



THE RIGHT OF ROMA CHILDREN TO EDUCATION

POSITION PAPER

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FOREWORD

Across Central and Eastern Europe, discrimination and non-inclusive school systems systematically deprive children from Roma communities of their right to education. In most countries, only about 20% of Roma children ever complete primary school, compared with more than 90 percent of their non-Roma peers. Those that do enroll are likely to drop out before the end of basic schooling because of racism in schools and the ill preparation of schools to meet their needs; in South-eastern Europe only 18% of Roma children ever enroll in secondary school and less than one per cent attend university. Many Roma children are tracked to 'special' schools and classrooms for children with disabilities simply because of their language differences. Thus there are large equity gaps in the quality of education received by Roma children and their non-Roma peers.

International human rights doctrines - such as the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Education for All and Millennium Development Goals - declare *all* children's right to education. Governments and their partners have signed on to these doctrines and committed to extending their school systems to reach the most marginalized children. Yet, global media, international organizations, civil society and communities themselves continue to call the world's attention to the challenges facing Roma communities in Europe. Social science research further confirms that Roma children remain excluded, provides us with analyses for why they are excluded and identifies strategies that have been successful in promoting the inclusion of Roma children. Thus, with rights affirmed, governments and media on board, research done and effective practices identified, **it is time to act.**

The Right of Roma Children to Education: Position Paper promotes action by providing concrete guidance on programming and policymaking for inclusion. It provides a framework for implementing a human rights-based approach to the inclusion of Roma children in education. It elaborates, in detail, the political, legislative, policy, educational, communication and financial commitments that are needed to overcome the extreme and entrenched disadvantage experienced by Roma children in realizing their right to education. Full implementation of these commitments would lead to the inclusion of Roma children within the mainstream education system on an equal basis with all other children, without discrimination and achieving comparable outcomes.

UNICEF will continue to advocate and work toward ensuring that all children from Roma communities have equitable access to quality education in all countries in the region. I hope that this paper calls to action all partners to work toward the realisation of the right to education for all Roma children and I hope that it may be a tool to accelerate our joint progress.



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The principal author of this position paper was Gerison Lansdown, drawing on an original draft by Caroline Sykora.

Ms. Lansdown was the founder and director, in 1992, of the Children's Rights Alliance for England, established to promote implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. She has published and lectured widely on the subject of children's rights. Her dedication in writing this paper and integrating a wide range of inputs from various organizations and UNICEF country offices throughout the consultation process has been highly appreciated.

Philippe Testot-Ferry (UNICEF Regional Office, Geneva) had overall responsibility for the planning, design, development and coordination of this initiative.

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INTRODUCTION

All of UNICEF's work is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child. The agency has been working in Central and South-Eastern Europe (CSEE) since the 1990s, with the objective of ensuring that the rights of children, especially those from the most vulnerable and marginalized groups, are comprehensively addressed. The right of Roma children to education falls directly within this mandate, and in recent years has been an increasing focus of UNICEF's work in promoting equity in this region. This position paper aims to contribute to a stronger, more unified and better articulated approach to UNICEF's work in promoting Roma education in CSEE. This paper has been developed to enhance and strengthen UNICEF's focus on the most marginalized children by elaborating, in detail, the political, legislative, policy, educational, communication and financial commitments that are needed to overcome the extreme and entrenched disadvantage experienced by Roma children in realizing their right to education. Full implementation of these commitments would lead to the inclusion of Roma children within the mainstream education system on an equal basis with all other children, without discrimination and achieving comparable outcomes.

This position paper complements and contributes to UNICEF's significant commitment to the rights of Roma children. In addition to strengthening partnerships around Roma education and joining the Roma Decade in 2007, the UNICEF Regional Office for CEE/CIS initiated the drafting of a Review of Best Practices and Successful Initiatives in Roma Education in 2009. UNICEF joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion in October 2008 and participated regularly in the International Steering Committee meetings of the Roma Decade, including an important meeting on education for Roma children organized in Belgrade in June 2009 by the Serbian Presidency of the Decade. This work is informed by UNICEF's global education strategy that commits, in two of its overarching goals, to helping countries achieve universal primary education, and to reach gender parity and address disparities. The global strategy outlines the guiding principles, which require that programmes are developed:

- Within existing national frameworks and reinforcing existing mechanisms and tools
- Through partnerships that are interlinked and seamless
- With a focus on inter-sectoral links across programmes
- To add value, based on evidence of good practices and experiences
- To respond to the urgent needs of countries and populations

