

# ARE YOU READY TO LISTEN?

Ever wondered how life unfolds for Roma children in the marginalized neighborhoods of Bucharest? They are ready to tell their stories.

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## OUR MISSION

**Cu Alte Cuvinte** is a Romanian NGO that aims to promote diversity in children's literature, with a focus on Roma culture.

In Romania, literature, cartoons, history books, and cultural and knowledge production in general have not valued the cultural diversity of the country and have not embraced Romani characters, stories, and tales. Romani children have not been able to identify with any past or modern hero who shares their looks or their background.

Characters and tales that reflect real world diversity have the power to steer children and teenagers towards acceptance, diversity, and inclusion. Romani characters and stories can not only boost Romani children's pride and trust in their aspirations but can also contribute to building unbiased social interactions between Romani and non-Romani children.

## RESSOURCES



### ROMA INCLUSION POLICIES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Half of Roma children don't participate in early childhood education while almost all other children do....

[| ARTICLES](#)


### AGAINST PREJUDICE: ROMANI HEROES IN LITERATURE

Like teenagers anywhere, Roma teenagers in Romania alternate between being excited and melancholic; they fall in love...

[| ARTICLES](#)


### WHY SHOULD WE CARE ABOUT DIVERSE CHILDREN LITERATURE?

Children's literature is a source of knowledge and entertainment for children, and for adults, especially those ones who surround children....

[| BOOK REVIEWS](#)

## NEWS and UPDATES



### THE POWER OF STORYTELLING. HELP US CREATE AN ILLUSTRATED BOOK INSPIRED BY ROMA CHARACTERS.

Our latest project, **THE NEW STORYTELERS** is live on **Indiegogo**. The New Storytellers project brings together 12 creative Roma children from a marginalized neighborhood in Bucharest, who will join two beloved Romanian authors for a series of storytelling workshops.

The children's personal stories will be a source of inspiration for an illustrated book, which we will publish and donate to local school libraries and NGO's.



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# OUR PROJECTS

## THE POWER OF STORYTELLING

THE NEW STORYTELLERS  
LIVE FROM GIULESTI

Certain stories help us grow stronger and kinder: they are powerful tools of openness and empathy. Understanding and appreciating of children and people from minority groups is sadly not an established aspect of education in Romania at present. We believe that our society would be stronger and richer if this were the case, and our role is to develop projects that would achieve this goal.



### THE NEW STORYTELLERS

With The New Storytellers we bring together 12 creative Roma children from a marginalized neighborhood in Bucharest and 2 beloved Romanian authors for a series of storytelling workshops. The children's personal stories will be a source of inspiration for an illustrated book, which we will publish and donate to local school libraries and NGO's.

[READ MORE >](#)



### LIVE FROM GIULESTI

"It's one of the best adventures in my life!" - this is what Antonio, a 12 year-old Roma boy, told us when he was part of our project Live From Giuleşti in the summer of 2016. A team of artists worked for two days with 19 children and teenagers from Giuleşti-Sârbi, a marginalized neighborhood on the outskirts of Bucharest.

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## THE NEW STORYTELLERS

The New Storytellers aims to bring ethnic and cultural diversity to children's literature in Romania.

THE NEW STORYTELLERS

LIVE FROM GIULESTI

Working closely with a community facilitator, our authors will design and deliver 12 storytelling workshops for a group of 12 Roma children ranging from 10 to 12 years old. The workshops are meant not only to serve as documentation but also to enhance the participants' creativity and to develop their storytelling skills. The children will develop stories through creative games, drawings, short video recordings, and writing.

The authors will then use the collected narratives to write an illustrated book infused by the children's stories and by the rich tradition of Roma folktales.

In the long run, we strive to replicate this project in other European countries and to organize creative writing workshops for aspiring Roma authors.

### Our Storytellers

Our storytellers live in Ferentari, a Bucharest neighborhood that shelters one of its most disenfranchised communities and where a significant number of Roma children are exposed to exclusion, discrimination, and sometimes abuse. Their daily life might be marred by insecurity and inequality, and yet when they come together, they open up: they are bright, playful, and inquisitive. Our storytellers are among the 200 children and teenagers currently engaged in a wide variety of activities offered by The Alternative Education Club, including art, journalism, and storytelling workshops; street-dance and sports; remedial education and mentoring.

