

# The importance of ethnic data for promoting the right to education

Zoë Gray

**R**oma people are the most marginalized and least integrated of recent migrant communities to Ireland. Frequently they have been stereotyped in the media as criminals and illegal immigrants (even though they are EU citizens). They fare poorly in all indicators of social and economic well-being including education. According to Sara Russell, Roma Officer at NGO Pavee Point:

*‘There are no formal statistics about how many Roma there are in Ireland or how many Roma there are in schools. The previous Census did not include Roma as an option and even if it did few Roma could complete it, as most are illiterate.’*

Previously, population estimates could be taken using asylum and work permit data, but as Romania – the country of origin for many of Ireland’s Roma – is now a member of the EU, this is no longer a source of information. ‘This lack of information about the numbers of children in school makes advocacy very difficult,’ Sara Russell said.

The experience of the Roma in Ireland is no exception. Lack of quantitative and qualitative data is a problem affecting minority and indigenous communities around the world. The information that is available frequently shows lower enrolment rates, higher drop-out rates, disproportionately higher disciplinary rates and lower achievements, with the situation usually even worse for minority girls. A clear picture about how different ethnic, religious and linguistic groups benefit or are disadvantaged by educational policies and projects is essential to raise awareness about problems and as a starting point to resolve them. UNESCO’s Education for All (EFA) *Global Monitoring Report 2009* projects that 29 million children will remain out of school in 2015 unless all disparities – gender, ethnic, rural and other – are tackled. Amongst the key recommendations the report calls for improved targeting to reduce disparities based on ethnicity and other indicators of disadvantage.

This chapter will consider the importance of collecting and analysing ethnically disaggregated data (quantitative and qualitative) as the basis for working towards achieving equal opportunities and results in education for all communities.

As discussed extensively elsewhere in this volume, states have a responsibility to ensure that education must be available, accessible, acceptable and adapt-

able, and a human rights obligation to ensure that education occurs without discrimination. According to the United Nations Committee on Economic Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR): ‘Educational data should be disaggregated by the prohibited grounds of discrimination.’ In the 2007 Ostravia case, *D.H. and others vs. the Czech Republic*, statistical data was collected to show the existence of discrimination in the disproportionate placement of Roma children, regardless of their abilities, in ‘special’ schools for children with learning disabilities. The judgment ruled that statistics can be helpful in determining discrimination.

## Using ethnically disaggregated data: a long way to go

Urban Jonsson, who formulated the idea of a rights-based approach for development, advocates that ethnic research is essential to address disparities in development and emphasizes that tackling inequalities of opportunities and of results is part and parcel of a rights-based approach to development. But despite the positive judgment in the Ostravia case above, and other small steps forward (discussed later in this chapter), there is still a long way to go before the use of ethnic data becomes standard.

The collection of ethnic data is infrequently prioritized, and the impact of this lack of information is grave. Minorities are not adequately targeted, they fall through the gaps, marginalized in mainstream development and education programmes, stuck in poverty. In the collection of information and development of indices of children’s well-being, geographic and income deprivation indicators are often used instead. In recent years there have been considerable advances in the disaggregation of data by gender, with increased usage and greater attention to developing better methodologies.

In December 2007 researchers from the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) called for attention to sub-populations or minorities when disaggregating information by gender. They said it is unusual for governments and other bodies to collect information by ethnicity – and as minority women often face additional barriers in education and development, information is required to help target minority women. As the case study on the USA included in this book argues, the need also applies to boys from minority communities.

But when ethnic data is collected, it is usually not done systematically and consistently to allow for comparisons to be made across gender, groups, countries and over time, and when it relates to education it tends to focus on attendance rather than achievements. Jonsson's comments notwithstanding, workshops on ethnic data are something of a rarity and child poverty or education seminars and conferences seldom treat the subject.

