roma practice. We included a simple question concerning the knowledge of this oral Romani language to evaluate the possibilities of implementing projects in this field. Graphic VI presents the results for the 5+ years old Roma population.

**Graph. VI - Knowledge of Romani language in the 5+ years old population**



This graphic shows clearly that a large majority of Roma declare to actively know Romani and that only a small fraction declares to have no knowledge of it. As we introduced this question only to have a general idea of the situation, we are not going to pursue the analysis further. Indeed, we did not qualify the three categories enough to be able to learn more about the varieties of Romani language spoken.

## Conclusions

The main conclusions that we draw from the data in this chapter in this chapter are:

- That a large percentage of the Roma population has never in the formal education system and that this percentage remains stable over the years and probably increased during the last 10 years.
- That the illiteracy rate among this population is very high and is a major obstacle to its integration in society.

- That even when Roma are integrated early in the formal education system they quickly drop out of it.
- That the authorities have to develop a more proactive attitude when dealing with the education of Roma.
- That efforts to integrate Roma in the formal education system can work but need to be sustained.

## Chapter III – Issues

### The living conditions of Roma

In order to get the most detailed picture possible of Zavidovici's Roma community, we asked several questions concerning housing and living conditions. As we allowed a certain degree of freedom in the answers, the data we gathered can be translated in graphics up to a point only. Also, part of the data, such as ownership status, was not crosschecked. Nevertheless, we think that we have gathered interesting information that has its place in this report as it can be the basis for further questions and research.

#### Where do Roma live in Zavidovići?

Images of Roma settlements, normally makeshift constructions of cardboard, tin and recuperated materials, are common throughout BiH and other SEE countries. Though not all Roma live in such settlements, that image is generally true and reflects both exclusion and poverty. The phenomenon of segregation is complex as it is not only the non-Roma that exclude Roma, sometimes violently, but Roma also exclude themselves, asserting their will to live apart<sup>1</sup>. In the context of this report, we want to concentrate on simpler questions: do Roma live apart in Zavidovići?

The answer is both yes and no. Around 39% of the Roma households<sup>2</sup> are located in a settlement called Rupin Dol – literally, the Valley of the Hole – and on the road above it, Dragovački Put. Others live in some small clusters all around the town. A minority lives in the middle of non-Roma neighbourhoods. Even though the majority of Roma does not live in Rupin Dol it is the latter location that serves as a postcard of Roma condition in Zavidovići. The mix of half-built and half-destroyed houses, the makeshift shelters built with recuperation materials conforms well to images of similar settlements all over the region (see Photo I). And indeed, Rupin Dol shares some of the problems of those settlements, though not all<sup>3</sup>.

Roma started to settle in the Rupin Dol area probably during last century's first years and from a small group developed a stronger presence. Today and since some years, the overwhelming issues concerning Rupin Dol are the constructability and ownership ones. The zone has been declared too dangerous to be built by the Municipality. Yet, nothing has been done concerning the Roma living there. As there is no perspective of rebuilding or recuperating the existing houses and that in most cases proof of ownership is unavailable, the situation is not to be solved soon. This issue is very hard to tackle by local NGO's as it involves skills not readily available or too expensive to contract such as engineers and lawyers. The inability to ascertain the constructability of the area and to legally reinforce the ownership claims of the families living in Rupin Dol effectively prevents any kind of action behind simple humanitarian help with no long-term perspectives.

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<sup>1</sup> - This is particularly clear when one analyses some aspects of Roma language and traditions.

<sup>2</sup> - 51 out 131 households. The percentage if we count individuals (218 out of 566) differs only of a few decimals.

<sup>3</sup> - There is also the question of size. Some of the settlements most seen in television house hundreds of families.

