

**Development, piloting and dissemination of new methods in data collection  
on discrimination against Roma in public services (ADinPS)**

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# Report on using discrimination testing to measure discrimination against the Roma in public services

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Project **“New methods in data collection on discrimination against Roma in public services (ADinPS)”** was implemented between May 2020 and February 2022 by a consortium led by the [Centre for Policy Studies](#) of the Central European University (CEU, Hungary) and including [Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis](#) (BI, Hungary), [Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance – Amalipe](#) (Bulgaria), [ROMEIA](#) (Czechia) and [Autonomia Foundation](#) (Hungary).

The project aimed at contributing to fighting discrimination that Roma face in accessing public services through developing, piloting and disseminating methods of data collection that can be easily implemented by NGOs and used to monitor discrimination in a regular and systematic way.

During the project three grassroots NGOs, Amalipe (Bulgaria), ROMEIA (Czechia) and Autonomia Foundation (Hungary) piloted the mystery shopping methodology in six experiments (two in each country):

- Bulgaria: enrolment in school, access to municipal social housing,
- Czechia: enrolment in school, renting municipal premises,
- Hungary: enrolment in school, registration of car,

and obtained data on discrimination that Roma face in accessing public services both accessed via online gateways and personal contact with providers.

Based on data from these experiments, the present report was developed.

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Contents

- 1. Introduction..... 4**
  - 1.1. Aims of the project ..... 4
  - 1.2. Existing evidence and added value of this project ..... 4
    - Evidence from population surveys..... 4
    - Evidence from correspondence testing ..... 5
    - Evidence on discrimination in education ..... 5
- 2. Implementing the experiments ..... 6**
  - 2.1. Outline of workplan and participants..... 6
  - 2.2. The method of discrimination testing ..... 7
  - 2.3. Choice of services ..... 8
  - 2.4. General approach to setting up experiments..... 10
- 3. Setup and results of the school experiments..... 10**
  - 3.1. School experiments in the Czech Republic..... 11
  - 3.2. Results of the Hungarian experiment on schools..... 12
  - 3.3. Results of the Bulgarian experiment on schools ..... 14
  - 3.4. Comparing results of the three school experiments ..... 18
  - 3.5. Other experiments..... 19
    - Rental of premises experiment in Czechia..... 19
    - Housing experiment in Bulgaria ..... 19
    - Car registration in Hungary ..... 20
- 4. Lessons about using discrimination testing ..... 21**
- 5. References..... 22**
- 6. Appendices..... 24**
  - 6.1. Background information on the Bulgarian school experiment ..... 24
    - Calculating the raw response rates..... 24
    - Important school dates in Bulgaria ..... 24
  - 6.2. Examples of school responses ..... 24
    - Examples of school responses in Bulgaria ..... 24
    - Examples of school responses in Hungary ..... 25
  - 6.3. Background information in the Bulgarian housing experiment ..... 26
  - 6.4. Sample letter in the Czech premises experiment..... 26

## 1. Introduction

Project “New methods in data collection on discrimination against Roma in public services (ADinPS)” was implemented between May 2020 and February 2022 by a consortium led by the Centre for Policy Studies of the Central European University (CEU, Hungary) and including Budapest Institute for Policy Analysis (BI, Hungary), Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance – Amalipe (Bulgaria), ROMEIA (Czechia) and Autonomia Foundation (Hungary).

This report summarises the aims, methods, process and results of six experiments that were designed to measure discrimination against the Roma in public services. The rest of this chapter outlines the aims and rationale of the project and briefly presents the existing evidence on discrimination against the Roma. Chapter 2 describes the general methodology of the project, while chapters 3 and 4 focus on the six experiments. Chapter 5 summarises the evidence gained in the project while Chapter 6 outlines some lessons regarding the use of discrimination testing by NGOs.

### 1.1. Aims of the project

The project aimed at contributing to fighting discrimination that Roma face in accessing public services through developing, piloting and disseminating methods of data collection that can be easily implemented by NGOs and used to monitor discrimination in a regular and systematic way.

The rationale behind was that, while discrimination testing may not allow us to test all aspects of discrimination, given the general lack of evidence on barriers to accessing public services, this method can greatly contribute to building an evidence base. As discrimination testing is relatively inexpensive, it may be regularly used by NGOs to monitor and measure discrimination in services that are especially relevant for the Roma. This can be especially useful in countries where equality bodies are relatively weak both in terms of their political mandate and staff numbers.

Thus, the project had three main aims. First, to generate evidence on discrimination in services that are highly relevant for the social inclusion of Roma and thereby contribute to the monitoring and improvement of Roma strategies. Second, to test the potential for the regular usage of discrimination testing by NGOs in Central and Eastern Europe. Third, to use the new evidence to raise awareness of discrimination and lobby for effective anti-discrimination measures.

### 1.2. Existing evidence and added value of this project

There is evidence that prejudice against the Roma is wide-spread in Central and Eastern Europe, and it is also well-documented that the labour market exclusion of the Roma is partly due to employer discrimination. However, discrimination against Roma in public services is much less documented (Hojsik et al 2018).

#### Evidence from population surveys

Population surveys recording public perceptions show that discrimination against the Roma is wide-spread across Europe, but with large variations across countries. According to the latest available

Eurobarometer survey<sup>1</sup> on this topic, the population perceiving discrimination to be wide-spread was relatively low in Bulgaria, much higher in Hungary, and about the EU average in the Czech Republic in 2019.

These perceptions tend to underestimate actual discrimination, as they depend on culturally and legally determined norms of what constitutes discrimination as well as the sensitivity and exposure of respondents to discriminatory practices. In the same survey, when asked about feeling comfortable about having a Roma colleague at work, the refusal rate was much higher in Bulgaria (at 37%) than in the Czech Republic (30%) or Hungary (22%).

There seems to be growing awareness that discrimination is harmful for the whole society and more should be done to reduce it. In all three countries, the majority of the population believe that better integration of the Roma would be beneficial for society, though public support for integration efforts is much higher in Hungary (72%) than in the Czech Republic (58%) and Bulgaria (49 %). At the same time, a high share of the population believe that government efforts for integration in the fields of education, health, housing and employment are non-existent or ineffective (48% in HU, 54% in BG, 58 % in CZ).<sup>2</sup>

#### Evidence from correspondence testing

Employer discrimination against disadvantaged ethnic minorities is well documented by studies based on correspondence testing ([Neumark 2018](#); [Zschirnt and Ruedin 2016](#), [Lippens et al 2020](#), [Lancee 2021](#)) and there is some evidence specifically about the Roma in Central and Eastern Europe (Bartos et al 2016, Olasz 2020). There is much less evidence on discrimination in public services, and studies focusing on Central and Eastern Europe are especially scarce ([Bertrand and Duflo 2017](#), [Hansen, J.A. and Tummers, L. 2020](#)).