These goals and principles are also central to UNICEF's Regional Education Strategy, the key vision of which is that every child in the region will access and complete basic education of good quality. Basic education in the regional strategy is comprised of one year of pre-primary, the full primary cycle and lower secondary education. In the region, UNICEF expects four results aimed at the inclusion of less advantaged children:

1. Disparities and exclusion will be reduced and the last 10 to 15 per cent of children out of school will receive quality education.
2. The quality and relevance of basic education will be improved to reduce dropouts, and completion and retention will be increased
3. All children ages 3 to 6 will have access to at least one year of free pre-primary school and will begin school by the age of 6 to 7.
4. Education will be the strategy for disaster risk reduction to promote social cohesion and tolerance.



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Finally, this position paper is informed by the strengthened UNICEF focus on reaching the most marginalized children, as well as by corporate programme policies.¹ This focus recognizes that without additional targeted efforts to address these excluded groups, it will not be possible to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Accordingly, this paper constructs a human rights-based approach to analysing and conceptualizing the challenges faced by Roma children in realizing their right to education, highlighting the specific targeted action that will be necessary to achieve that goal. This analysis draws on the UNICEF/UNESCO paper, *A Human Rights-Based Approach to Education for All*.² The extreme challenges faced by some children mean that 'more of the same' is not enough. Some of the barriers to supporting the rights of marginalized children and families might be technological, institutional or organizational, and could be overcome through technological innovation or improved management of existing services. In many cases, however, 'reaching out' requires the exercise of specific political will and commitment, including financial commitment. This commitment is often absent for a variety of reasons: lack of awareness of the need, lack of political advantage associated with such investment, prejudice and hostility to the particular groups of children, ignorance as to the actions needed to overcome marginalization, fear of the associated costs and failure to acknowledge obligations associated with international human rights commitments.

This paper elaborates the overall dimensions of investment, activity and commitment that are required. It does not provide strategic or step-by-step guidance on the implementation of those actions, nor does it prioritize particular actions or commitments. Such decisions need to be made in light of the unique and differing political, economic, social and cultural context on the ground. This paper can be used by UNICEF and partners to inform, engage and advocate for the political commitment necessary at a country level to identify priorities and develop the strategy needed to achieve the goal of quality education for every Roma child. In so doing, the political case for action can be strengthened through the following arguments:

- State parties to the CRC have committed themselves to ensuring the enjoyment of rights by all children, and should be guided by principles of universality, non-discrimination, participation and accountability. The CRC makes a special case for focusing government's actions on the most vulnerable and excluded. States parties have to periodically report to the CRC Committee, which will comment on their performance and expect to see consequent action.
- The Millennium Declaration³ underlines the commitment to reaching the most vulnerable and marginalized.⁴
- It is increasingly recognized that inclusion brings widespread educational benefits. While inclusion is most advantageous to marginalized and disadvantaged children, mixing children of differing capacities, skill levels and cultural backgrounds benefits all children. Inclusion helps promote tolerance and contributes to the formation of stronger social cohesion and aids in developing both academic and social skills among all children, from the most advanced to those with special needs.⁵ Accordingly, inclusion in both the educational system and in society as a whole is integral to improving the conditions and opportunities afforded to Roma. Reducing marginalization also lowers the risk of social unrest, and increases chances for social stability and peace.

¹ 'Reaching marginalized children and their families', UNICEF Programme Policy and Procedure Manual, Section 20

² For a detailed account of the implications of a rights-based approach to education see: United Nations Children's Fund and United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *A human rights-based approach to education for all*, UNICEF/UNESCO, New York, 2007.

³ Most of the Millennium Development Goals, except goals number two and three on education and gender, respectively, are 'reduction goals', implying that there will still be children left out. By contrast, the Millennium Declaration cites human rights principles to make a stronger case for the inclusion of all children.

⁴ See Millennium Declaration, Article 2: "As leaders we have a duty therefore to all the world's people, especially the most vulnerable and, in particular, the children of the world, to whom the future belongs."

⁵ Fisher, Douglas, Virginia Roach and Nancy Frey, 'Examining the general programmatic benefits of inclusive schools', *International Journal of Inclusive Education*, 1464-5173, Volume 6, Issue 1, 2002, pp. 63-78.

- The unit costs of any service reaching marginalized children and families is often higher than the cost for those already served. Given that those left out have so far not benefited from public expenditures for such services, it is fair that higher costs may be incurred for them now. Providing a service to marginalized populations may only slightly increase the average unit costs of the service; this is because there are only a small number of marginalized people compared to the population already covered. The unit costs for any recommended strategy in a particular scenario should be carefully calculated. Development (e.g., capital) costs need to be clearly separated from recurrent costs of the service.
- Significant levels of marginalization (and lack of access to service) do in fact have their own costs to society in both the short and long term.