They are ready to become the heroes of their own narratives and share their stories with you!



## FUND US ON INDIEGOGO



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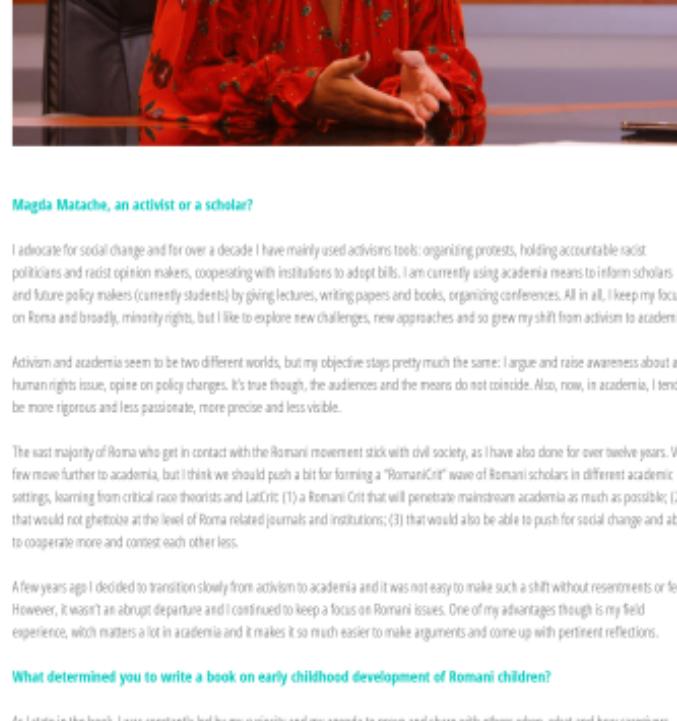
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## RESSOURCES | INTERVIEWS

## All children should have full access to early childhood development settings

Magda Matache, a Roma activist now studying at Harvard, speaks about her book on early childhood development of Romani children in which she discusses both social risks and solutions for a proper formation in all aspects of children from disadvantaged groups. She also pleads for a new generation of Romani scholars that would make a step further, from activism to academia.

July 21, 2014 | DANIEL STOEV



### Magda Matache, an activist or a scholar?

I advocate for social change and for over a decade I have mainly used activism tools: organizing protests, holding accountable racist politicians and racist opinion makers, cooperating with institutions to adopt bills. I am currently using academia means to inform scholars and future policy makers (currently students) by giving lectures, writing papers and books, organizing conferences. All in all, I keep my focus on Roma and broadly, minority rights, but I like to explore new challenges, new approaches and so grew my shift from activism to academia.

Activism and academia seem to be two different worlds, but my objective stays pretty much the same: I argue and raise awareness about a human rights issue, opine on policy changes. It's true though, the audiences and the means do not coincide. Also, now, in academia, I tend to be more rigorous and less passionate, more precise and less visible.

The vast majority of Roma who get in contact with the Roma movement stick with civil society, as I have also done for over twelve years. Very few move further to academia, but I think we should push a bit for forming a "RomaCrit" wave of Roma scholars in different academic settings, learning from critical race theorists and LatCrit: (1) a Roma Crit that will penetrate mainstream academia as much as possible; (2) that would not ghettoize at the level of Roma related journals and institutions; (3) that would also be able to push for social change and able to cooperate more and contest each other less.

A few years ago I decided to transition slowly from activism to academia and it was not easy to make such a shift without resentments or fears. However, it wasn't an abrupt departure and I continued to keep a focus on Roma issues. One of my advantages though is my field experience, which matters a lot in academia and it makes it so much easier to make arguments and come up with pertinent reflections.

### What determined you to write a book on early childhood development of Romani children?

As I state in the book, I was constantly led by my curiosity and my agenda to prove and share with others when, what and how caregivers, schools or neighborhood, society or policies affect the child developing brain, health, his/her educational performance and trajectory, or his/her job opportunities and well being. I chose to talk about Romani children, first of all because of my background, both personal and professional, but also because this is, at least it was at the moment when I started dealing with it, a pretty unexplored topic. Early childhood development as a whole, not necessary for minority or marginalized groups, and in the framework that I discuss it in the book, is a new area in Romania not only for researchers, but also for policy makers and practitioners.