However, there are a few recent studies that find discrimination against the Roma in the private rental market (Bartoš et al 2016) and in public employment services (Mikula and Montag 2022) in the Czech Republic, and in access to various municipal services in Hungary (Simonovits et al 2021). These studies document both explicit and tacit forms of discrimination, i.e. the response rate of public services as well as the quality of the response varies according to the ethnic background of the client. Some recent studies suggest that this may partly be explained by the fact that public officials are short of time and may discriminate as a way of coping with high workload (Andersen and Guul 2019, Olsen et al 2021, Taghizadeh 2021).

#### Evidence on discrimination in education

Education is an especially important area of public services as inequalities in accessing high quality education largely determines children's chances not only in terms of job opportunities, but in all dimensions of social inclusion. Unequal access to public education has a long-term impact on the skills formation of disadvantaged children and consequently on their employability, incomes and wellbeing in their adult life (OECD 2019). School segregation (especially segregated classes of ethnically mixed schools) may also have a devastating effect on the development of young people's identity, self-esteem, and interethnic relationships (Messing 2016).

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<sup>1</sup> Eurobarometer Special Survey 2019/493. Relevant questions include QC1.3, QC8R. [https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2251\\_91\\_4\\_493\\_eng?locale=en](https://data.europa.eu/data/datasets/s2251_91_4_493_eng?locale=en)

<sup>2</sup> Eurobarometer 2019. QC8R.

There is a growing body of (mainly qualitative) evidence that discrimination against the Roma is widespread in the public education system across Central and Eastern Europe (Ohidy and Forray 2019). The underlying reasons are closely connected and difficult to disentangle. Teachers may be prejudiced against the Roma (just as their fellow-citizens, cf Kisfalusy et al 2021, Lambrev et al 2020), or may adjust their conduct to the (perceived) prejudices of non-Roma parents, or may be trying to avoid the additional workload they expect to be required when teaching Roma children (most of whom come from families of a low socio-economic background). Free school choice and spatial segregation tends to magnify these underlying factors as it allows schools to select children who are considered easier to teach (and achieve higher in exams), and allows parents to avoid schools where the share of low-status children is high.<sup>3</sup> The general lack of teaching skills required for teaching mixed-ability classes also contributes to a tendency towards school segregation.

Survey data on public attitudes also suggest that majority parents' prejudice against Roma children is one of the factors driving school segregation and discrimination. According to the 2019 Eurobarometer Survey, the share of respondents who would feel uncomfortable about their children having Roma schoolmates is among the highest in the Czech Republic (40%), and Bulgaria (34%), and slightly below the EU average in Hungary (25%).

The evidence proving the causal impact of discrimination on access to schools is relatively limited. There are few correspondence studies (which have been widely used to measure labour market discrimination) on school enrolment, and we are not aware of any that were implemented in Central and Eastern Europe (Olsen et al 2021 studied school access by Muslim children in Denmark, Taghizadeh 2021 focused on Arab children in Sweden).

## 2. Implementing the experiments

This chapter provides a brief outline of our approach to designing and implementing the six experiments carried out during the project. The ethical issues concerning the mystery shopping method are discussed in detail in a separate document.

### 2.1. Outline of workplan and participants

The project was coordinated by CEU CEPS and implemented by three grassroots organisations and the Budapest Institute. The three grassroots NGOs included Amalipe (Bulgaria), ROMEA (Czechia) and Autonomia Foundation (Hungary). They were involved from the initial stage of the project from selecting the service areas to be tested to developing and using lobbying tools. NGOs were responsible for collecting and interpreting information on the situation of the Roma and the organisation of particular services in their country, while the Budapest Institute was responsible for defining the methodological framework of the experiments, guiding the design and implementation of the experiments and providing technical assistance where necessary, and also for analysing the data.

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<sup>3</sup> Free school choice may lead to stronger segregation in towns, where more schools are available: children of disadvantaged minorities are less likely to commute to distance schools, because of informational disadvantages, the larger burden of commuting costs on the family budget, or because of fear of the unknown (Kézdi and Kertesi 2013).

The first stage of the project included a review of the literature, a detailed mapping of the potential ethical concerns of using mystery shopping techniques in a context of public services, and discussions about the relevance of particular services for the Roma in the participating countries.

In the second stage, participants identified six areas to work on, prepared and implemented the online experiments between January and August 2021. The in-person experiment was implemented in September 2021. The six services were as follows:

- Bulgaria: enrolment in school, access to municipal social housing
- Czechia: enrolment in school, renting municipal premises
- Hungary: enrolment in school, registration of car

In the third stage, work was organised in parallel: NGOs used preliminary results to disseminate the method and develop lobbying tools while the Budapest Institute worked on the analysis of the data.

The last stage, in January and February 2022, focused on dissemination and lobbying.

## 2.2. The method of discrimination testing

For the purposes of this project, we defined discrimination testing (or mystery shopping<sup>4</sup>) as a particular method of participant observation. The participant (or an avatar) acts as a service user and observes various aspects of service provision, while the officer representing the service provider is not informed of being observed. In our case, the focus will be on the accessibility of services and we are mainly interested in whether Roma experience any discrimination in this regard. The participants follow a pre-defined scenario that also specifies their reactions to possible questions or reactions on the part of the provider. Participants are 'constructed' or selected in a way that they differ in their ethnic background but are the same or similar in all other characteristics. Thus, the differences in the outcomes observed for participants belonging to different ethnic groups can be attributed to ethnic discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

Such tests can be implemented via different channels of communication. Depending on the choice of channel, participants may be real persons trained to act as clients, and may initiate real-time, interactive contact with public service providers in person, on the phone or using chat facilities. Alternatively, participants may be avatars, that is, 'constructed' personas: this can be used when contacting the service provider does not require the real-time presence of the client, such as sending an email or a letter via regular mail.

The advantage of this method is that it can provide reliable evidence on the magnitude of discrimination and can be implemented at relatively low costs (at least in the case of using avatars). An important limitation of the method is that it is best suited for capturing discrimination in the initial phase of accessing a service as in later stages the costs and ethical risks become too high (Nathan and White 2021). Ethical risks are a concern even in the initial stage of accessing a service, thus experiments must be designed with care.

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<sup>4</sup> The original title of the project referred to 'mystery shopping', which is more often used in the commercial applications of the method. As academic studies use 'discrimination testing' to refer to this method, we chose to use that term in this report.

<sup>5</sup> There may still be some bias in these outcomes, flowing from the fact that levels of education represent different signals for Roma and non-Roma, as we discuss in the next chapter.

The reliability of the results is very sensitive to the design and implementation of the experiments ([Bertrand and Duflo 2017](#)). One important issue is to ensure that Roma and non-Roma clients indeed only differ in their ethnicity, which applies not only to their personal characteristics but also to the circumstances of contacting the service provider. Another major issue is to ensure that treated (those contacted by a Roma client) and untreated (those contacted by a non-Roma client) service providers are comparable. In some cases this can be guaranteed by contacting the same provider multiple times. In many cases this is not feasible, due to the risk of the experiment being uncovered. In the latter case, random assignment of the providers into the treated and non-treated group can ensure that *on average* the two groups will have the same characteristics.