UNICEF's emphasis in all its work on quality, elimination of disparities, universal coverage, tolerance building and preschool education are all components necessary for assuring the right of Roma children to education. This paper is rooted in that body of work. It also builds on discussions with Roma Decade partners and other stakeholders, including Roma NGOs, a consultative meeting convened by UNICEF in Budapest in May 2010, and finally, from discussions and recommendations from the 15th ISC Meeting of the Roma Decade, which took place in February 2009.



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SETTING THE CONTEXT: THE ROMA IN CEECIS

The Roma are by far the largest ethnic minority group in Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CEECIS). With an estimated total population of over 10 million, they are present in nearly all countries of Europe.⁶ Approximately 70 per cent of Roma are concentrated in Central and South-Eastern Europe (CSEE), with the greatest proportions in Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, and also high numbers in the Czech Republic and Poland.⁷ The Roma population is rapidly expanding. Although there is a lack of reliable disaggregated data, certain projections indicate that the size of the Roma population will double over the next 50 years. High fertility rates, coupled with lower life expectancy, means that a growing share of the Roma population is young, and an increasing proportion of national youth are of this ethnicity.

The Roma population is far from homogeneous. There are traditional cleavages based on geographical origin, tribe, language, religion and occupation as well as more recent divisions, such as economic status and type of residence. Groups may remain distinct from the majority population and each other, or be adapted, though rarely assimilated, to one another. Roma identity is not readily claimed, especially among the more educated. The Roma population suffers higher than average rates of unemployment. In CSEE, unemployment rates for Roma are more than five times that of the general population.⁸ They are also more often living in substandard conditions or homeless, which contributes to their poorer health and overall poverty. For example, in Serbia, it is estimated that there are around 600 Roma settlements, of which half are categorized as unsanitary slums.⁹ In Bulgaria, ghetto-like Roma neighbourhoods are widespread in both urban and rural areas,¹⁰ and in Montenegro, the majority of Roma live in ethnically homogenous slum settlements.¹¹ In Serbia, 35 percent of registered Roma settlements have no piped water, and in Montenegro, this rises to 75 percent.¹²

EDUCATION ACCESS AND OUTCOMES

Roma educational achievement has been historically poor across Europe. While considerable advances were made in the socialist period, the disadvantage of Roma children, manifest in every aspect of schooling, never disappeared and has only worsened over the last two decades.

Levels of enrolment and retention

Preschool coverage for Roma children in South-Eastern Europe (SEE) is low, ranging from 0.2 per cent in Kosovo¹³ to 17 per cent in Romania.¹⁴ This lack of access has been identified by the Roma NGOs as a major contributing factor in the educational failure of Roma across the region. According to World Bank data, educational enrolment in CSEE among primary-school age Roma children is on average a quarter of the corresponding rate for non-Roma children.¹⁵ In South-Eastern Europe, gaps in enrolment are the greatest in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Montenegro, ranging from 45 to 50 per cent. Some 20 per cent of Roma children in Bulgaria and 33 per cent in Serbia never

⁶ European Commission, *The Situation of Roma in an Enlarged Europe*, Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs, Brussels, 2004, p. 6. Roma.

⁷ Open Society Institute, *Monitoring Education for Roma: A Statistical baseline for Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, Open Society Institute, New York, 2006.

⁸ Ringold, Dena, Mitchell A. Orenstein and Erika Wilkens, *Roma in an Expanding Europe: Breaking the Poverty Cycle*, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2005.

⁹ Laksic, B., and G. Basic, 'Roma settlements, living conditions and possibilities for integrating Roma in Serbia,' Centre for Ethnicity Research, OXFAM, 2002.

¹⁰ UNDP Vulnerable Groups Dataset.

¹¹ United Nations Development Programme, 'Household Survey of RAE, Refugee and IDPs in Montenegro', UNDP and Institute for Strategic Studies and Prognoses, 2003, pp.20–23.

¹² UNICEF, *Breaking the cycle of exclusion*, 2007.

