

ROMA COLLEGES FOR ADVANCED STUDIES NETWORK IN HUNGARY

Author:

Gábor Biczó (Ph.D., Prof., habil.)

E-mail address of the author:

[biczo.gabor@ped.unideb.hu](mailto:biczogabor@ped.unideb.hu)

Lectors:

Norbert Tóth

Debreceni Egyetem (Magyarország)

Katalin Mező (Ph.D.)

Debreceni Egyetem (Magyarország)

Biczó, Gábor (2021). Roma Colleges for Advanced Studies Network in Hungary. *Különleges Bánásmód*, 7. (1). 7-15. DOI [10.18458/KB.2021.1.7](https://doi.org/10.18458/KB.2021.1.7)

Abstract

Roma colleges for advanced studies network in Hungary is a unique chain of institutions for helping those students' integration into the system of higher education whose sociocultural background might be characterized by deprivation. Recent study analyses the history as well as the networking process of Roma colleges and the paper endeavours to interpret the features of collegiate students' dwelling-places. In the second part, the author deals with the significance of Roma collegiate students' fields of study related to the debate coursing on the integration policy of marginalized and peripheral local ethnic communities in Hungary.

Keywords: Roma students in higher education, ethnicity, social inclusion, integration, acculturation

Disciplines: social anthropology, anthropology of institutions

Absztrakt

MAGYARORSZÁGI ROMA SZAKKOLLÉGIUMI HÁLÓZAT

A magyarországi roma szakkollégiumi hálózat egy különleges láncolata azoknak az intézményeknek, amelyek célja, hogy a felsőoktatásba bekerülő deprivált szociokulturális háttérrel jellemezhető hallgatók egyetemi integrációját segítse. Jelen tanulmány röviden elemzi a roma szakkollégiumok létrejöttének történeti és hálózatosodási folyamatát, valamint vizsgálja a szakkollégisták lakóhelyi-környezeti jellemvonásait. A szöveg második részében a roma szakkollégisták szakos képzési területeinek jelentőségét a szerző abból a szempontból tanulmányozza, hogy a fiatal értelmiségiek szakmai tudása miként kapcsolódik ahhoz a vitához, ami a marginalizált és perifériális lokális etnikai közösségek integrációjával kapcsolatban zajlik Magyarországon.

Kulcsszavak: roma hallgatók a felsőoktatásban, etnikum, társadalmi befogadás, integráció, akkulturáció

Tudományterületek: szociálintropológia, intézmények antropológiája

Introduction

“The girls from Hodász told about the Roma College quite a lot. They told me how many help they got, there is the scholarship too, and there are programs for community building. [...] You can meet amazing people there, and I got closer to the teachers, that is a point too. There were teachers at the tutorial weekends and on exams towards whom in the beginning I had negative sentiments, because I told to myself, God bless me, they are tough. After he came in the college, and that was something else, I talked to him and he knows now who I am. That is absolutely great about this college, and if it wouldn't be, then supposedly, I wouldn't be a student at University of Debrecen.” (Biczó–Szabó 2018)

This confession was told by a young Roma student who lives with his parents in a local Vlachos-Roma community located in North East part of Hungary, where abiding by the traditions they speak a special dialect of Romani language (cerhari). Stepping out from their local environment the students who have gypsy lineage, have difficulties concerning the proper orientation in the strange world of higher education. Recently the systematic support of Roma students in order to avoid their dropping out of the education is an exceptional challenge.

In the last decade, the Roma colleges for advanced studies network have yielded significant results so much as more than four hundred graduations. This group of young intellectuals can help efficiently to induce a turn in the prejudiced way of thinking that is so typical in Hungary as well as all over Europe concerning Roma minorities. In other words, the discrimination that is affected generally the Roma people can be lessened by the social activity of this genuine intelligentsia.