Furthermore, the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) do not adequately attend to such issues. Measurement does not require the use of ethnic statistics and little attention is paid to ethnic or minority or indigenous issues in overall assessments of progress. Occasionally countries such as Thailand use data on different regions in their country reports, acknowledging that the particular disadvantaged areas are populated mainly by minorities or indigenous peoples and as such should be targeted. Vietnam's fourth report shows disparities in enrolment rates for minorities, and particularly minority girls, but it does not provide specific information for the different ethnic groups. This failure to adequately attend to the situations of different excluded groups, and girls and boys from those groups, and to tackle structural inequalities is harmful to poverty reduction. To reach the poorest of the poor there must be an understanding of the barriers that minorities and indigenous peoples face. To do this, the MDGs must improve involvement of minority communities throughout programming, and add ethnic and other minority specific indicators such as language and religion targets across all countries. These should also be gathered from a gender-specific point of view.

The World Bank Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) are one of the key tools for development, setting out country goals regarding reducing poverty. They are intended to pay particular attention to participation of civil society in their formulation but they have been criticized for their failures to involve minority and indigenous groups adequately. According to the EFA report 2009, PRSPs are poor at attending to ethnic and religious issues (thus failing to use ethnic or religious indicators), stating that not one of the 18 second-generation PRSPs mentions education of religious minority groups. However, according to the report:

*'Kenya provides a rare illustration of an integrated approach to the needs of marginalized people with its*

*Pastoralist Thematic Group, which influenced the PRSP ... by developing a creative schooling programme for pastoralist children, strengthening community-based health care systems and preventive medicine, and improving food security through community-based early warning systems ... A target of increasing primary enrolment among pastoralists to 40 per cent was adopted.'*

Human rights bodies including the Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD) and the CESCR consistently request that governments provide ethnic information on population, on education and employment in their reports to the Committees. In the last few years the Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has also been asking state parties for data stratified by gender and ethnicity. But the data offered is frequently poor or states give reasons why they cannot or will not collect such data.

When CERD requested data from the government of Russia, the state's response was that it does not collect comparative statistical data, 'in order to prevent any discrimination on the basis of ethnicity'. In its 2008 Concluding Observations to the Government of Russia, CERD persisted in its request stating that: 'Without such data, it is very difficult to assess the socioeconomic status of the different ethnic groups in the State party and, on that basis, adopt special measures to address any inequalities in the enjoyment of those rights.'

### **Reluctance of governments to collect ethnic data**

Many states believe that recognizing ethnic, religious or linguistic differences will have a negative, disruptive and even destabilizing effect on a country. Efforts to deny the existence of minorities can stem from a desire to create a homogenized identity in order to maintain national unity (see Turkey in the Europe chapter, for example), and sometimes in a post-conflict environment. But the negative impact of this desire often means the same communities are consistently excluded, fuelling further tensions; and resources remain in the hands of specific ethnic, linguistic, religious or ideological groups.

According to a Rwanda government delegate at CEDAW in early 2009: 'The country of Rwanda does not have Pygmy children.' Batwa people

(termed 'Pygmy' by this delegate) have been historically marginalized, including in education in Rwanda. In Rwanda, where the 1994 genocide wiped out a third of the Batwa population, this refusal to recognize different identities is based on an argument that it will cause instability. But it also contributes to ongoing exclusion for Batwa children.

In countries and regions where there has been repeated ethnic or sectarian violence it is understandable that there is a reluctance to highlight ethnic and religious difference, but failing to formally recognize different ethnic groups and monitor their needs through data collection does not prevent resentments and differences arising. A general stereotype or perception of these differences will exist without data, and if unaddressed, these inequalities could provide fuel for community violence. Maurice Odhiambo Makoloo, director of the Institute for Law and Environmental Governance, a non-profit civil society organization based in Nairobi, outlines some of the benefits to states of disaggregating data:

*'Those who fear that publishing disaggregated data will lead to "unnecessary tension" need to understand that a certain amount of constructive tension within society is inevitable and prevents latent tensions building up which can explode into violence. If a government has no data about the position of different communities, it is extremely vulnerable to accusation, exaggeration and rumour, which it may find difficult to refute. Indeed, without accurate information political extremists can provide their own biased ethnic data to stir up trouble. The existence of authoritative data allows the government not only to refute exaggerated claims and ensure that political extremists manipulating ethnicity do not gain ground, but also to plan programmes so as to reach the poorest. Having transparency in the system allows this not only to be done, but be seen to be done. Such a strategy can avoid the development of unmanageable tensions in the long term.'*

In France, traditionally the European nation that stalwartly advocates a 'one size fits all' approach to human rights and development, it is illegal to include ethnic data in official statistics, or for the census to include questions about race or origin. Reporting on her 2007 mission to France, the Independent Expert on Minority Issues Gay McDougall stated that minorities expressed their discomfort at the rigid French identity, that they

felt: 'that acceptance will be granted only with total assimilation that forces them to reject major facets of their identities'. The country experienced race riots in 2005 and in 2007 sparked by poverty and exclusion.