¹³ UNSCR 1244

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Cited in United Nations Children's Fund, 'Cooperation between UNICEF and REF: Some reasons and approaches', UNICEF, Geneva, 2007, p. 4.

go to school.¹⁶ Moreover, even if they gain access to primary school, drop-out rates are high. In Slovakia, Roma children are 30 times more likely to abandon school than the rest of the population, and in Bulgaria, most of the 45,000 students who drop out annually are of Roma ethnicity. According to recent multiple indicator cluster surveys, of the 63 per cent of Roma children who enter primary school in the the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, only 45 per cent complete it; in Serbia, only 13 per cent of Roma complete primary school.¹⁷ A survey conducted by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) found that two out of three Roma do not complete primary school, as compared with one in seven in majority communities.¹⁸ Declining participation begins at the primary level, with enrolment between cohorts decreasing, whereas there is little or no decline for the non-Roma population.

As a result of the high drop-out rate among Roma children, their participation beyond primary school is dramatically lower than that of the majority population. In South-Eastern Europe, for example, only 18 per cent of Roma attend secondary school, compared with 75 per cent of the majority community, and lower than 1 per cent of Roma attend university.¹⁹ Most of the Roma who remain in education beyond primary level attend vocational establishments, a sector badly hit by industrial decline, which has lowered the value of practical qualifications as a means to gainful employment.

Poor educational achievement

Educational achievement among Roma is also low. For example, a Hungarian survey found that the grade average of Roma pupils was lower than that of majority peers, with half receiving failing or near failing marks in Hungarian language and mathematics.²⁰ The PISA study in 2003 confirms the strong influence of socio-economic background on the performance of pupils.²¹ It also takes longer for Roma children to finish their schooling. In Slovakia, Roma children are 18 times more likely than non-Roma to not finish eight grades in eight years, and in Hungary, 80 per cent take longer than eight years to complete primary education. Of those with less than eight grade levels, nearly all are entirely or functionally illiterate.²²

Gender-based dimensions

Roma education gaps also have an important gender dimension. The primary school enrolment rate for Roma girls is just 64 per cent, compared to 96 per cent for girls in non-Roma communities in close proximity to Roma who face similar socio-economic conditions.²³ Three quarters of Roma women do not complete primary education, compared with one fifth of women from majority communities. Although disaggregated statistics are only beginning to be collected, evidence is emerging that literacy and other indicators are poorer for Roma girls than boys. The illiteracy rate in the SEE region is 32 per cent for Roma women, compared with 22 per cent for Roma men, and 5 per cent and 2 per cent respectively among women and men in the majority community.²⁴ In Albania, one quarter of Roma women are illiterate – more than twice the rate for men. Roma women in Albania have spent an average of 5.5 years in school, as compared with 8 years for men, and almost one third of primary-school-age girls from those communities do not take part in education, as against 19 per cent of boys.²⁵

¹⁶ 'Needs Assessment Study for the Roma Education Fund', Background paper, Bulgaria, 2004, p.15. Save the Children, 'Country Brief 2004/5', Save the Children, Serbia.

¹⁷ UNICEF, *Breaking the cycle of exclusion*, 2007.

¹⁸ Ivanov A., *At Risk: Roma and the displaced in South-East Europe*, UNDP Regional Bureau for Europe and the CIS, June 2006.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ferenc Babusik, 'A szegénység csapdájában', Research Report, Budapest, 2004.

²¹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Learning for Tomorrow's World: First results from PISA 2003*, OECD, 2004.

²² Barany, Z., *The East European Gypsies: Regime change, marginality and ethno-politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002, p. 170.

²³ O'Higgins, N. and Ivanov, A., 'Education and Employment Opportunities for the Roma', *Comparative Economic Studies*, 2006, 48:6–19, <www.palgrave-journals.com/ces>.

²⁴ Ivanov, A., *At Risk*.

²⁵ UNICEF, *Breaking the cycle of exclusion*, 2007.



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CAUSES OF POOR EDUCATIONAL OUTCOMES

Lack of quality early childhood education services

The low educational achievement among Roma can in large part be attributed to poor quality or non-existent institutions and support for the development, care and education of very young children. A 2009 UNICEF report notes, "Roma young children bear a triple burden. First, they are subject to the stigma and discrimination that are associated with poor Roma communities. Second, like other young children who are dependent and voiceless, they too are most likely to have their needs and rights overlooked as countries in Central and Eastern Europe cope with social and economic transition and sectoral reform. Third, mainstream early care and educational institutions are conventionally insensitive to the cultural and linguistic background of Roma communities; this reinforces Roma young children's exclusion from service provision, thereby deepening disparities and increasing marginalization and vulnerability."²⁶ The problems are compounded by the fact that a majority of the parents of Roma children have themselves received an inadequate education, making them less empowered to claim the right to quality education for their own children.