### What are the key ideas and messages that you are "selling" in the book?

I use the social ecology theoretical frameworks established by Urie Bronfenbrenner, and refined, among others by Arnold Sameroff or Jack Shonkoff. In a way, the book pioneers in analyzing the social ecology of the Roma children in their early years, starting from the nearest (family, community, peers, kindergarten) to the distal (and political contexts). In the broader early childhood development studies, the book brings added value on the analysis of risk factors such as discrimination, stigma and prejudice on child development.

In the book, I focus especially on Romani children early experiences and contexts that lead to negative or positive life outcomes. I discuss the risk factors present in the environments in which Romani children grow up, factors that were assessed by the literature as strong determinants in establishing unequal start in life for children belonging to marginalized groups. Risk factors at such an early age include maternal and infant malnutrition, infectious diseases, toxins within the environment, psychosocial factors (including parental interaction, maternal depression, exposure to violence, and institutionalization), or discrimination and poverty. Protective factors include maternal education, breastfeeding, early childhood education settings. Understanding and analyzing the risk factors and sources of chronic stress for Romani children, and how these interact and lead to negative or positive life outcomes is at the heart of this book.

I push for a perspective that takes into account risk and protective factors that accompany early years of life of children in socially disadvantaged contexts. I argue for a social ecology approach in building policies and for multi-expert teams in practice. Distinctly, I support early childhood education and care from very early ages, its availability for all children, and involvement of playing, reading, good nutrition, and caring, as much as possible. I advocate for policy and practice developments that consider the child development since her/his conception.

### What are the solutions for the young Romani children you come up with in the book?

As I said, contemporary developmental studies place the child in a multiple number of social contexts that influence her/his life trajectory. Parents, family, community, school and peers, and geopolitical situation are seen sources of socialization and influence on the child development. These contexts permanently influence and interact with the personal characteristics of the child.

Broadly, I suggest that all children should have full access to early childhood development settings and the policy makers should invest more in building infrastructure, training teachers, making this service available for all. I also argue that young children are under the responsibility of their families, as well as of the society as a whole. I speak about a moral societal responsibility of ensuring equal start to every child. I am not a fan of an equitarian system, I am advocating for an equal start for all children and for availability of services. How many day care centers do we have in the rural area? A very few, so therefore, the chances of those children to benefit from elite education and career and well-paid jobs are very small. So what I am saying is make the services available and then adventure the children in a fairer competition. One of the best ways to combat extreme poverty and inequality is to invest in young children, especially those who belong to disadvantaged groups.

I propose several solutions in the book. I conclude that would be advisable to explicitly require that kindergarten teachers have at least a university degree and specialize in early childhood development, cultural diversity and some, where necessary, on bilingual education. Another obvious recommendation is to introduce cultural diversity elements in the ECD programs.

A solution that can positively affect the education pathway of a Roma child or of a poor child is to build the social capital, namely family and community resources. The adults, the parents, who can invest time and effort to support children at the community level are strong resources and networks able to support the children. School and health mediators have been and may be part of such networks as well. I also suggest that schools and local authorities should come up with solutions to actively involve parents in their children's education. Pilot programs involving parents and giving them the skills and the chance to read books, for example, may have many positive effects. There is a need for creating a pool of human resources at the community level to fill the gaps at home, such as toys, access to information, practicing writing and reading, discovering skills, food.

Finally, I propose in the book a model based on the claim that the social and economic inclusion of Roma will happen only if a new perspective will be acquired by decision makers, advocates and scholars along. The policies, in my opinion, should pursue both the reconciliation with the past as well as reparations for the oppressive policies Roma were exposed to, but also equal opportunities and building foundations for a true democratic values. All these require political will, expertise, and a lot of financial investment. Their benefits will be visible though in a few decades, especially from a financial point of view, as shown in other developed countries. If not for other reasons, at least for the economic argument early childhood development should get on the policy agenda... although I believe it is for so many other reasons.

Somehow, I do hope that my four-year research journey will contribute to a new agenda for Romani children and for early childhood approach in Romania.

### What authors and people have most inspired your reflections and thoughts in the book?

From a theoretical point of view, I was definitely inspired by Urie Bronfenbrenner, Arnold Sameroff or Jack Shonkoff for the social ecology framework. Amartya Sen and James Heckman shaped by ideas quite a lot.