Research methods and tools

This study is based on long-term research that has been conducted in 2020 and involved all the

Roma collegiate students in Hungary. In terms of completeness, all the present 326 students from 11 Roma Colleges have been investigated through thematic questionnaires. The so-called Human Register 2020 database contains pretty near 14 thousand items that is the result of the most extensive research in this topic. In addition, concerning the conclusions of the study, the author can rely on the interviews and observations those have recorded in 32 different local multi-ethnic communities in the peripheral regions. Actually, these research spots are located in the areas from where the Roma collegiate students arrived at the universities. If anybody would like to understand the significance of this unexampled chain of institutions for helping Roma students, first should gain insight into the general ethno-demographic processes of contemporary Hungary.

Ethno-demographic processes and collegiate students' geographical and sociocultural background

One of the most crucial discoveries was in the field of applied social sciences in Hungary after the political turn in 1990, that the tendencies of population are divergent comparing the minority Roma and majority Hungarian communities. There lies behind this difference the fertility rate of Roma and Hungarian women. In 90s Roma women's fertility rate was 3,12 meanwhile that decreased up to the millennium 2,9 and the recent figure is estimated 2,7. (Polónyi 2011) The current (2018) average fertility rate for Hungary is 1,55 that includes also the Roma women. As it is well-known fact, for stabilizing a country population the minimum required fertility rate cannot be lower than 2,1. In many respect, the demographic tendencies mirror unfavorable social processes related to the spatial/geographical location of Roma minority groups, because it becomes gradually more concentrated in certain parts of the

country. Many in the literature on ethno-demographic processes in Hungary forecast a dark future concerning the peripheral regions.

The mostly undereducated, partly unemployed Roma people are not going to be able to integrate into the society except for getting more efficiently supported. The contemporary ethno-demographic tendencies can be observed excellently by comparing the two maps below. The available data from the mid-'80s show the geographical regions where the proportion of Roma population is higher than the average country rate (Figure 1.). There is northern and north-eastern rim alongside the borderline that covers the poorest and most underdeveloped regions in the country.

The ethno-geographical relations and the concerning proportions for the townships are quite a similar in the south-western part of Hungary. A new research was conducted by the University of Debrecen in 2018 which reveals similar geographical location of Roma population in Hungary as it was in 1984, but the new statistical

figures of average regional population growth of ethnic minority groups are surprisingly intensive in the last four decades. Moreover, it can be also observed on the map that how many townships have reached and stepped over the number of Roma population the line of 25% (Figure.2.)

Due to the contemporary ethno-demographic tendencies in the strongly touched townships, there can be detected a lot of smaller villages where only Roma people live. As far as the shortly detailed processes show, Hungary has to face an unavoidable challenge concerning the social integration and inclusion of ethnic Roma citizens of the country. Recently all over the spheres of social policy, experts are talking about the necessity of immediate intervention. In addition, the age distribution of the Roma community significantly diverged comparing to the majority. In other words, more than 50% of Roma people are younger than 19 years, and that fact shows the important role of education system in the social integration.

Figure 1. *Proportions of Roma people in townships based on statistical survey conducted by CIKOBÍ in 1984-1985* (Source: Kertesi – Kézdi 1998)