**Photo I - Rupin Dol seen from the road**



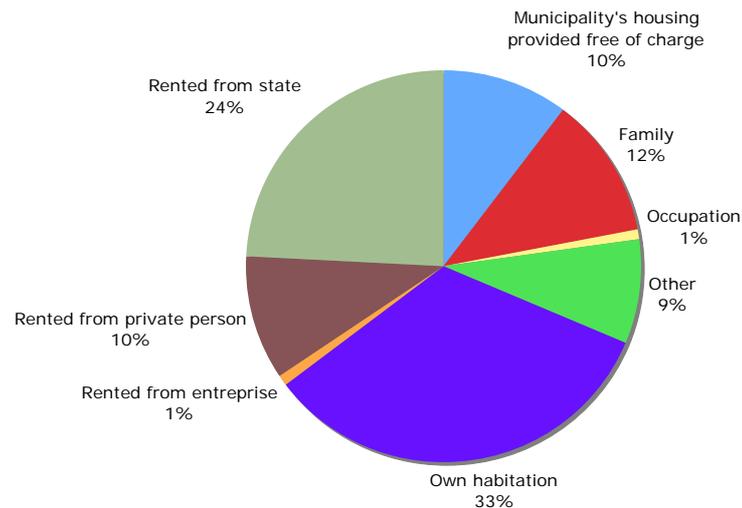
## **Ownership status**

In Graphic VIII we provide a synthesis of the questionnaire results concerning the ownership issue after having consolidated some unclear answers. Even after this cleanup we still have some doubts concerning some of the categories. Let's take these one by one:

- According to this graphic 33% of Roma households own their housing. This figure includes probably some cases where proof of ownership would not sustain the scrutiny of a court because of insufficient documentation. It would be interesting to compare this percentage with the percentage of owners in the general population but we lack the data to do this.
- The global percentage of tenants is quite close to that of owners: 35%. In the answers given is not clear what administrative body is referred to when it was declared that the housing was rented by the state. It would also be interesting to ascertain if the housing is rented by a private Rom or non-Rom.
- The housing units provided by the Municipality free of charge fall into two sub-categories: housing provided by humanitarian reasons through social services and alternative accommodation following judiciary eviction.

- Under Family, we placed together all the cases where the extended family helps to lodge other members of that family, sometimes against monetary retribution sometimes not.
- Under the category Other, apart some very unclear cases or missing answers, we have placed also some cases that would probably should fall under the Occupation category. We know of at least three cases were abandoned Serbian owned housing were occupied by Rom (a smaller percentage than in the general population).

**Graph . VIII - Housing ownership status**



Our field experience leads us to consider this graphic globally accurate if we do not forget the abovementioned precautions.

## **The living conditions of Roma**

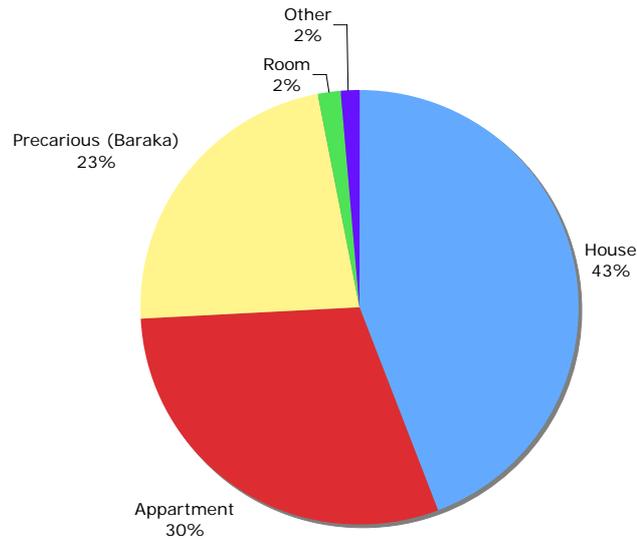
*I went to this house to fill the questionnaire and it was unbelievable, these people really have nothing, nothing at all.*

A member of the assessment team coming back from the field.

### **Type and condition of housing**

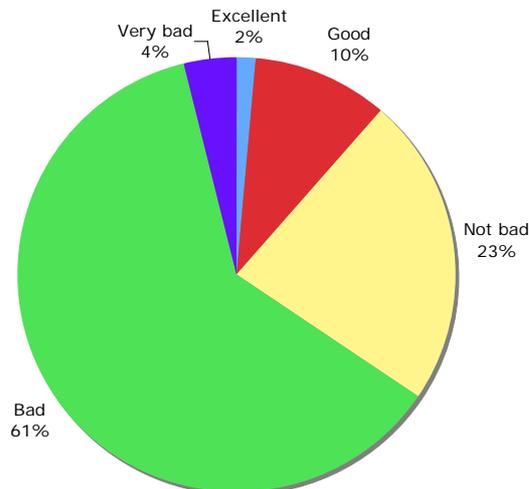
In graphic IX we present the consolidated categories of housing type. The graphic is simple and needs only one remark concerning the precarious category as some of the housing placed under it, while not built in durable materials, are quite well fitted.

**Graph. IX - Type of housing**



In graphic X we present the condition of the housing units as ascertained by the assessment team during the visits. These evaluations are based on the personal impressions of the team but also on the answers to the housing section of the questionnaire.