Since 1989, there has been widespread elimination of free kindergartens from most of the countries in CSEE. Kindergartens that remain are too expensive for most Roma families, do not have adequate space and are underfunded. When kindergarten is available, there is usually little effort to create a diverse environment in which the Roma language and culture is acknowledged, and home-based and community approaches for the youngest children and their mothers do not exist. Furthermore, as the Roma population's economic situation has deteriorated since 1989, access to prenatal care and health services for infants and toddlers has also

²⁶ Grover, Deepa and Elena Yanakieva, *Starting at the Beginning: The meaningful inclusion of Roma children in early childhood development services*, UNICEF, Geneva, 2009.

diminished. However, the Roma communities are largely excluded from the early childhood development education and care services that do exist in the region. This lack of provision contributes to a lack of readiness for school, which in turn serves to impact negatively on children's capacity to benefit from primary education. Even where such services do exist, they are often fragmented, with services for children under 3 years old separated from services for 3 to 5 years olds, resulting in a lack of continuity for families, patchy or absent services, inconsistency in quality and little input from the parents.²⁷

Lack of birth registration

Many Roma children, particularly those in the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, are not registered at birth.²⁸ The reasons are many: there is a widespread mistrust of state institutions, many hospitals are not welcoming, mothers are not insured and ambulances will not drive into Roma communities in some areas. As a result, many Romani women do not give birth in hospitals, increasing the risk that their child will not be registered. Where Roma have wed before the legal age of marriage, young mothers may be reluctant to present themselves in hospitals or register their children.²⁹ In other cases, young parents may simply be unaware of the requirement to register their child, or they may be unregistered themselves, fear hostility from authorities when doing so, or be inhibited by their lack of literacy, unfamiliarity with the language in which the forms are written, and the costs of registration.

The Committee on the Rights of the Child has on many occasions drawn attention to the low level of birth registration in Roma communities, for which the consequences can be significant.³⁰ The lack of official identity papers for some Roma children renders them all but invisible in many municipalities.³¹ It can result in being denied citizenship, which closes the door, for example, to getting a passport, an identity card or to being able to vote. Furthermore, without a birth certificate, children have no guaranteed protection under state legislation relating to child labour, early marriage or commercial sexual exploitation. In emergency or conflict situations, unregistered children are less likely to be able to be traced, reunified with families and provided with appropriate protection. They can be denied access to a range of services such as education, health care and social protection. If the Roma child does not show up on the official identity roster at the time they are due to begin compulsory education, it is more likely they will not enrol or start on time. The lack of birth registration and identity papers among the Roma lowers school enrolment rates, hinders the achievement of universal coverage and keeps Roma children from realizing their right to education.

Poverty and social exclusion

Many Roma children live in conditions of poverty that create barriers to access. With restricted household incomes, many families cannot afford the associated costs of attending school. It has become increasingly common for children to abandon their education to help with economic activities.³² Roma boys tend to operate in the informal sector, while girls stay home to attend to children and chores.³³ In other cases, children may need to leave school because the family migrates for work, or because they are homeless.

²⁷ Bennett, J., 'Starting Strong', *Journal of Early Childhood Research*, 2003, vol. 1, no. 1, pp. 21–48.

²⁸ European Roma Rights Centre, *Personal Documents and Threats to the Exercise of Fundamental Rights among Roma in the former Yugoslavia*, European Roma Rights Centre, 2004, <<http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=1685>>.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Hodgkin, R. and P. Newell, *Implementation Handbook on the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF, New York, 2007. Miller, M., 'Nationality and the child: Birth registration, statelessness and other repercussions', Paper prepared for Council of Europe, Third European Conference on Nationality, Strasbourg, 2004.

³¹ UNICEF, *Breaking the cycle of exclusion*, 2007.

³² According to a recent investigation in SEE, a large proportion of human trafficking victims are Roma. See Dottridge, M., 'Action to prevent child trafficking in South-Eastern Europe: A preliminary assessment', UNICEF/Terre des Hommes, Switzerland, 2006.