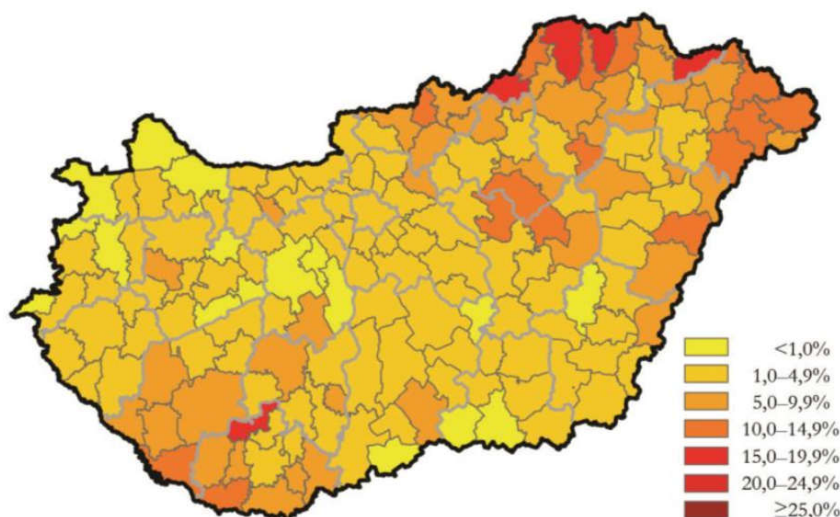
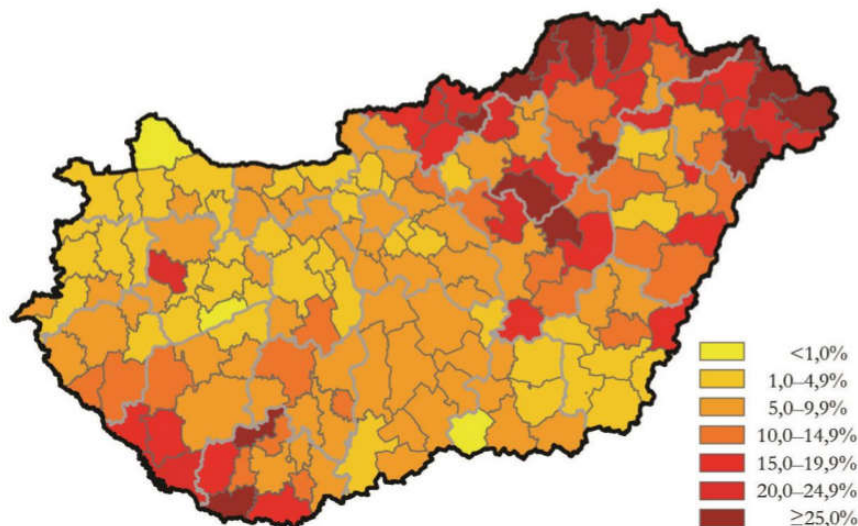


Figure 2. *Proportions of Roma people in townships based on statistical survey conducted by University of Debrecen in 2010-2013.* (Source: Péntzes et al. 2018)



Moreover, the age composition of the majority generates less favourable tendencies also in the schooling, i.e. from the infantries to the secondary schools, at every level of education system gradually decreases the proportion of Hungarian pupils. There are many settlements where the kindergartens and primary schools have become spontaneously segregated as a consequence of ethno-demographic trends. Behind the phenomena there lies a logical explanation, Hungarian parents do not allow their kids to attend kindergartens and schools where Roma children's proportion is higher. According to the available results, there are many counties in Hungary where the proportion of Roma pupils in the primary schools is about one-third of the schoolchildren. The figures were in Nógrád county 34,3%, in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county 32,8%, in Szabolcs-Szatmár-Bereg county 28,7% in 2011 (Papp Z. 2011) The remarkable statistics draws our attention to another context, namely the danger of uneducation in the schools mostly attended by Roma children. As it is well-

known fact, the early dropping out extremely threatening in those schools where the school community includes mostly disadvantaged children with uncertain socio-cultural background.

A crucial consideration in the integration issue of disadvantaged Roma children in the marginalized and pauperized regions of Hungary is the willingness for partaking of the new generation of intellectuals who are involved in Roma colleges for advanced studies network.