**Graph. X - Housing units condition**



It is clear from this graphic that the majority of the housing units taken in consideration are in bad condition. The reasons for this are various, amongst them:

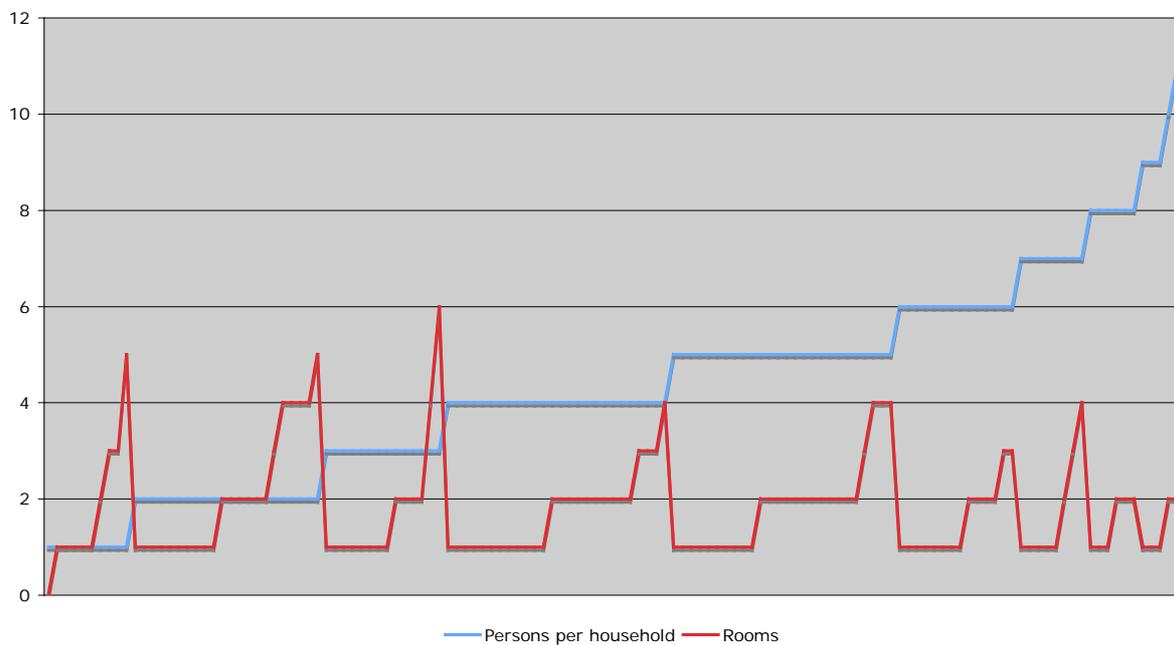
- When proof of ownership is lacking access to construction materials donated by humanitarian organisations is practically impossible.

- When the housing does not belong to the household that inhabits it, investment is not willingly made.
- The economic weakness of the Roma community does not allow it to invest in renovation or reconstruction work.

### The living space

In order to know how much living space was available to Roma households we included a question about the size of the housing unit, i.e. how many rooms each housing unit had, toilets and kitchen excepted. The general average is already telling: 3.94 individuals to a room. In this average the smaller households push the figure down. In the larger households the figure is closer to 5 than to 4 individuals per room. Graphic XI shows this situation clearly.

Graph. XI - Household size distributed by number of rooms



### Sanitation, electricity, heating

Table XII shows our findings concerning the availability of running water, connections to the urban sewage system, the availability of electricity, the type of toilets and the kind of heating.

**Table XII– Sanitation, electricity, heating**

	<b>Percentage</b>
<hr/> <b>Water</b> <hr/>	
No running water	24.62%
With running water	75.38%
<hr/> <b>Connection to the urban sewage system</b> <hr/>	
Not connected	28.46%
Connected	71.54%
<hr/> <b>Type of toilets</b> <hr/>	
Exterior toilets	33.59%
Flush toilets inside	66.41%
<hr/> <b>Electricity</b> <hr/>	
No electricity	19.23%
With electricity	80.77%
<hr/> <b>Heating</b> <hr/>	
No heating	1.53%
Wood stove	98.47%
<hr/>	

From this table we can conclude that while the heating problem is relatively small – even though the supply of burning materials is not easy and toxic waste is sometimes used in order to provide fuel – there remains a large sanitation problem. Concerning this point, we must underline that those that have no running water, no connection to the urban sewage system, no inside toilets and no electricity are sometimes the same, even though, for practical reasons, they are accounted separately in the table. This segment (6.87%) of the Roma population is the bottom of the bottom of Zavidovici’s inhabitants.

