

Roma rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina:

To what extent are non-state actors effective in promoting the rights of the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina?

Comment [1]: The Engagement Activity should consist of three parts: introduction, main part and conclusion. The introduction is usually three paragraphs, and you should include: introducing the issue under investigation, personal interest and description of the engagement activities. The main part is usually nine paragraphs, and you should have three sets of arguments. Each set of argument should consist of argument, different perspective and evaluation of different perspective. The conclusion is one paragraph, and you should do a brief summary of the arguments and the different perspectives.

Word count: 1850

While learning about human rights which are considered to be indivisible rights that all human beings are entitled to by virtue of their humanity without any discrimination, I kept thinking about how this definition cannot be applied to the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.¹ Roma people have been living in the Balkans for more than 600 years but have never been able to integrate into the society and even though they were recognized as the largest minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina after World War 2, their poor conditions of life have not improved. UNICEF reported that 69 percent of Roma families earn below 200 Bosnian marks (102 euros) per month with the national average monthly income being 700 Bosnian marks (357 euros).² The European Convention on Human Rights, a binding legal text which Bosnia and Herzegovina has signed and is committed to act in accordance with states in both Article 1 and 14, that “the enjoyment of the rights” is “secured without discrimination” on any association with a national minority” status.³ These rights are universal, not dependent on any aspects of identity.⁴ Since the state has failed to take any concrete actions in order to fulfil these laws, many non-state actors have a leading role in promoting Roma rights. Therefore, my engagement activity would explore to what extent are non-state actors effective in promoting the rights of the Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The reason why I wanted to explore this topic is because the Roma community is large in my town, but there has always been an invisible wall between them and the rest of the community. I was able to witness their everyday struggles so I started to wonder about the lack of provisions that can help them. My interest grew, even more, when I found out about my Roma ancestral

Comment [2]: Link to the course content!

Comment [3]: The issue under investigation is introduced.

Comment [4]: Once the issue is introduced, information from secondary sources is used to support the claim i.e the use of statistics is the best way to illustrate that there is a problem.

Comment [5]: Link to the course content!

Comment [6]: The main actor under investigation is introduced to the Engagement Activity!

Comment [7]: Personal interest! Personal interest should go beyond "I have always been interested in this topic" or "We mentioned this issue in class". You need to provide a personal connection to the issue. If one area from the state is chosen, then you need to provide a brief explanation as to why this particular area is under investigation. The reason should not be "because I come from this area", but rather a specific reason that can be supported with secondary sources. For example, this is an area with the largest number of refugees, or this is an area with the largest number of human rights violations against women.

¹ Murphy, Robert, and Charles Gleek. “Human Rights.” Essay. In Global Politics, 30–30. Pearson Education, 2016.

² Yee, Hoi Mun. “Bosnia's Roma Try to Break out of Isolation.” Balkan Insight, May 18, 2018. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/06/14/bosnia-s-roma-try-to-break-out-of-isolation-06-13-2017-2/>.

³ European Court of Human Rights. “European Convention on Human Rights”. Council of Europe. Accessed February 23, 2022. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf.

⁴ Murphy, Robert, and Charles Gleek. “Human Rights.” Essay. In Global Politics, 30–30. Pearson Education, 2016.

roots through my paternal grandmother and heard about the difficulties my ancestors had as members of this minority.

To investigate this matter, I conducted three interviews and did an internship in a local NGO.

The first interview was with Ms. Bojana Jovanović, a program director in the NGO Otaharin which is the leading citizens' association for the promotion of Roma rights. This interview

helped me to understand the significance of NGOs in the promotion of Roma rights by providing

educational support for Roma children ages 6-11. By assisting them in school work as part of my

internship, I was able to see that Roma children are lagging behind in school work due to a lack

of opportunities. The second interview was with Ferdinand Koenig, head of Communications &

Spokesperson in The Delegation of European Union in Bosnia and Herzegovina. I got an insight

into the EU's domain of work by financially stimulating the state and cooperating with NGOs.

This allowed me to see the restricted domain of IGOs in the promotion of Roma rights due to the

lack of the state's reactive measures. My third interview was with Nedžad Jusić, the Roma

representative in the Council for national minorities in the Parliament of Federation of Bosnia

and Herzegovina. I learned about the main factors impacting the poor situation for the Roma

community as Mrs. Jusić told his own story. This interview helped me understand the lack of

effectiveness of governmental institutions due to a lack of cooperation with non-state actors.