### 2.3. Choice of services

There were two main considerations guiding the choice of service to be tested in this project. First, that the services are relevant for the Roma community, and second, that the method of discrimination testing is feasible. Feasibility covered several aspects: ethical risks, the risk of being uncovered (i.e. that the constructed clients are accepted as real), adequate sample sizes to ensure that we get a reliable measure of discrimination, and costs of implementation.

Accordingly, we aimed to select **services** that

- are provided by a public institution
- are not very costly or life-saving (to avoid harmful crowding out of genuine users)
- are used by Roma
- are frequently used (so that suddenly increasing inquiries do not seem suspicious)
- may be used by outsiders, i.e. people not living in the locality, or relevant for newcomers
- usage is voluntary and typically initiated by the client (so we cannot include compulsory vaccination)
- allow some room for discretion on the part of the public officer (which may be used to discriminate some clients)
- clients can ask for information about the service via some online channel (email, facebook, web)
- ideally, making a relevant inquiry does not require in-depth knowledge of the locality (as this would increase the time and money spent on the testing)
- ideally, the provider has at least 60 separate offices – this helps us in generating enough observations without becoming suspicious.

For the selected services, we defined a situation where we could observe the interaction between the client and the public officer. These situations were outlined to

- be relatively simple (so that we can still compare the situations initiated by different clients, and measure any differences in how officers handle the situation), but
- still have some room for discretion
- require minimum effort on the part of the service provider: it relates to a single service, it asks for a concrete piece of information about the service (rather than actually attempting to use a service), it asks about an issue that commonly arises and thus is likely to elicit a standard response.

Considering the ethical risks and the available resources, we used a strategy that tackled ethical risks in four ways:

- 1) focus mainly on the telephone and online channels of contacting the service provider
- 2) focus on requesting information rather than the actual use of service
- 3) use appropriate sampling procedures and timing in implementing the interventions
- 4) anonymise results.

The shortlist of services and possible scenarios are presented in Table 1, all relying on online channels. The pandemic greatly facilitated the feasibility of using online channels as public providers moved to using these.<sup>6</sup> Following discussions with project partners about the concern that using the online channel may considerably reduce the relevance of our research (as the Roma are likely to use other, more personal channels more frequently), we added a scenario based on personal contact. The final choice of services are marked in grey.

To mitigate ethical risks, in each of these scenarios we use synthetic identities and automated procedures (in emails) so that there will not be any natural persons involved on the client-side of the encounter. In order to reduce the waste of service capacity, each scenario is designed to minimise the effort required on the part of the service provider: it relates to a single service, it asks for a concrete piece of information about the service (rather than actually attempting to use a service), it asks about an issue that commonly arises and thus is likely to elicit a standard response. To further simplify the encounter, each intervention involves only one client.

**Table 1. Risks specific to shortlisted scenarios**

	service area	channel	action	risks	risk mitigation
1	school enrolment or day-care for child aged around 3	email / FB message	mother asks if there will be a place for her child in the next semester	increases admin for school/ childcare institution	exclude (or undersample) small villages with limited admin capacity
2	youth guarantee	online registration at YG website / personal visit	youth registers to ask for information on training opportunities	small increase in admin for PES (standard procedure)	exclude understaffed PES units? time the intervention in a less busy period
3	inquire about availability of municipally owned housing (for rent)	in person / phone/ Email	Request information on availability and application procedure	increases admin for municipality	exclude villages
4	use/rent of outdoor premises by business	phone / email / FB message	request information on cost/rules of using municipal premises e.g. for clothes-sale or farming bees	increases admin for a municipality cannot fully ensure informed consent in phone encounters	exclude (or undersample) small villages with limited admin capacity

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<sup>6</sup> See for example the description of rules for Czech schools in the first wave <https://www.expats.cz/czech-news/article/czechs-schools-will-conduct-enrollment-for-2020-2021-school-online>

	service area	channel	action	risks	risk mitigation
5	rent of indoor premises (e.g., community room) by organisation	phone / email / FB message	request information on cost of rent	increases admin for a municipality cannot fully ensure informed consent in phone encounters	exclude (or undersample) small villages with limited admin capacity
6	support/information on business start-up	phone / email / FB message / personal visit	request information on how to get a permit for a certain profession/support for starting a business	increases admin for municipality/public agency cannot fully ensure informed consent in phone encounters	exclude (or undersample) small villages with limited admin capacity

## 2.4. General approach to setting up experiments

In designing the setup of each experiment, the first step was to collect information on the existing rules and practices that shape the initial phase of accessing the service as well as on the relevant characteristics of the Roma communities. The Budapest Institute prepared a detailed list of questions to support NGO partners in collecting the data. The next step was to discuss the avatars, the communication channel and the sample size. In five of the experiments, we decided that using emails was feasible (considering the risk of the experiment being uncovered). In the sixth experiment, we relied on personal contact. In most experiments, we used four avatars to separate discrimination based on social status to that based on ethnicity. In most experiments, we chose the maximum feasible sample size, i.e. we contacted all units of the public service targeted by the experiment, excluding only those where this would have created suspicion.

The final step of preparation was to obtain the contact details of the public service units, select the relevant units (which was done by the Amalipe, Romea and BI), and draw the random subsamples to be contacted by each avatar (which was done by BI). Emails were sent in a fully automated way in the Hungarian school experiment, and for half of the sample in the Czech school experiment. In the other experiments, emails were manually sent by Romea and Amalipe.

## 3. Setup and results of the school experiments

To measure discrimination in enrolment to primary education, we sent standardised email messages to a large sample of schools, in the name of four types of parents (avatars),<sup>7</sup> asking for information about school admission about 2-3 weeks before the official application deadline to first grade in the Spring of 2021. In Bulgaria, the message concerned a child in 4th grade wanting to change school, while in the other two countries it was about a child starting 1st grade. The email messages included 4-6

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<sup>7</sup> The four avatars were allocated to four, randomly selected subsamples of primary schools. In the Hungarian case, we had a fifth avatar representing an educated parent of partly Ukrainian origin.

questions concerning the application process and details of the school's offer that typically concern working parents.

We used four avatars varying in their level of education and ethnicity. Markers included the names of the mother and the child, the writing style, and residence in the case of Bulgaria. In the Hungarian experiment, we used a 5th avatar as well, and some additional information was provided to explain the motivation behind school choice, which we also used to signal social status. We identified discrimination by comparing response rates and quality of response across the avatars.

### 3.1. School experiments in the Czech Republic

The Czech school experiment involved contacting primary schools to ask about admission rules for a child who just reached compulsory school age. In the Czech Republic school choice is free with few constraints. Schools are predominantly public and have considerable freedom in selecting children to admit into first grade.

The messages by the low-educated avatars were sent manually on 9-11 April (Friday to Sunday), while those by the educated avatars were sent in an automated way on 11 April (a Sunday),<sup>8</sup> that is roughly two weeks before the typical deadline of 30 April.<sup>9</sup> The first subsample was randomly halved in order to reduce the cost of manual sending (thus including 267 schools). The second subsample included 540 schools.