## Domestic appliances

**Table XIII – Domestic appliances: stoves, refrigerator, washing machine, radio, television, VCR**

	Percentage
<hr/> <b>Stoves</b> <hr/>	
No stove <sup>4</sup>	0.76%
Wood stove	97.71%
Electrical stove	16.03%
Gas stove	0.76%
<hr/> <b>Refrigerator</b> <hr/>	
No refrigerator	53.85%
With refrigerator	46.15%
<hr/> <b>Washing machine</b> <hr/>	
No washing machine	75.57%
With washing machine	22.90%
<hr/> <b>Radio, television and VCR</b> <hr/>	
With radio	49.62%
With television	64.12%
With VCR	9.92%

This table shows clearly that while the vast majority of the Roma population has a wood stove, an essential item to heat and to cook, as soon as the items are less essential the percentages diminish sharply. It is particularly striking that a larger percentage has a television than a refrigerator. The overall picture of households forced to make choices between goods that are all considered standard in the houses of the general populations is a good reminder of the economical weaknesses of the Roma population.

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<sup>4</sup> - We must keep in mind that wood stoves are used to heat and to cook.

## Transportation

**Table XIV – Transportation: Car, Motorcycle and Cycle**

	<b>Percentage</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Type of transportation</b>	
Car	31.30%
Motorcycle	0.00%
Cycle <sup>5</sup>	7.63%

The surprisingly high percentage of car ownership in this table must be explained. A small part of it certainly exaggerated and does not represent real ownership but access to a car. The other explanation relates to the fact that a large percentage of the Roma population survives by collecting materials in the trash and bringing them to one or two points of collection. Taking this fact in account, a car is in investment that has a good chance of paying itself and so, preferable to renovations in the housing or the acquisition of a refrigerator.

## Access to the phone

**Table XV – Access to the phone**

	<b>Percentage</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Type of phone</b>	
No phone	64.12%
Private ground line phone	23.66%
Cellular phone with prepaid card <sup>6</sup>	10.69%
Cellular phone with monthly rate	0.76%
Both private ground line phone and prepaid cellular phone	4.58%

This table is interesting on two accounts. First, the majority of the Roma population can not be reached by phone. Knowing the high illiteracy rate, letters are not very effective. The Roma must relay on neighbourhood networks to know what is going on. The second interesting fact is the very small percentages of subscription types that imply trust in Roma costumers by the phone company.

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<sup>5</sup> - In most if not all instances, a cycle is more a leisure good than a mean of transportation.

<sup>6</sup> - Exclusively this kind of phone.

# Documentation status of Roma population

One of the issues that arises most often when Roma are concerned is that they often don't have documents and so their marginal status is reinforced<sup>1</sup>. Having this in mind, we decided to include a question about documents in the questionnaire. More precisely, each household was asked for each of its members if the individual in question had the following documents: birth certificate, identity card, health card, driving license and passport.

By these questions we aimed to know if the problem of lack of documentation existed in Zavidovici *and* to get a better picture of the community itself<sup>2</sup>. We had also a practical goal in mind as a civil registration project could be easily implemented once we had the relevant data<sup>3</sup>.

Table<sup>4</sup> \* presents the data concerning the Rom without birth certificate, in a way the most important document as it is necessary to establish all other documents<sup>5</sup>.

**Table \* -Roma individuals without birth certificate**

	Individuals	% of total
<b>No birth certificate</b>	42	7.42%
- of which with no other documents	21	3.71%
- of which with other documents	21	3.71%

As we can see, the data gathered can be somewhat confusing as half of the individuals without birth certificate declares to have other documents<sup>6</sup>, a situation that shouldn't be possible and a figure that we are almost sure that we can discard. Indeed, after asking some additional questions we established that most of the individuals in this category just don't have their birth certificate at home and interpreted the question in this way. Without exception, all the households represented in this under-category in this table

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<sup>1</sup> - See, for instance, Chapter 6 of (2004). The Non-Constituents. Right Deprivation of Roma in Post-Genocide Bosnia and Herzegovina. Budapest, European Roma Rights Center.  
<sup>2</sup> - For instance, by analysing gender distribution of driving license owners.  
<sup>3</sup> - OSCE BiH is implementing such a project now.  
<sup>4</sup> - In this section tables have a percentage column only as an helpful way of keeping in mind the proportion of the issue under discussion. When dealing with such small quantities, percentages can become meaningless by themselves.  
<sup>5</sup> - We must make a cautionary remark here, as sometimes a vicious circle exists that doesn't start at the birth certificate but before. Indeed, if one of the parents has no ID card it will be impossible to register the birth of his child by the regular procedure.  
<sup>6</sup> - A typical case of this would be someone that declares to have no birth certificate but declares to have identity card, health card and passport.

declare themselves to be resident in Zavidovici – as opposed to refugee<sup>7</sup> – and can obtain their birth certificate if needed.