From interviewing IGOs and NGOs, I learned about different challenges non-state actors face in

an attempt to promote Roma rights. While IGOs are effective in cooperation with the state and

can provide financial support, the NGOs are more effective in providing everyday help while

working on the ground and monitoring the life quality of a Roma community.

The main problem contributing to the current situation of the Roma community in Bosnia and

Comment [8]: The engagement activities should be 'active' and NOT 'passive'. Active engagements are those where you can interact with particular actors and ask questions and receive answers. Examples of active engagements are: interviews, internship, participation in protests and etc. Engagements that are not accepted are: simulations, observation of meetings and etc. You should have three engagement activities with different actors in order to get different perspectives on the issue. For example, perspectives from the NGO sector (national vs international), state, experts in the field and etc.

Comment [9]: Always mentioned the name of the person and their position.

Comment [10]: You must state what you learned from this engagement activity. Provide one specific learning outcome, for example "providing educational support for Roma children ages 6-11". Do not provide all the details and insights from this engagement, but mention one that you think that is the most important one.

Comment [11]: After every engagement activity make sure you mentioned what you "learned" from this particular engagement and in what way has 'helped you understand' the issue better.

Comment [12]: After you state the engagement activities, in the last sentence of the paragraph make a comparison between the actors. In what way are they similar or different in what they are doing when it comes to the issue under investigation.

Comment [13]: Provide three sets of arguments. Each set should consist of argument, different perspective and evaluation of different perspective. When making argument/different perspective/evaluation you can use the insights from the engagement activities or information from secondary sources as a base for the claims.

Herzegovina is the low level of education.⁵ According to Civil Rights Defenders research from 2018, 69.3% of Roma children attended elementary school, while only 22.6% were enrolled in secondary education.⁶ According to Mr. Jusić, education is crucial since only those who are educated can not only know their rights but can also create future prospects for job opportunities and income-earning. Mrs. Jovanović explained the NGO Otaharin was initially established to provide access to education for Roma children by recruiting volunteers to help Roma children with their schoolwork. As a member of this volunteer group, I assisted the Roma children in their homework and played interactive games with them. This care centre serves as necessary supplemental support and motivation for Roma children in their education and their path to integration. Integration refers to incorporation as equals into society or an organization of individuals of different groups. By creating a basis for integration into the society through educational support, NGOs are effectively promoting Roma rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina. However, even though NGOs provide educational services, they only reach a limited number of Roma children. Low levels of education are still present with only 47% of Roma children who are old enough, enrolling in the first grade.⁷ According to Mrs. Jovanović, most children leave school due to dysfunctional family relationships and discrimination in school. Otaharin urges the state to react whenever they receive reports from parents, children or when teachers in the care centre notice child is not going to school. NGOs are not effective because their domain is restricted to addressing and reporting human rights violations and cannot take concrete actions. This shows the lack of action by the government is restricting NGOs and leaving the children out of school. Consequently, a small number of Roma children finish elementary education. Most of

Comment [14]: Synthesis! Always support your insights from the engagement with insights from secondary sources. This will allow for synthesis of information. Make sure that everything is properly referenced!

Comment [15]: The argument is based on synthesis from two engagement activities and information based on secondary research.

Comment [16]: Different perspective! There is synthesis from secondary research and insight from the engagement.

Comment [17]: Addressing the research question by providing own analytical insight.

⁵ Jusić, Nedžad. Interview with the Roma representative in the Council for national minorities in the Parliament of FBiH. Personal, August 16, 2021.

⁶ Rep. The Wall of Anti Gypsyism-Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Civil Rights Defenders, 2018.