In 2009, the government of France acknowledged the reality of discrimination within the country, giving credence to the view that diversity needs to be accepted and discrimination addressed, by launching a commission to investigate the use of ethnic data, including in the next census. According to media reports there has been uproar about the change in approach, reflecting concerns held by many other states that ethnic data will be divisive or the information used to disadvantage ethnic communities (such as past targeting of Jews under Nazi occupation.) However, the commission is rightly forging ahead, recognizing that the current situation is intolerable. Yazid Sabeg, who is responsible for setting up the commission, said that France is becoming like 'an apartheid state'. He said it was 'essential to measure how effective are official policies combating discrimination', adding that: 'It's no longer possible to say that here we say we're just one community and therefore there's no racism or discrimination. This isn't working any more.'

### **Challenges in collecting and using data about ethnic, religious and linguistic communities**

In some countries there are legal restrictions on data but usually laws don't prohibit collection and analysis of ethnic data used to identify discrimination and inequality. European data protection laws, for example, differentiate between the collection of individual personal data, which is strictly controlled, and anonymous aggregate data. Accordingly, statistical results are not personal data, because they are not linked to a person who is identifiable. There are also considerable methodological difficulties in attaining representative and accurate data where there is a small number of a minority group or groups in an area; creative approaches will need to be used, such as carrying out small targeted surveys, using boosters and combining a range of research approaches.

There are sensitive issues about methods – how to categorize different groups and how to collect the information? MRG holds that minorities are often among the poorest and most marginalized groups in society. They may lack access to political power and



**Left:** A biology class in Peje/Pec, western Kosovo, offers Roma teenagers the chance to catch up with the curriculum's science component so they can join their peers at the local school. *William Henley/OSCE.*

were enrolled in school and 7.7 per cent of boys. In 2005 the researchers aimed to establish the causes of under-performance of ethnic minority groups at secondary level and consider what could be done to improve the situation. Information that was already available showed high public exam failure and high drop-out rates among minorities. The researchers spent a month in six schools in the region looking at classroom participation, attendance and achievement levels. They used a range of methods, including surveys with teachers, interviews with parents, classroom observation and examination observation. Facing considerable obstacles, including poor school records, they found that a combination of factors negatively impacted the children's performance including language issues, lack of a culturally sensitive environment and socio-economic factors. The report was used to promote more culturally sensitive policies toward educating minorities. Although macro-level research is important to determine patterns of discrimination across a country, in order to obtain information which goes to the core of the matter so as to understand the problem fully, this kind of targeted research is also essential.

### **Involving civil society in data collection**

Involving civil society and different minority and indigenous groups throughout the process, from design through to collection, will help improve accuracy and consistency of data collection and analysis. The Heinrich Boll Foundation and other civil society organizations have been lobbying for improvement of a range of indicators in recent censuses in Cambodia. Language is used as a proxy indicator for ethnicity, and though usually this is not ideal, the group has successfully lobbied for the inclusion of a list of the Cambodian indigenous languages to be included in the most recent census. They are currently lobbying for indicators on education and literacy disaggregated by ethnicity and sex.

Below are some examples of minorities and civil society lobbying to improve ethnic data and conducting some of their own research. Their important contributions should not detract from the fact that governments have the main responsibility for

collecting and using information to benefit minorities and indigenous peoples.