The messages included six questions concerning the application process and details of the school's offer. The translation of the letter sent by an educated avatar is as follows:

*Dear Madam Principal,*

*My son is six years old and should start school in September. I would like to enrol him into your Primary School.*

*Could you please let me know what the enrolment deadline is? What documents do we need for this and how are we supposed to deliver them to you? Should I bring my son to the school? How does the after-school group work at your school, what are the hours? Will your school open a class with [foreign] language instruction? Is it possible to enrol my son in that class?*

*Many thanks in advance*

*XY*

We used four avatars varying in their level of education and ethnicity. Markers included the name of the mother, and the writing style. The sample of schools excluded prestigious schools located in high-income neighbourhoods. In total, the initial Czech sample included 1082 schools, but the subsample of low-educated avatars was halved reducing the final sample to 807. Some of the email addresses

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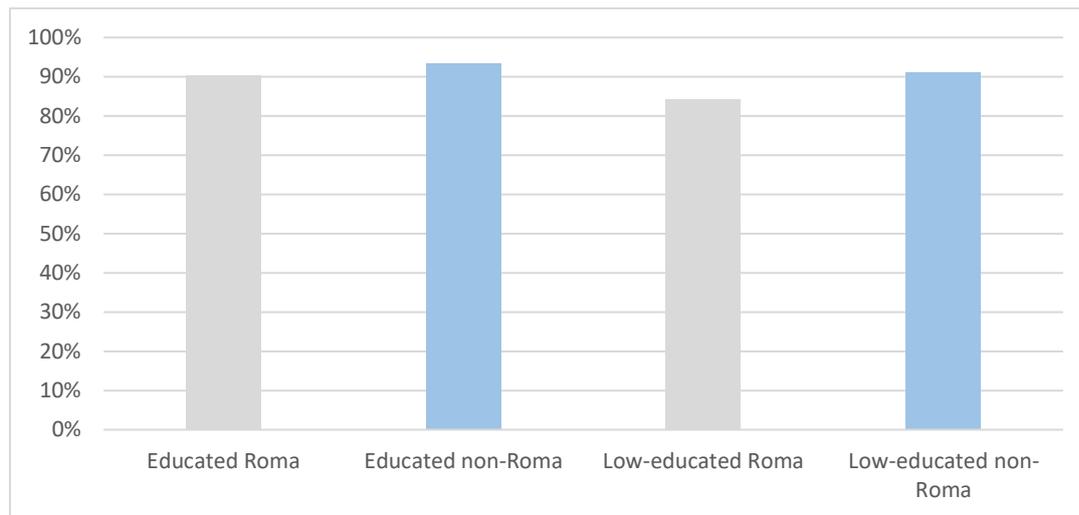
<sup>8</sup> The automated sending was programmed in Python, which includes a facility applicable to gmail accounts. Automation was limited to the educated avatars as they are likely to have gmail accounts while low-educated avatars are more likely to use other domains.

<sup>9</sup> The Education Ministry advises schools to organise enrolment in April but schools can deviate from this.

were incorrect, which reduced the number of schools successfully contacted to 778. The overall response rate was very high, over 90%.

The response rates were significantly lower for Roma parents, and especially for low-educated Roma parents (Figure 1), though the differences were relatively small. Discrimination was more apparent in the quality of responses. Roma parents, whether low-skilled or educated, as well as low educated non-Roma parents were much more likely to get an unhelpful response, and much less likely to get a very helpful one compared to educated non-Roma parents.

**Figure 1.** School response rates in the Czech Republic



Source: authors' calculation.

### 3.2. Results of the Hungarian experiment on schools

In the Hungarian school experiment we used four avatars varying in their level of education and ethnicity and a fifth avatar was added for comparison, who was constructed as a half-Hungarian mother from the Ukraine, with secondary education (recently divorced). Markers included the names of the mother and the child, and the writing style. Two educated avatars sent the inquiry in their own name, while for the Ukrainian mother, it was sent by a cousin living in Hungary. For the two low-educated cases, the avatar was an informal mentor supporting an older sibling in the family. In each case, some additional information was provided to explain the motivation behind school choice, which we also used to signal social status.

The message to the school included these questions:

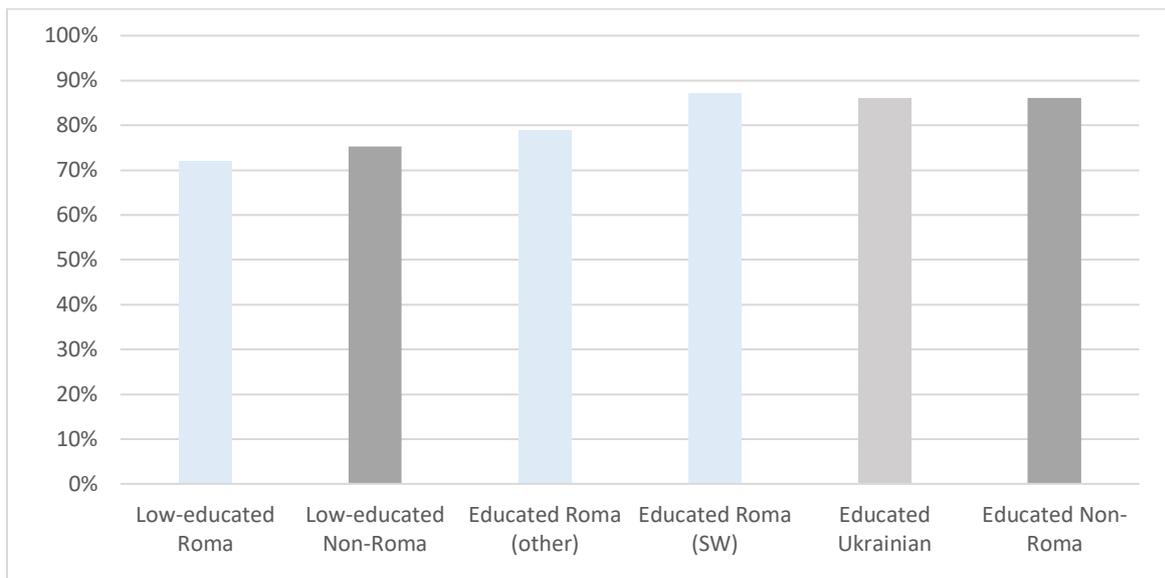
- How do I apply to the school?
- When is the deadline to submit an application?
- How long are the afternoon classes, are there compulsory classes in the afternoon?
- From what grade do you teach foreign languages?
- When does the child qualify for reduced-price meals (e.g., for single parents)?

The sample of schools excluded prestigious schools located in high-income neighbourhoods and also schools with a share of disadvantaged children over 40 %. In total, the sample included 1124 schools. Some of the email addresses were incorrect, which reduced the number of schools contacted to 1116.

All the messages were sent in an automated way, on the 24-25 March (Thursday and Friday). The overall response rate was somewhat lower than in the Czech Republic, but still reached almost 80%.

Roma parents (or mentors representing Roma children) were less likely to receive a response (Figure 2), and when they did get one, it was less likely to cover all the information they asked for, less likely to be „nice” and more likely to be neutral or rude compared to non-Roma parents. They were also less likely to receive a second response asking them about their decision to enrol their child to the school. The difference in response rates varied across regions: in the South-West of Hungary, we found no evidence for discrimination against educated Roma parents.