The short history of Roma colleges for advanced studies network in Hungary

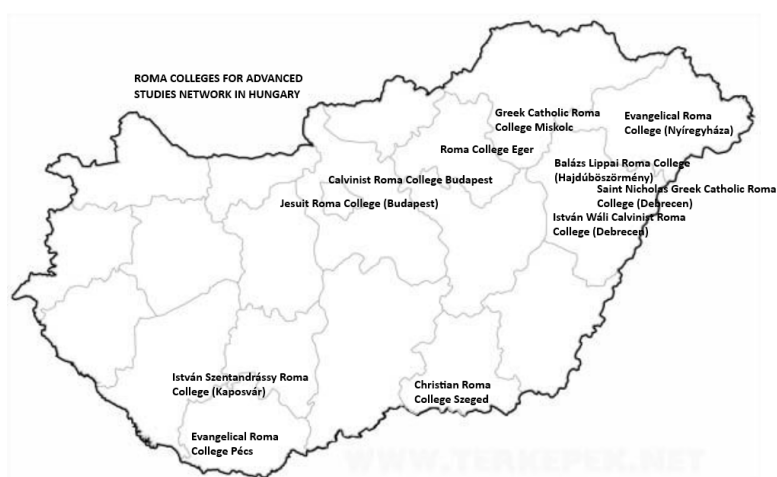
The history of the Roma college network goes back to the last century. The first wave of colleges at Hungarian universities had been organized for the talented youth of peasantry in the 1930s. According to the original idea, from countryside into the boarding school gathered young adults could get financial support for their studies and dwellings ensured by the state. In this way, their

disadvantageous situation hoped to be compensated, and after graduation, lots of them were employed in their residential district. (Kiss-Papp 2008) This early form of college system influenced the implementation of a talent support network at the Hungarian universities after the political turn in 1990. The first Roma colleges have been organized in the 1990s, and these early institutions tried to support disadvantaged students both financially and spiritually. The recent network of Roma colleges in Hungary includes 11 institutions (Figure 3.). According to their history, all Roma colleges have a very own institutional traditions, which means their particular features are quite different. The earliest founded college of recent network was established at the University of Pécs in 2001, and it was operated under the professional control of the Department of Romology. (In 2018, the Lutheran Church has founded a new Roma College in Pécs) This stronghold of contemporary romology researches in Hungary organized the Henrik Wlislöcki Roma

College, and all the professional staff, scientists, teachers, and activists that came together around the institution had a priceless pioneer role concerning the acceptance of conception. Initiating by the traditional churches a second wave of the foundation started in 2011. The Calvinist, Catholic, Evangelical, and Greek Catholic churches founded four new Roma colleges in order to foster the social integration of disadvantaged Roma students. Moreover, the founders emphasized their mutual commitment to make effort to networking. According to the rules, all the churches founded colleges entered in a contract with a university to ensure recruiting their membership. In this second wave of foundation, the church leaders' crucial role was inevitable and their efforts produced the first – Christian – form of Roma College network.

In the frame of the third wave, further four colleges have been established, but three of them were founded by universities – Debrecen, Eger, Kaposvár – and only one by the Catholic Church (Szeged) in 2012.

Figure 3. Location of Roma Colleges. (Source: Author)



Last but not least, the second Greek Catholic Roma College has been established in Debrecen in 2015, and the evolution of contemporary network of Roma colleges has ended.

On the map above, two striking features can be observed concerning the geographical location of Roma colleges. First, comparing the formerly analysed ethno-demographic maps with the location of Roma colleges one might detect how accurately overlap the regions where the proportion of Roma people is much higher. In contrast, there is a significant phenomenon that is the lack of Roma colleges in those regions – especially in Transdanubia – where the number of Roma ethnic minority people is lower than the average country rate.

Nevertheless, the establishment of a Roma college requires to fulfill strictly regulated preliminary demands. The most important precondition concerns the prescription of ethnic proportion at the membership. According to the rules that is generally expected threshold criteria for the colleges to reach at least 60% Roma collegiate students and 20% disadvantaged students in their membership. This regulation shed a light on the policy makers' intention in order to ensure an integrated community environment in the Roma colleges. As the recent figures show, the Roma students proportion is close to 80% in most colleges.

That is also a crucial requirement for the Roma colleges to implement their own operational program. These programs planned for three years period including those activities, which can help the students to avoid dropping out of higher education. Moreover, in the number of the operational program of required elements help the students to preserve their culture as well as ethnic identity.