### **Namibia**

According to the most recent census in Namibia (2001), almost twice as many San in Namibia were illiterate (84 per cent: 47 per cent) and almost half as many San of primary school age were enrolled in a school as compared to the Namibian average (34 per cent: 66 per cent). Kleofas Geingob, a member of the Hai//om, the largest San community, and Field Officer in Outjo region for the Working Group for Indigenous Minorities in Southern Africa (WIMSA), collected data for the census. According to Geingob, among other commentators, the data gives an overestimate and most of the San communities are illiterate. However, he said that the census was conducted in quite a positive way: 'Speaking to people in their own languages, people could reply freely.'

In recent years there have been some education and literacy programmes with some improvement but implementation is problematic. Geingob explained: 'A small number of San are being trained as teachers. However these programmes are operational only in some areas. There is still lack of teachers and a lack of awareness. Transport to the schools can be a problem.' But some effort is being made: 'Something commendable from the government is that if San can't afford to pay fees there is an exemption level.' WIMSA visits communities to assess why the San are dropping out and failing, and to help provide support to the communities by giving them information on the exemption rule; the group works directly with schools to persuade them of the need for change. 'When visiting the schools some of the principals are a bit cautious, they feel people should be treated equally. We explain our mission to the principal and explain how the San need and have a right to special attention. We brainstorm with the principal and this can help,' Geingob said.

### **Ireland**

Although the Traveller community in Ireland is now considered a 'cultural' group, they are not recognized by the government as a distinct ethnic or minority group. According to Colette Murray, Early Childhood Care and Education Coordinator at NGO Pavee Point: 'Historically there has been no

frequently have development policies imposed on them. The seeds for subsequent tensions are often sown by this lack of participation, while the potential for peaceful coexistence between different communities is thwarted by the denial of minority rights.

However, some communities may not wish to be classified primarily as minorities for various reasons. The word 'minority' is interpreted differently in different societies. In the former Soviet Union and former Yugoslavia, it can have a pejorative connotation, implying a lesser status than nationalities. In certain circumstances, it is preferable to refer to groups or communities, while in other situations reference to sects, peoples or ethnicities is preferred.

This is not something that can be dictated by a government or a researcher, and thus poses a problem in data collection. Furthermore, and understandably, minorities themselves can be mistrustful of data collection; in Hungary some Roma organizations oppose it because in the past ethnic data has been used to develop anti-minority policies. Minorities also often fear stigmatization or being designated as being lesser or backward, based on long-term prejudices against a group. As identi-

ties are fluid and a person from a minority may have a changing perspective of what it means to be a member of a particular community, this can make comparison over time difficult. These factors may contribute to the gross under-representation of minorities in official statistics.

Efforts to collect representative data to accurately portray the situation of minorities in Bangladesh are challenged by its demographic diversity. In Bangladesh 2 per cent of the population is made up of a large number of small ethnic groups. These include indigenous communities or Adivasis from hill regions, and Biharis from urban areas. Approximately 10 per cent of the population are religious minorities. Research from 1999 on the four most populous small ethnic groups that live in Chittagong Hill Tracts (CHT), data collected when the region was recovering from conflict, showed that the net enrolment rates for the Chakma, Marma, Mro and Tripuras were far behind the national estimate. The data showed considerable diversity between the ethnic groups and between girls' primary enrolment rates and boys'. For the worst-off group, the Mro, only 2.7 per cent girls



**Left:** A young boy plays in the early learning centre attached to Pavee Point Travellers' Centre, Dublin, Ireland. *Derek Speirs.*

and outcomes, there is some data but it isn't very good ... We have been fighting for disaggregated data for some years now.' Over the last few years a government-led Education Strategy was developed to improve the situation for Travellers. It involved consultations around the country and individual meetings with children carried out by Pavee Point. Although consensus wasn't reached on all the issues, the Education Strategy is considered relatively good; however implementation is a problem and there is no formal monitoring mechanism as yet. The government has now made a commitment to set up a Forum to govern implementation of the Strategy, and Pavee Point is lobbying to ensure the Forum has sufficient authority and capacity.

### **The importance of ethnic statistics to advance the Decade of Roma Inclusion**

There has been considerable effort in the last couple of years to advocate for disaggregated data within the Decade of Roma Inclusion as a means to determine the depth of exclusion and to determine progress in National Action Plans. The 2007 report monitoring the Decade highlighted the fact that 'Data collection is sparse, irregular and not nationally representative.'