**Figure 2.** School response rates in Hungary



Source: authors’ calculation. SW=South-West of Hungary

Less educated parents were less likely to receive a response and those who did, were more likely to receive a neutral or rude one, compared to educated parents.<sup>10</sup> The responses they received were also more likely to refer to some barrier, such as that they need proof of residence in the school’s catchment area, that they should have applied earlier as the pre-application process has closed or that there are no more places in the school.

Educated Roma received a response in 6% points fewer cases (7% if excluding schools in the South-West) than educated non-Roma mothers, while the ethnicity gap was only 3% points in the case of low-educated Roma mothers. The response rate for the educated half-Ukrainian avatar did not differ from the educated non-Roma avatar.

Both the rate and quality of responses tended to vary with school size: on average, larger schools were less likely to respond and less likely to cover all the questions asked. This may be partly due to lack of administrative support (or centralisation of decisions) to school directors and partly due to financial

<sup>10</sup> In a similar experiment in Sweden, Adman and Jansson (2017) find that schools discriminate mainly in this informal way (rather than not responding at all).

incentives attached to class size. In the Hungarian case, we found that schools struggling to reach the minimum class size for receiving per capita funding were more eager to respond and provide all information.

The responses of schools also revealed very wide variations in how schools organise information provision to parents, which likely depends both on their interests (popular schools need no „marketing“) and on their technical facilities and attitudes. Some schools seem very organised and skilled at using IT to facilitate the informing of parents, as well as managing the application process. They set up groups on Google or Facebook for prospective applicants, create and share videos, publish Q&As on their website and organise webinars. Other schools stick to the traditional formats and channels (telephone and in-person meetings) and seem much less proactive and forthcoming in providing information.

### 3.3. Results of the Bulgarian experiment on schools

In the Bulgarian school experiment 500 schools were selected, excluding the schools where the share of disadvantaged children was very high, and excluding small, rural schools. The message asked about the possibility of enrolling a child in 5th grade, and alluded to the background motivation that the family is moving. As in the Czech Republic, we used four avatars differing in level of education and ethnicity, signalled by names and writing style. The letter mentioned a well-known Roma ghetto as their current residence, which, combined with a Turkish name, signalled Roma ethnicity.<sup>11</sup> Low educated avatars were male (fathers) and educated avatars were female (mothers). All messages were sent manually between 14 June and 2nd July.

The message to schools included five questions (sample message by non-Roma educated parent):

*Dear Madam/Mr. Director,*

*My name is Yanka Atanasova, and my daughter Hristina Atanasova is a 4th grade student. We currently live in Fakulteta, Sofia, but we are about to move and are currently looking for a suitable school for our daughter.*

*What are the requirements for admission to your school?*

*What documents are required for enrolment?*

*When is the deadline for enrolment?*

*Do you have any places available?*

*Does she have to take an entrance exam?*

Emails were sent to the schools on five dates between 14 June and 2 July 2021. Most of the messages (317 out of 500) were sent on the 14 June, and the rest were sent about two weeks later. The raw response rates are included in Table A1 of the Appendix. Table 2 displays how the response rates varied according to the date of sending. The estimates of discrimination are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3. The average raw response rate was quite high: 3 out of 4 schools responded.

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<sup>11</sup> In Bulgaria the Turkish and Roma minorities both have Turkish sounding names.

**Table 2. Raw response rates by date of sending inquiry**

	educated Roma	educated non-Roma	low-educated non-Roma	low-educated Roma	total	N
14jun2021 Monday	64%	78%	87%	100%	80%	317
29jun2021 Tuesday	100%				100%	40
30jun2021 Wednesday		100%			100%	23
01jul2021 Thursday			100%	38%	71%	63
of which: primary schools			100%	39%		
of which: secondary schools			100%	36%		
02jul2021 Friday				29%	29%	51
of which: primary schools				24%		
of which: secondary schools				36%		

Source: authors' calculations

Clearly, the sending of the messages influenced the response rate. The ending of the school year varies by grade in Bulgaria: the school year ends on 31 May for grades 1-3, on 15 June for grades 4-6 and on 30 June for grades 7-11. In 2021, aptitude tests in grades 7 and 10 were organised between 16-18 June (see more detail in the Appendix). This helps explain the differences in the response rates by sending date. On the week of 14th June both primary and secondary schools were busy organising exams, which may explain the generally lower response rate. Two weeks later they had no such obligations and there were fewer classes still in school (only grades 7-11), which reduced the workload in both schools but especially in primary schools (where school had ended for almost all classes except in grade 7). This may explain the high response rates observed for messages sent on 29-30 June. As school ended for 7th graders on the 30 June, and there were no exams after that date, some school staff may have left for holidays (or summer camps), which may explain the sharp drop in the response rates for messages sent on the 1st and especially the 2nd of July.

Timing does not fully explain the very low response rate to the messages sent by the low-educated Roma parent on the 1st of July, as the response rate remained high for the low-educated non-Roma parent. However, the sharper drop in the response by primary schools on the Friday suggests that some of the drop was indeed due to the beginning of the holiday season.<sup>12</sup>

As on the last day of sending, all messages were sent by the low educated Roma avatar, this makes the Roma/non-Roma gap seem bigger than it really is. To correct for this bias, we used statistical methods to estimate the response rates as if all messages were sent on the 14 June. The results are presented in Table 3 and Figure 3.

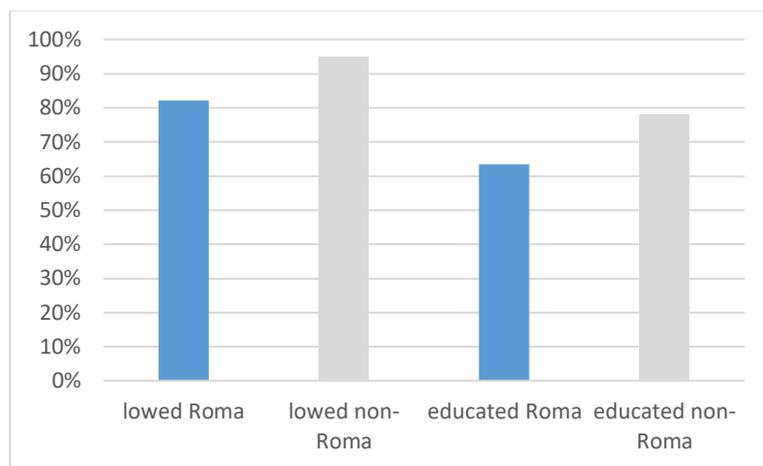
<sup>12</sup> For messages sent on the first three dates, the average response rate does not vary by school type.

**Table 3.** Predicted response rates and differences by avatar

	educated			low-educated			total
	Roma	non-Roma	gap	Roma	non-Roma	gap	
<b>response rate</b>	64%	78%	14%	82%	95%	13%	80%

Note: Estimates correct the bias in the date of sending, prediction for 14 June.