Concerning the individuals without any kind of documentation there are some interesting facts. These individuals come from 12 households and 9 of them from only 3 of these households. The age distribution is very evenly spread between 1973 and 2003. There are only 4 individuals born between 1992 and 1995, so to attribute the lack of documents to the war seems hasty<sup>8</sup>, at least in the case of Zavidovici.

All things considered, the data presented in Table \* allows us to say that the lack of basic documents among the Rom of Zavidovici is a relatively marginal situation and, that being so and considering the very precise data that we have, it would not be difficult to promote civil registration of those there aren't registered.

In Table \*\* we present the data concerning Roma individuals that being 20 years old don't have identity card.

**Table \*\* – Roma individuals 20+ years without identity card**

	Individuals	% of total <sup>9</sup>
<b>No identity card</b>	20	7.78%
- of which, with birth certificate	11	4.28%
- of which, with no documents	5	1.95%
- of which, with no birth certificate but some other document	4	1.56%

The identity card is a document that all Bosnian citizens can acquire since their 15<sup>th</sup> birthday and *must* have 3 months after their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. In this table we consider only the 20+ years old to allow some flexibility in what concerns this 3 months delay. According to this data there are 20 individuals in an illegal situation. 5 of these individuals have not the possibility of establishing an ID card as they have no documents at all and so, it's not really this last one that could be considered the most important one. The 4 four remaining individuals that don't have birth certificates but have some other document can be explained as in the comment about the preceding table.

It remains the 11 individuals that could *and* should have identity cards.

<sup>7</sup> - Which is not surprising as there's only one Roma refugee household, one of which members has no documents at all..

<sup>8</sup> - "An entire generation of Romani children born during the 1992-1995 war is particularly affected by not having been registered because they were born during wartime." (2004). The Non-Constituents. Right Deprivation of Roma in Post-Genocide Bosnia and Herzegovina. Budapest, European Roma Rights Center, p. 66. For instance, the refugee household mentioned in the previous footnote came to Zavidovici in 1991 "because of hunger", not war

<sup>9</sup> - Total of 20+ years old individuals.

## Discrimination of Rom in bars and other public establishments

*I, Mr Bajric would like to ask you to help to our youth because they don't allow us to come in to some cafés. Why do they separate us from others?*

This is an excerpt from a case story in one of the questionnaires that we publish here because Mr Bajric insisted to include his name and sign it. We left out the names of the two bars that Mr Bajric gives as an example because what he says is true of almost all the bars, restaurants and disco.

Usually, during the hot – or not too cold - days, Roma children will approach the tables outside the cafés begging and trying to get the most before the waiters shoo them away. During all year, if you watch, you can see one or two young Roma come into a café and salute politely the waiter. After, they'll take the trashcan out and will come back some time later with it empty. They emptied it to get the first pick of the waste, everything that can be sold as paper or metal and whatever else can be of use. With a bit of luck the waiter will give them half mark or maybe a cake.

These are probably the only two instances where you'll see a Rom in a café. Or, if you're a foreigner – crazy people as every Bosnian knows and so looked upon very tolerantly by the waiters – you can invite one of the boys to your table. A bit of blackmail is involved, you'll give him the three marks he asked – the price goes up if you're a foreigner, normally is half mark or one mark – if he answers some questions. So, you offer him a soda and ask your questions. He'll lie some, tell some truths and be all the time looking nervously around, especially to the waiter, wondering when he is going to be told away.

There are some Rom allowed in bars, even the trendiest ones, as long as they come alone or in two, preferably with non Roma in the group. They are very well dressed and don't live as most Roma live – or as people believe that Roma live. Most important of all, they have money and people know them by name not as some Rom.

When you ask the waiters or the owners why Roma are not allowed the answers can be quite different but usually follow the same pattern. "They're dirty", "they bother the other customers", "they don't know how to behave" are the first answers, followed by a denial of ethnic discrimination: "if only they behaved as civilized people there wouldn't be a problem, we're not racists".