⁷ "Roma Children." UNICEF. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/bih/en/node/516>.

them have no qualification which raises a stigma around the community and leaves them without a possibility to get a job. As a result, 90% of Roma community in Bosnia and Herzegovina live in poverty.⁸ Poverty is a state in which a person or community lacks the financial resources for a minimum standard of living.⁹ Patterns like this have been the same for years, creating the issue of intergenerationally transmitted poverty. This when poverty is transmitted from one generation to another, with poor parents having poor children.¹⁰ Roma people are stuck in this poverty trap, a mechanism that happens when an economic system requires a significant amount of capital in order to earn enough to escape poverty.¹¹ When individuals lack this capital, they find it difficult to acquire it, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of poverty.¹² This shows that a low level of education is preventing the integration of the Roma community and continuing the transgenerational poverty cycle.

Nevertheless, NGOs still have a significant impact on the everyday lives of the Roma community as they are the only actors that act through full engagement into local Roma communities while establishing personal relationships with them. This includes monitoring of family relationships, financial support, and children's presence in schools. NGOs are completely devoted to the families they work with while helping them overcome social and financial barriers.

According to Amnesty International, discrimination occurs when a person is unable to enjoy their human rights or other legal rights on an equal basis with others because of an unjustified

Comment [18]: Link to course content. Reference is provided.

Comment [19]: Link to course content. Reference is provided.

Comment [20]: Link to course content. Reference is provided.

Comment [21]: Evaluation of the different perspective.

Comment [22]: Second set of arguments! It starts with an argument. The base for this argument is information from secondary research which is further supported by insights from the interview.

⁸ Jovanovic, Bojana. Interview with Otaharin. Personal, July 26, 2021.

⁹ Chen, James. "Poverty." Investopedia. Investopedia, January 24, 2022. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty.asp>.

¹⁰ "Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty." Chronic Poverty, July 30, 2009. <https://www.chronicpoverty.org/page/igt>.

¹¹ Chen, James. "Poverty Trap Definition." Investopedia. Investopedia, May 19, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty-trap.asp>.

¹² Chen, James. "Poverty Trap Definition." Investopedia. Investopedia, May 19, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty-trap.asp>.

distinction made in policy, law, or treatment.¹³ During my interview with Otaharin, I found out that discrimination is one of the biggest obstacles NGOs have in helping the Roma community become equal members of society. Equality is the idea that people are treated without discrimination, and are allowed to enjoy the same opportunities.¹⁴ In one research conducted by The Faculty of Political Sciences in Sarajevo, 70% of the sample believes Roma people are dirty, thieves, beggars, and stupid.¹⁵ Due to these stereotypes, the Roma minority is faced with inequality, not allowing them to integrate into society. Therefore, there have been several projects with different companies that would get financial support if they hire Roma workers. One example is a social company “Agroplan d.o.o” established in cooperation with Otaharin, which supports Roma women who want to be financially independent of their male relatives.¹⁶ By doing this, NGOs are introducing Roma to the rest of the community as equals ready to cooperate and work, decreasing stereotypes that claim Roma people are unqualified thieves. In order to fight discrimination and create equal opportunities, the EU is influencing and financially supporting policy-making. Since 2007, Bosnia and Herzegovina have received 7.5 million euros from the EU for Roma integration.¹⁷ One of the most recent programs is “ROMACTED” which aims to assist the local authorities in integrating Roma-specific measures into local policies and “Roma Integration 2020” which aims to reduce the socio-economic gap between the Roma and non-Roma population in the Western Balkans through enforcement of specific socio-economic measures.¹⁸ Through financial support and policy-making, the EU is providing resources that serve as a basis for a path to equality and Roma integration into the society.

Comment [23]: Link to course content. Reference is provided.

Comment [24]: Examples for the arguments and different perspectives can be in form of statistics from secondary research or from the engagement activities. Here, the example is from the engagement.

¹³ “Discrimination.” Amnesty International, June 1, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/>.

¹⁴ Murphy, Robert, and Charles Gleek. “Human Rights.” Essay. In *Global Politics*, 33–33. Pearson Education, 2016.

¹⁵ Karaman, Lana. *Uzroci i posljedice diskriminacije Roma*, November 2018, 47–47.

<https://doi.org/https://fpn.unsa.ba/b/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MAGISTARSKI-RAD-LANA.pdf>.

¹⁶ Jovanovic, Bojana. Interview with Otaharin. Personal, July 26, 2021.

¹⁷ Koenig, Ferdinand. Interview with a member of the Delegation of the EU in BiH. Personal, August 9, 2021.