**Figure 3.** Estimated response rates in the Bulgarian school experiment



Source: authors' calculations

These results show that in the Bulgarian case, for 4 graders, there is no negative discrimination against low-educated parents, at least in the response rate. In fact, low-educated parents were more likely to receive a response. This might be due to the fact that most schools provide information on enrolment at their websites and thus expect educated parents to find that information for themselves (this is also suggested by the fact that several schools just referred to their websites, rather than providing a detailed answer).<sup>13</sup> Another factor could be that the parents sending the messages differed in their gender: the educated avatars were female, while low-educated avatars were male. Due to traditional gender role attitudes, school officials may have tended to take the requests sent by a man more seriously than those sent by a women.<sup>14</sup> However, Roma parents were discriminated against, regardless of their level of education.

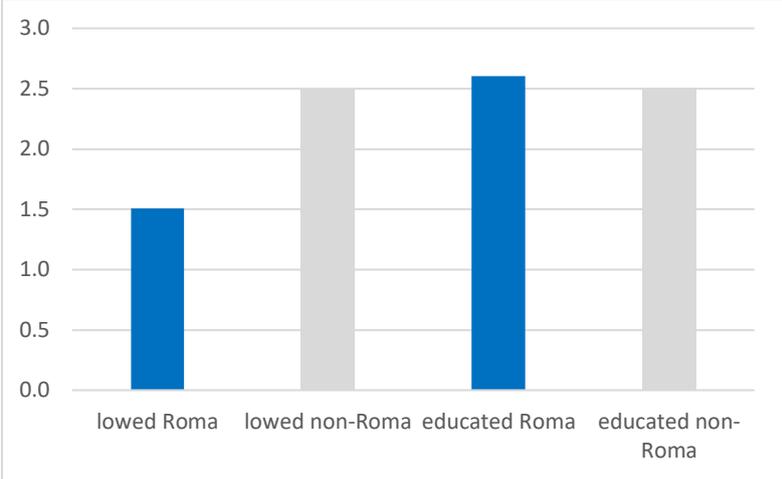
The quality of the responses also varied according to the parents' ethnicity and social status. On average, schools answered 2 out of five questions (Figure 4). Educated parents and non-Roma low-educated parents received a somewhat more informative response: on average 2.5 of their questions were answered. Low-educated Roma parents were much less likely to get a helpful response: on

<sup>13</sup> On average, 25% of the responses referred to the school's website. Low educated parents (who got a higher response rate), were slightly more likely to receive such a reference, but in their case, the school was less likely to provide a link. For low-educated Roma parents, only 1.4% of the responses included the exact link to enrolment information and instructions (compared to 8.5% of educated Roma parents and 5% of non-Roma).

<sup>14</sup> The prevalence of traditional gender roles in Bulgaria is documented for example by Lomazzi, Vera, Sabine Israel, and Isabella Crespi. 2019. "Gender Equality in Europe and the Effect of Work-Family Balance Policies on Gender-Role Attitudes" *Social Sciences* 8, no. 1: 5. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci8010005>

average only 1.5 of their questions were answered. Also, low-educated Roma parents were the least likely to receive an exact link to more information about the enrolment procedure at the school’s website, and more likely to receive a message that referred to the website without providing a link.

**Figure 4.** Estimated number of questions answered



Source: authors’ calculations

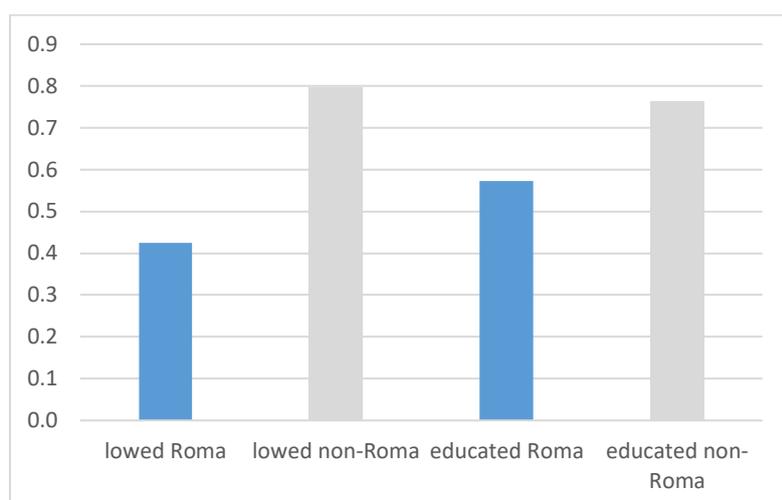
**Table 4.** Share of responses containing a reference to the school’s website, %

	Exact link	General link	No link	No such reference	Total
educated Roma	8.5	6.4	6.4	78.7	100
educated non-Roma	5.1	11.2	5.1	78.6	100
low-ed Roma	1.4	10.0	14.3	74.3	100
low-ed non-Roma	5.3	13.2	10.5	71.1	100

Source: authors’ calculations

Most schools sent a response written in a kind tone. However, the tone of the responses also varied across parents: Roma parents were much less likely to receive a kind response (Figure 5). This difference was especially large for low-educated Roma parents.

**Figure 5.** Estimated share of responses written in a kind tone



Source: authors' calculations

To summarise, we found that Roma parents were discriminated against in three ways: they were less likely to receive a response and also less likely to receive an informative and kind response, which could make them feel welcome by the school. Low-educated Roma parents were affected by all these forms of discrimination. Educated Roma parents were affected by two of these forms of discrimination: they were less likely to receive a response, and when they did so, the response was less likely to be written in a kind tone, but it was not less informative than the average response received by non-Roma parents.

### 3.4. Comparing results of the three school experiments

In all three countries, we found evidence of discrimination against Roma parents. Table 5 presents response rates and the ethnicity gap in the response rates for the three countries. These are not fully comparable as the experiments (and also the social context) varied across countries. However, it seems that (1) discrimination on ethnic grounds may be higher in Bulgaria than in the other two countries, and (2) the interplay of ethnicity and status-based discrimination is different in the Czech Republic and Hungary.

Table 5. Response rates by ethnicity and education of parent (%)

	Low-educated Roma	Low-educated non-Roma	Educated Roma	Educated non-Roma	Ethnicity gap, percentage points		Education (social status) gap, percentage points**	
					Un-educated	Educated	Roma	Non-Roma
Bulgaria*	83	95	64	78	13	14	-18	-17
Czechia	84	91	90	93	7	3	6	2
Hungary	72	75	80	86	3	6	8	11

\*In Bulgaria, response rates are adjusted for the date of sending (the last batch of emails were sent on a Friday at the end of the school year, and the response rate on these was much lower). \*\* Note that this gap may not measure the same thing for Roma and Non-Roma parents (Mikola and Montag 2022). Also, in the case of Bulgaria, the results may also capture gender-based discrimination as high-educated avatars were female (mothers) while low-educated avatars were male (fathers).