This "commercial" argument is not just a cover for racism. It reflects the truth of the society where it's expressed. During our research, we tried to interview most of the large employers in town so that they could express themselves on what they consider the obstacles to employ Roma. One member of the team

called one of the largest bakeries and after explaining the idea she was asked if she would buy bread from a Rom<sup>10</sup>. In truth, she told us, she would say immediately “No”. So, if even a member of our team has this kind of reaction, what to expect of the larger civil society? And, indeed, if you’re a baker, you want your bread to be sold. This is not to condone this kind of attitudes but to underline the complexity of the situation and so, to better understand the possibilities of effective action.

To come back to the cafés problem, the truth is also that you don’t see many Roma make a stand about the subject. Mr Halid is quite an exception, especially when he asks LDA to take some action against this discrimination and has also intervened publicly in the radio to protest about the same subject. Most of Roma just go elsewhere. If the disco in Zavidovici doesn’t accept them, there’s another one 30km away that accepts them. After all, you go to the disco to have fun – even if sometimes you finish by having trouble – not to make a point.

During the assessment, we interviewed several municipality and cantonal delegations officials and we tried to approach this problem<sup>11</sup>. Apparently, nobody was aware of it. Also, it must be said, to be fair, that most of these officials don’t go out to cafés and discos. Some were truly surprised to learn that Roma were discriminated in such a way. Others were mildly interested.

This problem cannot be solved on its own. Yes, we can try to open the doors of cafés to Roma using the law. But will the Roma want to go into these cafés under these circumstances? No, answered the ones that we asked. Yes, we can pressure the owners of these cafés to accept Roma in their establishment. Will that change the underlying attitude? We don’t think so. Discrimination of Roma in these cafés is not the main problem, but a symptom of the main problem.

## **The challenges of Roma civil society activism**

As a principle, in each of its activities, LDA tries to include people from every ethnic group. So, CoE CBM programme imperative of including people from different ethnic groups in this project was not a burden, until we tried to include Roma activists. In the assessment team we had two Roma that made an essential contribution to the activity. In the tutoring, we had one Roma as we didn’t manage to find, at first, more Roma with enough education *and* motivation to be in the team. Then something happened. We had to replace a member of the team and we interviewed a young Roma woman that had finished high-school and was interested in the work. Two days after we told

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<sup>10</sup> - More probably, the term used was Gypsy.

<sup>11</sup> - The idea being to link the authorization of business to the respect of law – in this case, non-discrimination in public establishments.

her that she could start working she called us and said that she couldn't accept the job because she would have too much problems within her community.

These problems were mainly verbal harassment by other Rom that told her that she had got the job because she was the cousin of this one or the other one, that someone else would be better, that she was taking advantage of their Roma.

## Use of drugs among the Roma population

During one interview with a Rom of Zavidovici that should have some knowledge about the subject<sup>12</sup> we enquired about the use of drugs among the Roma population. Not only he said that there was evidence of such use but, when asked, he stated that the drugs used were cocaine and ecstasy. This was somewhat surprising as these are expensive drugs and, to the extent of our knowledge<sup>13</sup>, these are not easily available substances in Zavidovici.

Nevertheless, we thought that some more questions could be asked to different people and in a discreet way. After all, we couldn't very well put these questions in the questionnaire and the subject is important. We asked a wide variety of Roma people about this and we've got some answers. It must be said that when Roma admitted that drugs were used by members of their community, it was with difficulty and in a shamefaced sort of way. We also asked some non Roma that could know of such activities.

The conclusion of our enquiries is that there's indeed a group of young Roma<sup>14</sup> – 10 to 16 years old and mostly male – that sniffs glue and other similar substances on a regular basis. When they have a bit more of money, this same group buys some hashish or marijuana – apparently, from non Roma. They're also said to drink cheap wine or brandy in large quantities.

As we suspected, cocaine, ecstasy and other substances in this category are laughed at as rich people drugs, according to a conversation with one of the boys.

This group comes from the most destitute of the Roma families and are shunned by the rest of the community. They're largely left to their own

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<sup>12</sup> - The interview was conducted under the guarantee of confidentiality. Thus, we can't give more details about this person.

<sup>13</sup> - We'll use this expression several times in this section as we are speaking of something where sure knowledge is impossible.

<sup>14</sup> - Or several groups. The total must be between 20 and 30 but it's not sure all of them hang out together or form rival groups.

devices by their families and don't attend school. Their families survive mainly by collecting waste and begging. It's by retaining part of what they earn begging that these youngsters manage to have some money to pay for cigarettes, glue, alcohol, etc.