A Working Group on Indicators was set up in 2008. It found a 'general lack of data and severe measurement problems', including missing variables in data when it is available, low self-identification rates and restrictive questionnaires not allowing for complex identities. The Working Group proposed that indicators should focus on access, results and success. For education the indicators should include enrolment rates; segregation, drop-out rates, special school incidences; length of stay, achievements and attainments. According to the Working Group, all regularly collected data needs to be disaggregated. However it recognizes that in the medium term more creative approaches to monitoring will need to be undertaken, such as dedicated mini-surveys or ethnicity supplements in existing surveys.

The Open Society Institute's Monitoring Education baselines from 2006 and 2008 show how enormous the gaps and inconsistencies are in information on Roma, and the gross disparities between

Roma and non-Roma throughout south-eastern Europe. Information was collated from official and unofficial sources and ranges were presented for numbers of Roma. The 2008 data-set provides estimates for the Roma population, numbers of Roma enrolled in, and who had completed, primary school, secondary school and tertiary education. According to the data-set, in Albania there are between 1,261 and 95,000 Roma in the population (official: unofficial sources), and only 48 per cent of the primary school age Roma population is in primary school – meaning that anywhere between 135 and 10,133 Roma children are enrolled in primary school.

One of the best sources of information on Roma is the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) vulnerable groups' survey of 2006. Key findings included that one in four Roma in the countries focused on were illiterate, and that three-quarters of Roma women did not complete primary education. It found that a quarter of Roma children were not attending school at all. Poverty, including poor housing, was a major cause of the Roma's poor education, the survey concluded, saying, '21 per cent of Roma households reported exposure to sanitation-related diseases to be the single greatest threat facing their families'. Other barriers to education were the lack of a role model in 'a well-educated household head', segregation in education; and attitudes towards education due to poor employment prospects. Specific barriers for girls include household duties, early marriage and attitudes towards girls' education.

### **Integrating ethnicity in Multiple Indicator Cluster surveys**

UNICEF has been working with governments around the world to address gaps in data collection on children and women. This has included developing nationally representative household surveys, known as Multiple Indicator Cluster surveys (MICs) which focus on a range of health and socio-economic indicators. Governments are given the option to include ethnicity, language and religion questions in the MICs but to date most have chosen not to, due to the concerns discussed above. However, between 2005 and 2006 (the most recent round of MICs), 17 countries collected data disaggregated by ethnicity, language and religion, based on membership of the head of household. These were Albania, Belize, Gambia, Georgia, Guinea-Bissau, Guyana,

engagement with education.' Travellers face discrimination and bullying in schools and have difficulty getting jobs; when they do get jobs they often have to hide their identity. According to the 2002 Census in Ireland 63.3 per cent of Traveller children dropped out of education before they were 15 years old compared to the national rate of 15.4 per cent. Travellers are under-represented in the data as they were fearful of identifying as Travellers, that somehow they would lose something or be targeted in a

negative way. Pavee Point carried out some outreach work to educate them on the importance of being included in the statistics. The most recent available data from 2006 shows a doubling in the number of Travellers in post-primary school between 2000 and 2006, but retention rates remained very poor (709 students were enrolled in first year and only 115 were enrolled in sixth year). Regarding disaggregated data in education monitoring, Colette said: 'There is a lack of information about absenteeism

Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Lao PDR, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Sierra Leone, Thailand, Togo, Uzbekistan and Vietnam.

The findings show wide disparities in education attendance at primary and secondary level in a number of countries. The survey asks about highest level of education, current school attendance and attendance during the previous school year, and the information can be used to estimate net attendance rates, survival rate to the last grade of primary school and transition rate to secondary school, among other indicators.

Although a very positive step towards incorporating ethnic, religious and linguistic groups in socio-economic research, there are some limitations in the questionnaires to date. Information on smaller communities' experiences, or those of groups that are not recognized within a given country, can be lost within the survey, often falling within the general category of 'other'. Additionally, like most data that is currently available on the education of minorities and indigenous peoples, the data does not focus on educational achievements except for literacy, and usually information on literacy is investigated for a sub-sample of the female population only.