While these results reliably reflect the actual experience of Roma parents asking for information about school enrolment, they cannot be used to identify discrimination on the basis of ethnicity as opposed to socio-economic status. This is because due to the fact that Roma need to invest much more effort to obtain secondary education compared to the majority population, a highly literate Roma parent is likely to be perceived by schools as a high-achiever, compared to a non-Roma parent signalling the same level of education (Mikula and Montag 2022). Conversely, while a poorly written message from a parent with a Roma-sounding name conforms to the stereotypical average Roma, schools may interpret a similar message from a non-Roma as coming from an under-achieving parent. This implies that the two sources of discrimination work in opposite ways in the observed gap in response rates, or, in other words, the gaps provide a lower-bound estimate of discrimination based on ethnicity.<sup>15</sup>

### 3.5. Other experiments

In each country, we implemented two experiments, one on school enrolment and one on another service, which varied across countries. This section presents the outcomes of these experiments.

#### Rental of premises experiment in Czechia

The second Czech experiment targeted municipalities: two avatars (Roma and non-Roma, both educated) contacted municipalities by email to ask about the possibility to rent municipal premises for two days at the end of August, for a small summer camp for a children's dance group. The translation of the messages is presented in Appendix 6.3. The Roma marker was very strong in this case as the message sent by the Roma avatar explicitly referred to Roma dance (as opposed to Czech and Moravian dances) and were signed with a typical Romani surname. Each avatar contacted 60 municipalities, which were regional centres likely to have some municipal establishment such as a school or kindergarten that could be rented for a few days. The messages were sent on 9<sup>th</sup> of August 2021. Many messages triggered an automated response acknowledging the receipt of the inquiry. In some cases, an "out-of-office" reply came with another contact indicated – in these cases, the original email was resent to this address, and a reminder was sent to those who did not respond by 20 August.

The response rate was much lower than in the school experiment, but it was 10 %points higher for the non-Roma citizen (37/60, or 61.7%) than for the Roma avatar (31/60, or 51.75%).<sup>16</sup> The answers were very diverse – some of them very brief, others acknowledge the work with kids. The Roma avatar was less likely to receive a kind and helpful answer, or additional information in response to their query. Very few municipalities made a concrete offer of premises to rent: in this regard, there was no difference between the two avatars, in fact, the Roma avatar received 1 more such offer (4, as opposed to 3 received by the non-Roma avatar).

#### Housing experiment in Bulgaria

The second experiment in Bulgaria concerned access to social housing. Social housing is scarce in Bulgaria and it is a long process to be allocated a council flat. The experiment tested if Roma and non-Roma citizens receive the same response to an inquiry about the conditions of applying for social

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<sup>15</sup> The markers we used in the Hungarian case may create a similar bias: for low-educated parents, the inquiry was written by an informal mentor helping the older, school-age sibling of the child to be enrolled. For Roma parents this may signal parental motivation above the stereotypical average, while for the non-Roma (where such mentoring is rare) this may signal problems in the family.

<sup>16</sup> Statistically, the difference is significant at the 6% level, which is weak, but that may partly be due to the small sample size.

housing. The inquiries were sent by email in March 2021. The sample included 31 municipalities and as the sample was small, we used only two avatars: Roma and non-Roma. The Roma avatar sent the same message to 18 municipalities, while the non-Roma avatar contacted 13 municipalities. The treatment and control groups were manually matched to include pairs that are similar in terms of level of urbanisation and entitlement rules (see Table A4 in the Appendix). The letters varied slightly by municipality according to the local entitlement rules, to ensure that the applicant narrowly meets the requirements of for claiming social housing and has a low social status.

The message was the following (in Bulgarian):

*Madam,*

*I need to find a solution to accommodate my family. We have a daughter and are expecting a second child to be born at the end of the summer. We have been tenants of a one-bedroom apartment in the municipality since (year varied by municipality), and my wife has had a current address in the municipality since (year varied by municipality). I was in Germany from 2017 - 2020, but lost my job due to the pandemic and had to move back to Bulgaria. The apartment only has one room and we can't afford to rent a bigger place as my wife won't be able to work and my salary is small and not enough.*

*Can you help me? I would like to know how to apply for council housing, how long do we have to wait for a decision, do you give preference to families with children? Also, are there any other special rules about who can apply?*

*Thank you very much for your help.*

The response rate was relatively low in this experiment: only 14 out of the 31 municipalities responded. We could not identify any systematic discrimination against Roma citizens in this case, in fact, citizens with a Roma (Turkish) sounding name were more likely to receive a response and the quality of the response was not systematically lower.

The response rate varied by the degree of urbanisation: municipalities including a large town or city (of at least 50 thousand inhabitants) were much more likely to respond (75%), while those with a smaller urban centre (of between 15-49 thousand) were less likely to respond (42%). The response rate was especially small in predominantly rural municipalities (with a town centre of 6-14 thousand inhabitants). This may be partly due to the fact that less urbanised settlements have fewer social housing, and partly to the lack of administrative capacity in these municipalities. Interestingly, municipalities with a mid-sized town were much more likely to respond in a helpful and informative way. However, the sample size was much too small to make any robust conclusions on the pattern of responses.

### Car registration in Hungary

In the only experiment conducted in-person, we tested the general administrative practices of government agencies in Hungary. These agencies are located in the urban centres of microregions („járás”, there are around 170 of these units across the country) and are responsible for a wide range of administrative functions from issuing passports to car registration or employment services. In the experiment, the Roma avatar visited 15 offices, while the non-Roma avatar visited 8. The non-Roma avatar went to the same offices that the Roma avatar had also visited, so that these cases can be more directly compared. The scenario involved the de-registration of a car owned by a client. The visits were timed between 31 August and 1 October 2021.

The tests did not detect any sign of systematic discrimination. There were some variations in the behaviour of administrators, but in most cases they did not seem to discriminate between customers: they were equally friendly to everyone or equally unwelcoming.

It is important to note that in the testing we only observed the first step of handling the case, and we did not obtain any information on differential treatment in later stages.

In a few cases, it happened that the security guard or the case manager turned away relatives or friends who arrived with the client. As we only observed Roma clients coming together in pairs or more, we cannot say that this rule (that only the client is allowed in the waiting room) is only applied to Roma. If field experts believe that this is common and discourages Roma from using these government offices, it is worth testing in a next experiment how common it is and whether it is applied discriminatorily.

In cities and large towns, the case workers seemed more professional: this might be because they have a more diverse clientele (e.g., foreigners, or homeless people), so they may be more open in general, and may also have more training.

As the number of observations was very small, we cannot say that there is no discrimination in these government offices, but it seems very likely that discrimination is not systematic or widespread.

The experiment generated some useful lessons regarding the implementation of in-person testing. First, the level of detail of the observations differed between the two avatars: this could be reduced somewhat by developing a more detailed observation sheet. Second, some important circumstances were not asked for in the observation sheet (whether there were any Roma employees in the office and in what position: receptionist, administrator, etc.), which shows that more thorough piloting is needed. Third, face-to-face enquiries are costly, especially for a country-wide enquiry, as travel time and travel costs are involved. Last, the case of the two avatars was not exactly the same, in the case of the Roma avatar there was already a case opened, which allowed the offices to avoid dealing with the case by claiming that they were not competent. This was unfortunate: it is important that the two avatars' cases are as similar as possible in all respects.