¹⁸ Koenig, Ferdinand. Interview with a member of the Delegation of the EU in BiH. Personal, August 9, 2021.

Despite these efforts, states can choose to ignore or delay the implementation of policies and programs. The EU has the economic power to support projects but is not putting enough pressure on the state to fulfil these goals. As explained in the realist theory, the state is the principal actor and the EU's power is limited when a state chooses not to take concrete actions. In terms of NGOs, they do not always have enough resources to organize projects for Roma integration independently and request the state to assist them which is often not the case.¹⁹ This illustrates that the effectiveness of non-state actors in the promotion of Roma rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very dependent on the state's cooperative nature because only when the state acts in accordance with NGOs and IGOs actions there can be a long-term change. The cooperation between non-state and state actors is crucial in the promotion of Roma rights making the non-state actors effective only to an extent the state allows.

Still, the state's decision not to cooperate with non-state actors brings consequences that can influence the state to change its behavior. NGOs monitor state's behavior and prepare annual reports to the EU.²⁰ If NGOs report the state didn't achieve the set goals, the EU can choose to withdraw their resources for any program.²¹ This influences the state to moderate its behavior and cooperate with the non-state actors in order to preserve the financial support it receives from the EU.

Overall, this engagement activity showed that the issue of Roma rights in Bosnia and Herzegovina is very complex due to the low levels of education and constant discrimination resulting in a transgenerational cycle of poverty. Regardless of this, NGOs and IGOs are taking concrete actions and working hard to promote Roma rights. By providing educational services,

Comment [25]: Different perspective!

Comment [26]: Link to course content!

Comment [27]: Link to course content!
Reference is missing!

Comment [28]: Addressing the research question by providing own analytical insight.

Comment [29]: Evaluation of the different perspective!

Comment [30]: Conclusion! In the conclusion make reference to both arguments and different perspectives. A brief summary of the two perspectives.

¹⁹ Jovanovic, Bojana. Interview with Otaharin. Personal, July 26, 2021.

²⁰ Jovanovic, Bojana. Interview with Otaharin. Personal, July 26, 2021.

²¹

employment strategies and financial support, they are changing the negative image the society has of this community. In this way, non-state actors are positively impacting lives of Roma people in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In order to overcome one of the main obstacles, which is the lack of cooperation from the state, non-state actors are working together through the processes of monitoring and reporting the state's behavior. Therefore, it can be concluded that non-state actors are effective to the most extent in the promotion of Roma rights.

Bibliography:

1. Chen, James. "Poverty Trap Definition." Investopedia. Investopedia, May 19, 2021. <https://www.investopedia.com/terms/p/poverty-trap.asp>
2. "Discrimination." Amnesty International, June 1, 2021. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/what-we-do/discrimination/>.
3. European Court of Human Rights. "European Convention on Human Rights". Council of Europe. Accessed February 23, 2022. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/convention_eng.pdf.
4. "Intergenerational Transmission of Poverty." Chronic Poverty, July 30, 2009. <https://www.chronicpoverty.org/page/igt>.
5. Jovanovic, Bojana. Interview with Otaharin. Personal, July 26, 2021.
6. Jusić, Nedžad. Interview with the Roma representative in the Council for national minorities in the Parliament of FBiH. Personal, August 16, 2021.
7. Karaman, Lana. *Uzroci i posljedice diskriminacije Roma*, November 2018, 47–47. <https://doi.org/https://fpn.unsa.ba/b/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/MAGISTARSKI-RAD-LANA.pdf>.
8. Koenig, Ferdinand. Interview with a member of the Delegation of the EU in BiH. Personal, August 9, 2021.
9. Murphy, Robert, and Charles Gleek. "Human Rights." Essay. In *Global Politics*, Pearson Education, 2016.
10. Rep. The Wall of Anti Gypsyism-Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Civil Rights Defenders, 2018.
11. "Roma Children." UNICEF. Accessed February 9, 2022. <https://www.unicef.org/bih/en/node/516>.
12. Yee, Hoi Mun. "Bosnia's Roma Try to Break out of Isolation." *Balkan Insight*, May 18, 2018. <https://balkaninsight.com/2017/06/14/bosnia-s-roma-try-to-break-out-of-isolation-06-13-2017-2/>.