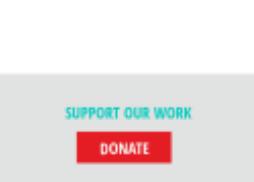
At the level of more personal interactions, my PhD coordinator, Iulia Motoc and professors and colleagues at Harvard made a big difference in my writing and thinking. I worked and learned a lot during these past two years from Jennifer Leving, Jacqueline Bhambhani and Arlan Fuller. I attended courses and discussed or confirmed ideas with amazing professors, such as Jack Shonkoff or Monica Yudron. However, I am grateful to many other people who helped me during this writing adventure and I wish I could talk about them all in the book, as well.

### Do you have other writing projects?

At Harvard I work with the FRS Center for Health and Human Rights. It's the main Harvard center with a distinct Roma agenda and we try to share our work as much as possible with the student body and the other departments with similar research interests.

I was involved in several writing projects already ([www.hsp.harvard.edu/margareta-matache/key-publications/](http://www.hsp.harvard.edu/margareta-matache/key-publications/)). I am currently co-editing a Roma focused book together with prof. Jacqueline Bhambhani, whom I like to believe is my mentor and my friend, and Andrej Mirkov, a well known Roma scholar and diplomat. Together with our Director, Arlan Fuller, as well as Sarah Dougherty and Vasoula Digidoni, we are writing a case study report on desegregation practices in six EU countries. Most exciting for me, we have just finalized data collection in a pioneering participatory action research project in Serbia that involves Roma and non-Roma adolescent researchers. Therefore, soon, we will come up with a few papers and events showing the positive impact of using such a methodology, both in terms of data, but also in terms of empowerment and giving a voice to the Roma families themselves.

## RELATED RESSOURCES



### ROMA INCLUSION POLICIES AND THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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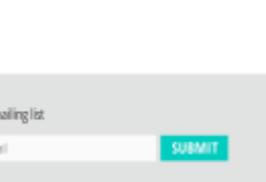
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Like teenagers anywhere, Roma teenagers in Romania alternate between being excited and melancholic; they fall in love...

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Children's literature is a source of knowledge and entertainment for children, and for adults, especially those ones who surround children...

| BOOK REVIEWS

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# OUR TEAM

We are a team of educators who support writers and illustrators to create books that reflect the ethnic diversity of Romania, with a focus on our Roma communities.



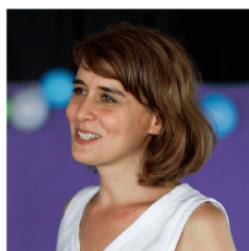
## GABRIELA NENCIU

Gabriela teaches at [Brandeis University](#). She previously taught at Dartmouth College and has international experience through the Institut Français network. Her belief that culture should embrace diversity led her to specialize in Cultural Project Design and Coordination during Master's degree studies at Sorbonne University.



## MARIA MILITARU

Maria lives in the Ferentari neighborhood and she joined the Alternative Education Club in 2011. She is deeply passionate about non-formal education methods that develop creativity in children and she is always there to help them with their homework. Maria is also involved in remedial education.



## CRIS PIRVU

Cris has 5 years of experience in the field of educational and cultural cooperation between France and Romania. She worked as a French teacher with Chinese students at the Sun Yat-sen University. Her interest in social action has led her to an internship in the Directorate General of Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion at the European Commission.