## 4. Lessons about using discrimination testing

Apart from generating new evidence on discrimination in public services, the project also yielded some useful lessons regarding the use of the method of discrimination testing. In the project we implemented six tests, 5 using email, 1 involving in-person visits by actors. The following considerations are based on these six experiments.

- Quality and reliability of the evidence: each of the experiments provided some insight on how discrimination may or may not take place at some stage of accessing public services. However, the school experiments, where we had relatively large samples, proved especially useful in that we could quantify the incidence of discrimination and also shed some light on how it happens at the initial stage of accessing education.
- Costs: there were three tasks in implementing the experiments that were rather costly: (1) understanding the service area and the relevant questions so that we can set up a credible experiment; (2) paying actors in the case of the in-person experiment; (3) coding and matching the answers in the school experiments where the samples were relatively large. These costs were slightly higher than initially expected, and will need to be funded if NGOs wish to repeat the experiments in other areas. However, the fixed-costs of setting up an experiment can be saved or reduced when periodically repeating the same experiment. Costs

can be greatly reduced by using digital tools, such as software handling the automated sending of messages.

- Expertise: it seems that in order to achieve reliable results, there is a need for expertise in social science. Such expertise is especially needed in the setup phase and in the analysis.

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## 6. Appendices

### 6.1. Background information on the Bulgarian school experiment

Calculating the raw response rates

**Table A1.** Calculating raw response rates by avatar

	educated Roma	educated non-Roma	lowed non-Roma	lowed Roma	total
lines in merged data ( schools targeted+second sending+second response)	160	138	139	185	<b>622</b>
second sending	29	19	11	54	<b>113</b>
bad address	1	1	0	4	6
responses	99	97	116	73	385
2nd or further responses	3	1	2	3	<b>9</b>
schools responding	94	98	114	70	376
<b>schools targeted</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>500</b>
schools reached	125	119	126	124	494
schools not responding	29	23	12	54	118
raw response rate	75%	82%	90%	56%	76%

Notes: Table A1 presents the number of messages sent and received by each avatar. For some schools, the messages were sent twice, and some schools responded multiple times: these duplicate messages were ignored in the analysis.

Important school dates in Bulgaria

**Table A1.** Examination dates and end of school by school type and grades in 2021

	primary (grades 1-7)	secondary (grades 1-10 or 1-12)*
11-15 June		grade 10
16 June	grade 7	grade 7, 10
17 June	grade 7	grade 7, 10
18 June	grade 7	grade 7, 10
2 July	deadline for issuing certificates of completing primary school	
15 June	end of school year for grades 4-6	
30 June	end of school year for grades 7-11	

\* for an overview of the school system see [https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/bulgaria\\_en](https://eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-policies/eurydice/content/bulgaria_en)

### 6.2. Examples of school responses

Examples of school responses in Bulgaria

a) *Kind, informative response, answering all questions (received by educated Roma parent)*

„Hello Ms Atanasova,

You need to submit an application to us at school or to this email, signed with an electronic signature, but after your child has completed fourth grade. All other documents will be requested ex officio by us from the previous school.

Enrolment is done by a parent or guardian and requires an ID and birth certificate for the child.

We will have four fifth grade classes - one with German and three with English. All will study in the elective classes additionally mathematics and Bulgarian language and literature.

There are no transfer deadlines. We have a total of up to 12 places available at this time.

We do not hold examinations for admission to fifth grade.

This is our website - <http://xxx>

xxx (name of school official), Director”

b) Rude response including no direct answers (received by educated non-Roma parent)

„Hello!

On the school's website there is information about admission after the 4th grade.”

c) Polite response including few direct answers (received by low-educated non-Roma parent)

„Hello!

Currently there are no vacancies at xxx (name of school). At the beginning of the new school year there may be a place if a student leaves.”

d) Rude response including only a rejection (received by low-educated Roma parent)

„Hello. We have no vacancies.”

e) Rude response including one answer out of five (received by low-educated Roma parent)

„Keep an eye on the school website for information. Documents required are Grade 4 certificate and application.

Have a nice day!

xxx (school's name)”

#### Examples of school responses in Hungary

a) Schools informing the parent that the school is not obliged to take children from their catchment area, the application process has already closed, and they have no vacancies:

„... is not a district school, so the deadline for applications for our future first classes has already passed, our classes are full...” (church-run school)

"it is not a district school, so it is not obliged to admit "nearby" residents. We regret to inform you that the pre-registration for our school to assess parental needs was closed last week. Admissions decisions and class placement have been made. There is no possibility for late enrolment."

"Our school receives students from the Reformed congregations in xxx and its surrounding area. The deadline for applications was 15 January 2021. The decision on admission has been made, we have no places available. I wish you every success in your choice of school”

b) Schools informing the parent that they are only taking children from their catchment area and require proof of residence.

„ We only accept children with an xxx address card and a declaration of residence in xxxxx.” (not mentioning vacancies)

### 6.3. Background information in the Bulgarian housing experiment

Table A.4. Sample municipalities by entitlement rule and treatment

rule type*	control municipalities	treated municipalities
2	Sliven	Gabrovo
3 and 5	Nova Zagora, Tryavna, Razlog, Satovcha, Elena, Simitli, Polski Trambesh,	Dryanovo, Tryavna, Galabovo, Radnevo, Chirpan, Garmen, Dupnitsa, Simitli, Kyustendil
4	Sevlievo, Veliko Tarnovo, Gorna Oryahovitsa, Sandanski, Yakoruda Blagoevgrad	Kotel, Kazanlak, Stara Zagora, Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni, Svishtov, Gotse Delchev, Petrich, Bobov dol

\*requires years of residence for being eligible for social housing

### 6.4. Sample letter in the Czech premises experiment

Dear Mr. Mayor,

*Since last summer I have been working as a volunteer with an informal group of about 15 children aged 12-16. Since they have missed many hours of school due to Covid, we meet once a week for tutoring, but I also try to help them to spend their free time in a meaningful way. Last summer we started a dance club where the children learn traditional Czech and Moravian (Roma) dances. It's just an amateur dance group, but the kids are really very motivated and talented. Moreover, I myself have professional experience in folk (Romani) dance choreography (I graduated from a dance conservatory) and the children have been training for the second summer in a row. So, the result is very good. I would like to send you a link to our YouTube channel, but we are still working on it, so it is not possible at the moment.*

*With a mother of one of the kids, we are planning to organise a camp for the children, combined with a trip to another part of the Czech Republic. I am writing to you because I would like to ask you if it would be possible to get municipal premises for this dance camp of ours, for two days sometime between 20.8. and 30.8. We operate on sponsorship donations and small contributions from parents, so we cannot afford to rent commercial premises. We would therefore welcome getting municipal premises for free or at a symbolic rent. This could be a room in a school or other municipal premises - we just need a room large enough with a suitable floor and an accessible toilet.*

*I will be grateful if you send me information about the possibilities and conditions for obtaining municipal premises for our camp, the possibility of public appearances. And also, if you could possibly advise some cheap accommodation in the area suitable for children (camp, guesthouse, tourist hostel, etc.).*

Best regards,

typical Czech (Roma) name