Even though they can be quite visible when they go around town begging and goofing around, they're not known to cause trouble or to steal.

As to drugs utilisation by other segments of the Roma population it is unknown or extremely marginal, to the extent of our knowledge.

The Roma population seems also absent from the distribution circuits. Anyway, Zavidovici itself is not really a main road for drugs circulation. Whatever arrives here and is visible is for local consumption. This, again, to the extent of our knowledge.

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# Roma settlements in the Zavidovići area: historical notes

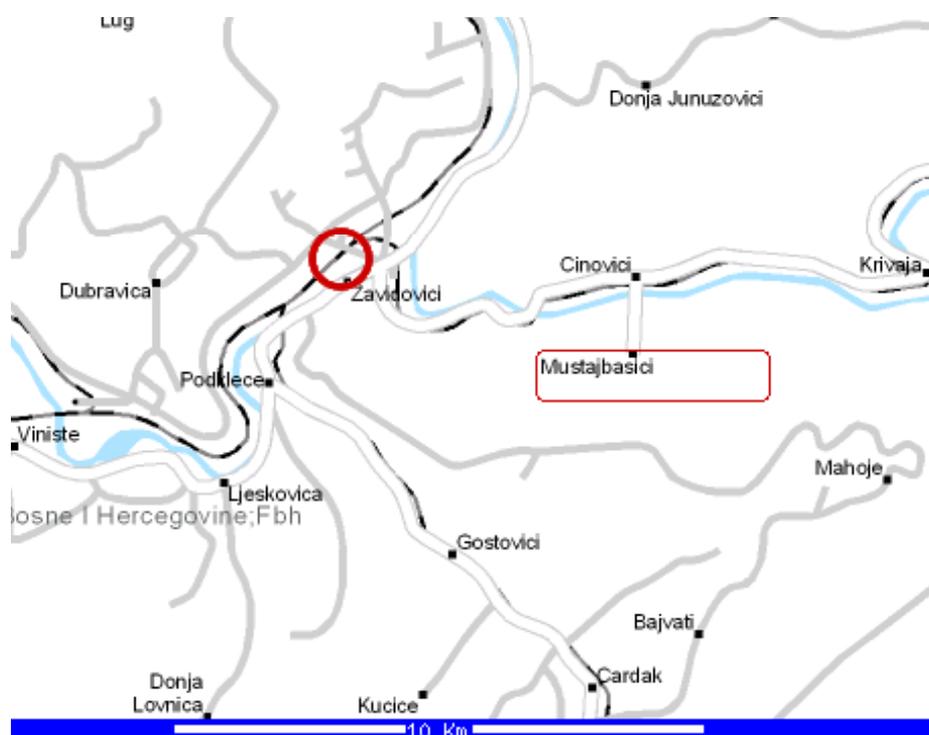
## Introduction

During the work and research done to complete the assessment of Zavidovići's Roma population funded by Council of Europe's Confidence-Building Measures Programme<sup>1</sup> we tried to get some historical perspective in order to better understand the Roma situation in its local specificities. Although we did not pursue this aspect in a systematic way, we gathered a small amount of information that we summarize in the following pages.

## Mustajbašići

The work of Mejrić Fehim [Fehim, 2000] pp.54-59<sup>2</sup>, based on the observation of monuments and interviews with the older Rom still living in Zavidovići, indicates that a Roma settlement existed in a place named Plane – also called Cigani – inside the Mustajbašići ring of villages, in the Krivaja valley twenty kilometres West of Zavidovići's urban center. It is not clear from Fehim's text when the Roma first settled in Plane, but it is clear that they started leaving around 1955 and that in 1962 there were no more Roma in Plane. All that remains today is an abandoned cemetery up the hills<sup>3</sup>.

### Geographical situation of Mustajbašići:



<sup>1</sup> - For more information, please check <http://www.roma-zavidovici.net/>.

<sup>2</sup> - We are indebted to Mr Ibrahim Slipić's translation.

<sup>3</sup> - We presume that this was an exclusively Roma cemetery, like the Dragovac one (see below).

During the time of their settlement, the Roma inhabited about fifteen houses and laboured the earth, raised cattle and foiled tin<sup>4</sup>. The women went around in the valley to beg and people spoke of seeing Gypsy (ciganski) women everyday. A flute and drums band also existed and played in weddings and other events. The names of this band's members are all Muslim. According to Fehim the Roma children attended school regularly.