## MAGDA MATACHE

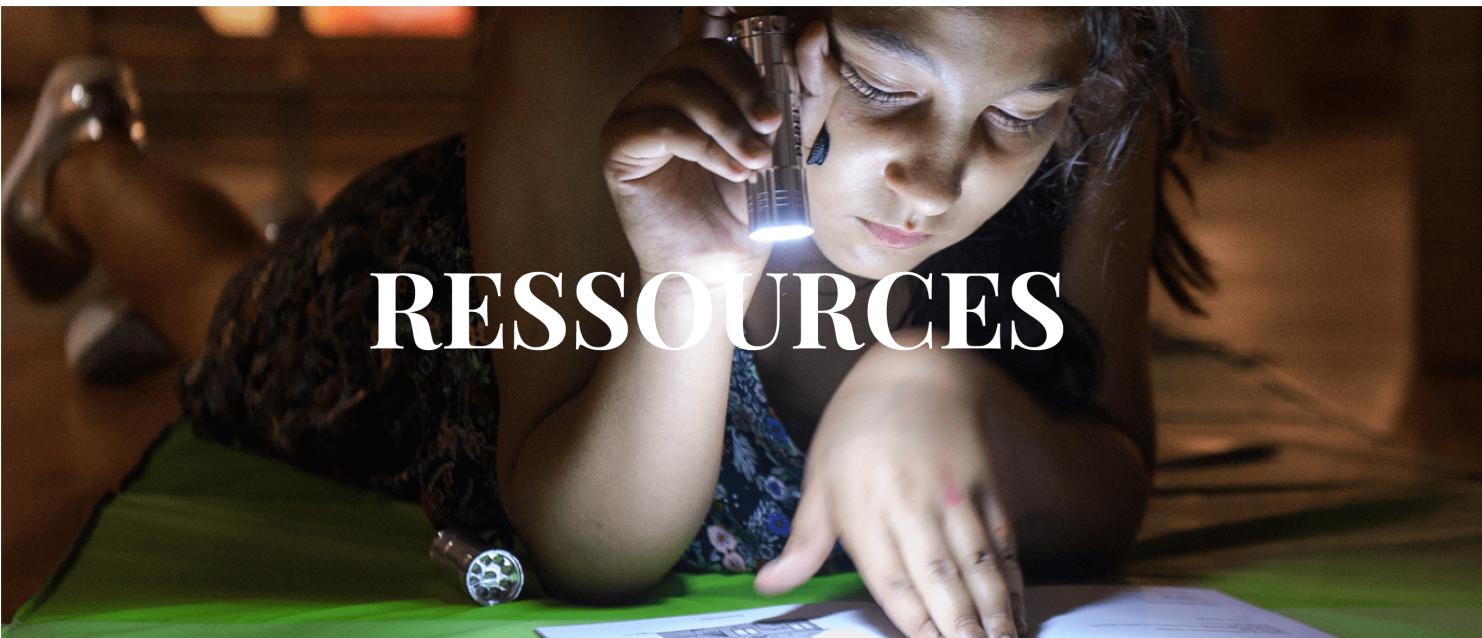
Magda is an Instructor at the [FXB Center for Health and Human Rights](#) at Harvard University. She is the Director of the Roma Program, which focuses on innovative research strategies and critical analysis of scholarly production regarding Roma. Her research spans the rights of Roma children and adolescents, segregation in education, and participatory action research.

The Policy Center for Roma and Minorities is our partner in this project through their [Alternative Education Club \(AEC\)](#). The AEC is a non-formal program started in 2010, which currently engages with over 200 Roma and non-Roma children from Ferentari. Its aim is to support children to break the circle of marginalization, poverty, and hopelessness, through sports and alternative education.

We also have a partnership with the [Global Shapers Bucharest Hub](#).

### SUPPORT OUR WORK

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# RESSOURCES

We put together a collection of interviews, book reviews and opinion articles from influential key opinion leaders from human rights advocates to teachers and NGO representatives. We hope to give readers an insight about the Roma culture and that it will raise awareness about the importance of different narratives in Romania.

## INTERVIEWS



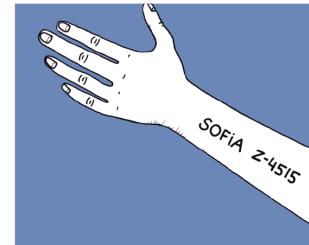
**Magda Matache**, a Roma activist now studying at Harvard, speaks about her latest book on early childhood development of Romani children in which she discusses both social risks and solutions for a proper formation in all aspects of children from disadvantaged groups in Romania. →

## ARTICLES



Like teenagers anywhere, Roma teenagers in Romania alternate between being excited and melancholic; they fall in love; they are fans of various football teams, singers, and actors. But they have some experiences that differ dramatically from their non-Roma peers. →

## BOOK REVIEWS



**Sofia Z4515** by Gunilla Lundgren and Amanda Eriksson, is one of the few children's books that talks about the Roma Holocaust and the life of Sofia Taikon, a Roma young girl from Sweden who survived the Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp. →

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