With this end in view, the concept of Roma colleges, the operational programs serve the promotion of structural integration. In other

words, these special institutions follow the principles of cultural pluralism, and their core idea to be supportive cannot be perceived as assimilative pressure. On the contrary, the operational programs emphasize the importance of relearning the elements of Roma cultural heritage, as the study of Romani language and Roma folklore marks the purpose: be integrated but not assimilated.

Collegiate students' fields of study

Studying the recent membership of Roma colleges that is striking to observe how diversified are the fields of learning. Due to our research applied overall questionnaire method, the collected data make reveal the collegiate students' specialties. In order to comprehend the significance of Roma college network concerning its efficacy for sociocultural integration, let have a look at the collegiate students' fields of learning.

According to the data, the investigated 326 collegiate students are studying on 122 major branches, but the field of teacher and pedagogical studies – including nurse, kindergarten teacher, schoolteacher – are more salient comparing to other fields. The ratio at 30,5% is three times higher than any other fields of learning. Another remarkable feature of membership is the level of university studies, and from this viewpoint, the BA is overrepresented by the ratio at 63,5%. At the time of our research, the MA students proportion was hardly more than 10%, and this statistical figure is surprisingly low due to the intensive fluctuation of collegiate students. The background of rapid fluctuation can be explained by the students' decision not to continue further education after graduation.

Another significant factor represents the Roma collegiate students' place of study, that is the universities where they study. The ratio at 46,5% of collegiate students have come from three

universities located in the North and North East part of Hungary: University of Debrecen 28%, University of Nyíregyháza 10%, University of Miskolc 8,5%. These statistical figures raise our attention to the fact how important is the attainability of universities for disadvantaged population, since the universities where the Roma collegiate students are concentrated might be identified close to the regions of a high proportion of Roma communities. That means an increasing number of Roma population is getting better educated in those regions. Moreover, according to their professions, many fresh Roma intellectuals are becoming competent to take an active role in promoting socio-cultural integration. In other words, the teachers, nurses, kindergarten teachers are the most wanted qualifications in those disadvantaged regions from there most of the college students have arrived into higher education. In the Roma colleges for advanced studies network graduated students are able to become active promoters for integration in their neighbourhood. They can be activists not only by their professions but the collegiate students' sociocultural competence concerning the closer residence particular features. In international literature, especially in applied anthropology these types of "experts" used to call *halfies*. The term refers in our context to the student's complex ability: they are educated in key sectors of social integration and simultaneously they have factual knowledge about his/her own community where the development or crisis management appears as a challenge.

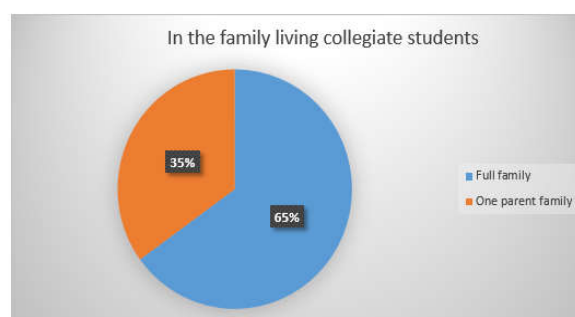
Family background

Our research, which was carried out in 2020, also targeted the investigation of the collegiate students' family background that is a determinative key aspect concerning their carriers in higher education. According to the available data, the ratio of students who live at home with their own family

is 76%, which means a quite high proportion comparing to the statistics concerning the full population of Hungary. Apart from the fact, these families dwell mostly in deprived settlements, however, the collegiate students' family background can be characterized mostly steady.

From the Figure 4 it is discernible that almost two-thirds of the students live in full families. This favourable socio-cultural characteristic contributes to reaching success in the higher education. There is another highly influential aspect of the collegiate students' learning abilities as well as their motivation, namely how educated are their parents. If we compare the available data concerning the fathers' and mothers' qualifications, then the students' learning efficiency and their studies in higher education can be thrown new light upon it.