³³ Burnett, Nicholas et al., 'Needs Assessment: Summary report' (version 2005), Background document prepared for the Roma Education Fund Donors' Conference, Paris, December 2–3, 2004, Roma Education Fund, p. 12. Roma

Other barriers, such as living in remote, isolated and crowded Roma settlements, also impede access to quality education. Crowded settings and the lack of amenities deter the acquisition of basic hygiene habits and hinder the completion of homework. Parents often lack the capacity to help their children with homework, and have limited understanding of the environment and support that their children need to study. In some cases, especially for girls, cultural and social pressures from within Roma communities hinder access. For some Roma women, early marriage and pregnancy reduce their opportunities for education. Additional characteristics, such as the scarcity of books or lack of adequate lighting and table space in the home, linguistic barriers, and a lack of academic support outside of school make it hard for Roma children to fit into the school structure. This is especially the case in the absence of preschool. The inflexibility of school systems to accommodate these circumstances exacerbates these barriers and compounds the children's exclusion. Moreover, schools that do not consider the child and their needs as a whole may overlook socio-economic and nutritional issues, such as the fact that many Roma children go to school hungry. Clearly, students who are hungry or sick do not learn and develop as effectively.

The disadvantaged status and marginalization of many parents within the Roma community means they not only lack resources to access adequate nutrition and health care, but many may also lack the basic education and knowledge of fundamental health and nutritional principles necessary to help facilitate their children's development and transition to regular primary school.

Segregation

The segregation of Roma children in education takes three key forms in CSEE:

Segregation between schools. Most Roma students attend Roma-majority schools that exist in predominantly Roma areas. Ghettoization, changing demographics and non-Roma students pulling out of schools where the proportion of Roma students is rising result in de facto segregation of entire schools. For example, residential segregation is common in Bulgaria, with ethnically Roma schools accommodating 70 per cent of Roma pupils in the country.³⁴ Schools that have a majority Roma student body often have substandard facilities and curricula. Teachers are not trained to teach students who may be of a different culture, which contributes to prejudice and ill-informed views as to the capacity and willingness of Roma children to learn, leading to low academic expectations.

Segregation within schools. Even where schools are more heterogeneous, Roma students are often separated from the majority by being placed into remedial classes. They may be segregated in classrooms by being put into specific areas of the class, or into entirely separate classes. In 2002 in Hungary, there were 1,230 classes where Roma pupils constituted from half to 74 per cent of the students; 740 classes where their share was 75 to 99 per cent, and 700 all-Roma classes.³⁵ In many cases, in-school segregation results in Roma children being placed into more rundown settings that are a part of the same school. They are often taught a remedial curriculum and, as in the segregated schools, teachers lack training, can be biased against Roma students and have lower expectations of them. In addition, these children often face stigmatization and hostility from the majority students. The results are higher drop-out rates, poorer academic achievement and the overall acquisition of a substandard education that does nothing to help prepare them for inclusion into society as adults. Segregation can also happen as an unintended consequence of catch-up classes or educational centres that risk becoming parallel educational systems.

Segregation into special schools. In many CSEE countries, Roma children are disproportionately streamed into special schools. Available data and anecdotal evidence indicates that the remedial special schools function as a de facto substandard parallel system of education for Roma children.³⁶ This phenomenon is justified in terms of the 'socialization defects in the family' and to insufficient kindergarten attendance among Roma, leading to the children

³⁴ European Roma Rights Centre, *Stigmata: Segregated schooling of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe*, European Roma Rights Centre, Budapest, 2004.

³⁵ The Gypsies/The Roma in Hungarian Society, Teleki László Foundation, Budapest, 2002, <<http://mek.oszk.hu/06000/06025/06025.pdf>>.

³⁶ European Roma Rights Centre, *Stigmata*.

being socio-culturally disadvantaged and, as a consequence, unable to study at the same speed with other children. It is therefore argued that they require the use of special pedagogical tools and methods within a special school or a remedial class. These negative assessments are, in part, a consequence of unfair entry testing when children start regular primary school.³⁷ Superficial examinations and partial examiners, compounded by linguistically and culturally insensitive tests, can and do serve to distort evaluation scores. In other cases, instructors, who mistake ethnic, linguistic and behavioural patterns for learning disabilities, earmark Roma children for special schools. Once in a special school, students do not receive an education of a standard equal to regular schools.³⁸ For example, while regular school students in the Czech Republic learn reading comprehension, the entire Czech alphabet and counting to 20 in the first grade, special school students are not expected to acquire this knowledge until the third and fourth grade. Furthermore, once in a special school, the chances of a transfer to the mainstream are virtually non-existent.

Some Roma parents prefer to enrol their children in special schools.³⁹ These Roma families feel that segregated schools offer the opportunity for their children to be educated with their Roma peers, provide additional support in the form of food and materials, are better known to their communities, are located nearby, safer for their children and the teachers and staff are more accommodating and understanding of Roma. Some parents may also explicitly request the transfer of their children to a special school in order to be able to receive the allowances available for children with disabilities. Desegregation, where it has been attempted, has frequently faced resistance from both the majority communities and the staff of special schools. The lack of willingness and preparedness of regular schools to integrate children with special needs is also a barrier to ending these practices of segregation.