Friedrich Huebler, of the UNICEF Division of Policy and Practice, has developed a relative parity index using the data-sets. This index is calculated by comparing the net attendance rate of the ethnic, religious or linguistic group with highest attendance with those with the lowest attendance. The further away from 1, the more unequal the situation. For example in Lao the relative parity index (RPI) of primary school attendance based on the language difference of household head is 0.59. Like the Human Development Index and the Gender Empowerment index, this index can be used to rank countries in order, to highlight good or bad practice and outcomes. It has the potential to be a very valuable advocacy tool, if used widely, to indicate the extent of equality or disparity within a country in a way that can easily be compared with other countries. But it is the disaggregated data that informs the index that will be most useful in understanding the problem, as it provides the information on specific groups and the reality of their exclusion.

### Conclusions and recommendations

The marginalization of minorities and indigenous peoples in education involves complex patterns of

entrenched, systematic and self-reinforcing discrimination (because the educational level of parents is a key determinant of that of their children). It is very difficult to successfully design interventions to tackle a complex issue like this without detailed, disaggregated and complete data. But even excellent data does not guarantee that the right interventions will be made, or even that any intervention will be made. The UK has some of the most complex and complete disaggregated statistical data, at least in the area of ethnicity (data on language and religion are not as complete). Schools are required to monitor children's performance by gender and ethnicity as well as by some indices of poverty, and these data are analysed and scrutinized at the level of the school, the local authority and nationally. Schools also have a statutory duty to monitor and report on racial incidents within schools. This data shows that UK black children have lower education achievements and are more likely to be disciplined or excluded (i.e. expelled). Each year the London Schools and the Black Child initiative organizes a conference with approximately 2,000 delegates, including black children, their parents and teachers, to give those present an opportunity to voice their concerns and to use the findings to influence policy. But speaking at the UN Forum in 2008, the founder of the initiative, Diane Abbott MP, said: 'Once the ... government agreed to look into the specific problem of Black and ethnic minority under-achievement, they refused to set targets for improvement. This effectively just leaves recommendations, reports and proposals but little action – or effective way of monitoring progress.'

Inequality in access to education will not end without solid ethnic data and analysis, and carefully designed and implemented targeted programming. Treating all people the same in development or education policies and programmes is akin to expecting economic growth to bring a 'trickle down' effect to the poorest and the most marginalized people in a society, regardless of the cause of their disadvantages. There are many reasons why minorities are not benefiting equally in their education; disaggregated data provides objective and comparative materials that can be used to design interventions that tackle the root causes of these problems.

If states are serious about respecting, protecting and fulfilling the human rights that they have voluntarily subscribed to, they must collect minority-

specific data in a consistent and sensitive manner to benefit minorities. The data should come from a range of sources – from censuses, from national socio-economic surveys and from education reporting that covers all aspects of the right to education: its availability, accessibility, acceptability and adaptability. This information should be made easily accessible to the public.

The World Bank, UN agencies, regional bodies such as the EU and ASEAN, and bilateral donor governments, as well as NGOs, need to place much greater weight on disaggregated data in education and development. They can do this by making ethnic indicators a requirement for monitoring poverty reduction and education programmes, in particular the MDGs and EFA goals, and by encouraging, supporting and pressurizing governments to collect this information and to make it available. As data collection on minorities and indigenous peoples involves many methodological challenges, emphasis needs to be placed on developing and sharing best-practice experiences.

Trust is paramount in data collection and analysis. Where groups have been historically disadvantaged, it is important that they are involved in the data collection, from design to use and publication of the information. All efforts to collect information should pay attention to the principle of self-identification, and should be conducted in a language and manner that is accessible to the different ethnic, religious and linguistic communities. Outreach programmes are necessary to sensitize people about the importance of self-identification, and how the information will or will not be used. Regular contact with members of the minority and indigenous groups and consultations with them on the specific issues that affect them is essential.

Methods of governance that deny cultural differences and fail to address inequalities across ethnicities or religions have repeatedly proven to be destabilizing. To promote peace and stability, governments and organizations involved in conflict prevention must attend to the rights of minorities and indigenous peoples, measuring the impacts of policies and programmes on different communities and developing programmes to promote de facto equality for all. ■