Figure 4. Family background. (Source: Author)



From the data (Figure 5) we can conclude, as well as from researches were conducted in local Roma communities we could detect that concerning the collegiate students' parents, they are undereducated or they are low educated people. In this relation, the parents' labour market status is more crucial. This aspect can shed a light on how regular the monthly income is in the households and how this factor contributes to fulfilling the financing requirements of studies in higher education (Figure 5.).

Figure 5. Parents' school qualification. (Source: Author)

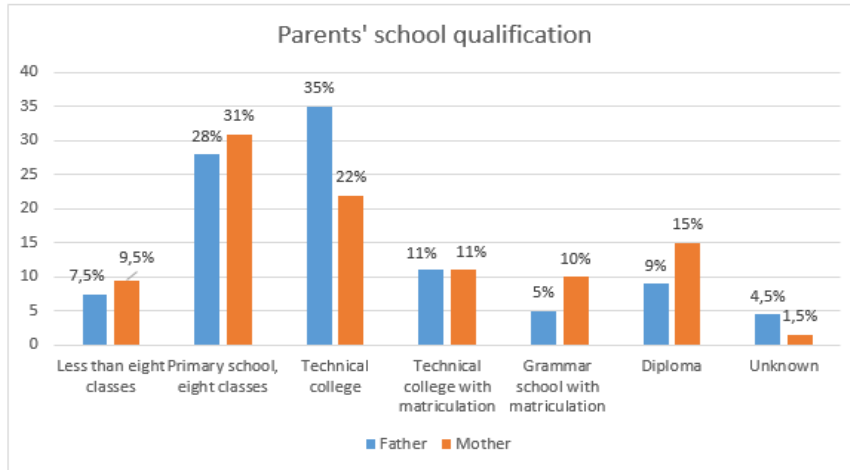
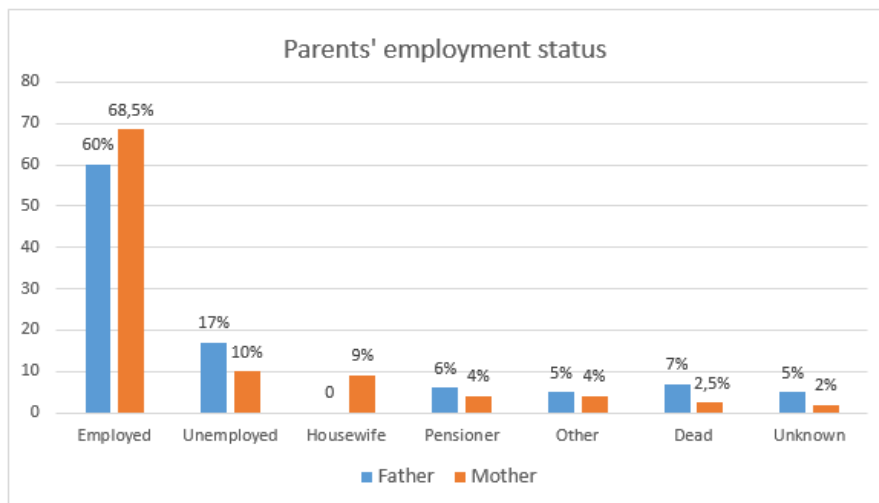


Figure 6. Parents' employment status. (Source: Author)



According to the Figure 6, we might come aware of the situation that the ratio in the case of employed parents is quite high. In these families, the regular monthly income is ensured but we have to face the fact that one-third of collegiate students live in families where the economic background of households is quite weak.

Conclusions

In this short analysis, we treated to interpret a special chain of institutions in Hungarian higher education. Roma colleges of advanced studies network helps for students who arrive from a disadvantaged environment to the higher education. According to the research conducted in 2020, most of the students in the network are ethnic Roma people who live in a peripheral

settlement where the proportion of the Roma population is higher than the average country ratio. As we have seen, the collegiate students' learning fields can be useful concerning the integration issue. That means they can help both by his/her profession as well as on the basis of their sociocultural knowledge to deepen the process of social integration of Roma population in Hungary.

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