School and classroom environment

Almost all aspects necessary for quality education tend to be missing for Roma students. The cumulative impact of this leaves Roma children vulnerable and unsupported within the education system.

Teaching quality and methods. Undifferentiated and child-unfriendly teaching methods are common across the region. Such teaching glosses over variations in abilities and skills that stem from differing cultural backgrounds, making it impossible to accommodate the needs and socialization of most Roma children. In residentially segregated and special schools, the quality of education is worse. Teaching in a Roma-dominated or special school is a low-prestige job, which is perceived as both more demanding and less satisfying than teaching in the mainstream. Most teachers do not regard this kind of work as a challenge, and they are often ill-equipped to handle it.⁴⁰ The proportion of teachers having no degree at all is much higher in special schools and in special classes than elsewhere. Unqualified teachers can be found throughout the school system in CSEE and schools with a majority of Roma children have been found to be more likely to contain a higher percentage of unqualified instructors.⁴¹ Research findings in Hungary in 2002, for example, showed that in those schools where over 75 per cent of pupils were Roma, an average of 30.8 per cent of teachers were unskilled; at schools with less than 25 per cent Roma students, an average of 17.4 per cent of teachers were unskilled.⁴² These teachers do not have the proper multicultural training, materials or support to effectively deal with diverse classrooms. There is also a dearth of Roma teachers who have insight into the specific needs of Roma students.

Language. Many Roma children face huge challenges in school because the language of instruction is not in their first language. This can and does place them at a significant disadvantage in comparison with other children. Even if Roma children speak the majority language, gaps in communication can occur, since social

³⁷ Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*, Volume II, Open Society Institute, Budapest, 2007.

³⁸ European Roma Rights Centre, *Stigmata*.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*.

⁴¹ Surdu, Mihai, *Desegregating Roma Schools: A cost-benefit analysis*, International Policy Fellowship Programme of the Open Society Institute, Budapest. p. 13.

⁴² Liskó, Ilona, 'Roma students in secondary education', *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2002/11, pp. 17–40.

context and culture directly influence language and speech. Roma students also have to learn in a school that is steeped in the majority culture, which they may experience as an alien and often hostile environment.

School environment. The infrastructure of special schools is often of the same substandard quality as schools that are residentially segregated. In Hungary, the majority of special schools are in buildings in need of repair, lack space, equipment and supplies, and have shortages of qualified staff.⁴³ Roma-majority schools are also often neglected in terms of infrastructure, or built near polluted areas, and sometimes are without basic sanitation and facilities, which negatively affects the health of the children.

Curricula. Most national curricula remain monocultural and non-inclusive, with limited mention of Roma history and culture. They render Roma children invisible, ignoring their interests and individual skills, making it harder for these children to relate to the material. Curricula also mostly overlook the fact that many Roma children speak primarily Romani; bilingual learning is mostly absent.

Prejudice and hostility. Negative assumptions about the intellectual inferiority of Roma children are widespread across the region.⁴⁴ Stereotypes held by teachers lower their expectations and inspire weaker instruction. For example, 47 per cent of teachers in Slovakia believed that Roma children could not succeed in school, and 88 per cent believed that Roma children are less capable than their non-Romani peers.⁴⁵ In a survey conducted by the European Roma Rights Centre, children testified that teachers systematically ignore them in the educational process.⁴⁶ Verbal and physical castigation of Roma classmates by majority students is not uncommon. According to a survey of Hungarian schoolteachers, Roma are the least preferred students out of all minorities.⁴⁷ Under these conditions, it is not surprising that Roma children suffer from lower self-esteem, academic performance, enrolment and retention rates, and a poorer ability to transition between levels of education. Many Roma parents feel reluctant to send their children to school, perceiving it as a hostile place that offers little of value for their children, particularly as the high unemployment rates among their communities serve as a disincentive to the need for formal qualifications.

Education Financing

Both the level and manner of financing education can be deliberately or de facto discriminatory, exclusionary and unfair. Many states in CSEE under-fund public education and have increasingly shifted educational costs from the state to individuals.⁴⁸ This disproportionately affects the poorest regions and most excluded populations, including the Roma. While basic education is nominally free in the region, fiscal reform measures have brought the introduction of official and unofficial charges. Rising costs, combined with the expense of clothes, food and travel deter parents from sending their children to school; even if pupils are able to learn, incidental fees, such as extra-curricular lessons and excursions, limit their participation. Additionally, in most countries of CSEE, the elimination of the provision of free kindergartens is now an increasing financial barrier to education.