The economical success of a certain Rasim Bajrić is still spoken about among the older Rom consulted by Fehim. Rasim Bajrić made and sold souvenirs and his success was evident on the fact that he had two wives<sup>5</sup>, houses in Zagreb – where he moved to later - and in the seaside. It would also seem that he was president of the Roma Association of the Social Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.

By 1962, all the Roma had left to Novo Naselje and Dragovac, nearer Zavidovići's center, or to the neighbouring municipality of Banovići.

## **Dragovac**

Dragovac is a small place up in the hills West of Zavidovići's urban center that has been completely abandoned by Roma, the only sign of their presence being an uncared for cemetery hidden by bushes.

We visited this cemetery and observed that the dates of death on the gravestones that can still be read go from 1914 to 1973. The older gravestones are in the old Turkish style and all the names are Muslim. The range of dates implies that Roma were present in Dragovac before the dates abovementioned for their abandonment of Plane, probably since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

According to Zavidovići's Roma Association the Roma arrived in Dragovac in 1937 as a group of around ten individuals and worked on tin foiling or in the Krivaja factory, until they left to Rupin Dol in 1949. This information is contradicted by the presence of tombs older than 1937 and, partially at least<sup>6</sup>, by the tombs more recent than 1949. Also, some documents refer ambiguously to damage provoked to Roma houses in Dragovac during the 1992-1995 war. There is also a Municipality project to build houses for Roma in Dragovac to accommodate those that illegally occupy housing units in the town, thus accepting the historical dimension of Roma presence in that place.

The reason for an exclusively Roma cemetery is also unclear. As mentioned above all the tombs are Muslim or old Muslim style. Is it because Roma were excluded from the majority cemeteries or was it because of practical and historical considerations, i.e., the cemetery

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<sup>4</sup> - None of these activities survives today.

<sup>5</sup> - Interestingly, the only Zavidovići Rom today that has two wives also worked – prior to the 1992-1995 war – on souvenirs, especially woodcarvings. The subject of these carvings is predominantly religious and Catholic, showing the importance of the Croatian market for Zavidovići's Muslim Roma. This importance is still seen today as the better-off Roma households – the ones that declared to us a monthly income of KM 3'000 to KM 4'000 trade in Zagreb.

<sup>6</sup> - Partially, because we are unsure if the Roma cemetery as a sign of exclusion from other cemeteries. See below.

began informally and after it was used out of habit? Nowadays, Muslim Roma are buried in all-Muslim cemeteries and no Roma has mentioned to us any case of exclusion of cemeteries be it in the present be it in the past.

**One of Dragovac's abandoned tombstones:**



**The most recent tombstone:**



**And one of the oldest:**



### **Other historical settlements**

There are references in some documents to Roma presence in Hajderovići on the right margin of the Krivaja river, further away from Zavidovići than the abovementioned Plane settlement, but nothing concrete is known. In any case, no Roma live in Hajderovići today. To be exact, no Roma lives more than 5 km away of the urban center.

### **Final observations**

The history of Roma presence in the Zavidovići municipality would deserve some more study, especially considering that most of its sources are oral and that they risk to disappear

soon. The presentation this history in an accessible way – an exhibit, for instance – would allow to ground the perception that Roma presence in Zavidovići is not temporary but has going on for more than a century.

The above information shows that apparently Roma had a better life – crafts that were unique and profitable – and were better integrated – regular attendance to school and work in public firms – than nowadays. It maybe so and in that case further research would be beneficial to correct the image of the Roma as unable and unwilling to participate in the society. Nevertheless, we should approach this subject with caution, as that image can also be understood as a specific Romani way to Yugo-nostalgia. Indeed, this current is strong in the older Romani population and projects to (re)learn the old crafts that gave Roma pride and profits are immersed in this kind of feelings. Unfortunately, the economic sustainability of the this kind of projects is doubtful. The idea of building modern Roma identity on the image of the pre-industrial proud craftsman can also be questioned.

The pattern of separatedness of the Roma settlements should also be noted but not too hastily characterized as exclusion but probably as a mix of the later and of self-exclusion or a will to stand apart. Also, from a practical point of view and considering that Roma probably arrived first as two or three large households, it would be surprising that they settle in the middle of a village. That separation continued throughout history and even today, when Roma live practically all over town, the largest concentrations have historical reasons or were motivated by the 1992-1995 war. The nagging question concerns the problem of the all-Roma cemeteries. As we saw above, it is difficult to attribute their existence to a precise reason. As we said, it can be a simple matter of practical and historical reasons. But it can also be a matter of exclusion.

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