In some instances, funding structures developed at the central level become distorted when implemented at the local level. This was the case in Hungary prior to 2007, where government payments to schools for disadvantaged pupils actually created a perverse incentive for segregation (for more on this, see sidebar, 'Competitive funding, Education Ltd. and the National Educational Integration Network (OOIH)').

⁴³ Cited in United Nations Children's Fund, 'Cooperation Between UNICEF and REF: Some reasons and approaches', UNICEF, Geneva, 2007, p. 8.

⁴⁴ Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*.

⁴⁵ Zelina, M., et al., eds., 'Vzdelavanie romov', SPN, 2002, pp. 44–61.

⁴⁶ Open Society Institute, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*.

⁴⁷ Bordács, M., 'A pedagógusok elítéltelessége a Roma gyerekeket is tanító pedagógusok körében', *Új Pedagógiai Szemle*, 2, 2001, <<http://www.oki.hu/cikk.asp?Kod=2001-02-ta-bordacs-pedagogusok.html>>.

⁴⁸ UNICEF, *Breaking the cycle of exclusion*, 2007, p. 45.

Levels of government action

In 2005, following a high-level conference on 'Roma in an expanding Europe', nine countries in CSEE signed the Declaration of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. There are now 12 participating countries. The Decade brings together governments, inter-governmental and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and Roma civil society to combat the poverty, social exclusion and discrimination suffered by the Roma. The aims of the Decade are to accelerate progress toward improving the welfare of Roma by including them in the decision-making process, and to review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way. The focus areas of the Decade are education, health, housing and employment. National action plans were drawn up in each country to map out the initiatives, legislation, policy and actions to reach the goals under each of these priority areas. An International Steering Committee (ISC) made up of donors, international organizations, government representatives and Roma NGOs guides the planning for the Decade. The participating countries have in place Decade Action Plans and have established Decade coordination offices.⁴⁹

In spite of these commitments, the Decade offices tend to be poorly integrated within government ministries and do not have the political leverage or staffing to set agendas and push for the implementation of policies. Furthermore, adopted Decade Action Plans are not sufficiently used to inform government decision-making and policy planning, and programmes that are being run continue to be insufficiently tracked or monitored. Governments across the region overwhelmingly fail to prioritize and consider the specific needs of Roma for inclusion into the educational system, and appropriate platforms and mechanisms for Roma communities to voice their concerns and influence decisions are still largely missing. Even when measures and policies have been drafted to improve Roma education, there has been a lack of political will to ensure their implementation. The *2007 Decade Watch Update* stated that although it has been reported that there are "increasing signs of enhanced and more systematic attention to Roma inclusion across most countries, integrated inclusion policies with a focus on achieving and demonstrating results remain a distant goal."⁵⁰ In fact, most governments think about Roma inclusion in terms of projects and sporadic measures but not in terms of programmes or integrated policies that would address systemic issues, such as discrimination.⁵¹ Regular monitoring and evaluations of initiatives to address education for Roma children also remain inadequate.

Weak legislation continues to be a problem. At the national level, not all EU countries have specific anti-discrimination laws on education,⁵² and the implementation of directives and legislation remains weak. The legislative environments in non-EU countries, specifically those in SEE, include constitutions that declare non-discrimination as a right. But more comprehensive provisions that protect against all forms of discrimination – from racial to gender, in employment and education, to name a few areas – or which include means for compensation, are mostly lacking in this region.⁵³

The problem of access to education for Roma is compounded by decentralization. While decentralization can often be a positive development, allowing for adjustments to policy and initiatives according to local needs and priorities, it has been characterized in some countries in the region by poor implementation, which runs counter to the objectives established at a national level. The misuse of per capita funding arrangements in Hungary is an illustration of inappropriate local application of a national policy. In Romania, although County School Inspectorates were set up to make sure schools were upholding the right to inclusive education for Roma children, their lack of training and understanding of the issues resulted in the continued practice of in-school segregation.⁵⁴

⁴⁹ Decade Watch, *Decade Watch: Roma activists assess the progress of the decade of Roma Inclusion, 2005-2006*, Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, Hungary, 2007, p. 18.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p17.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, p 27.

⁵⁴ Editorial Team European Roma Rights Centre, 'The prohibition of discrimination and segregation in education under domestic law', *Research Papers*, European Roma Rights Center, Issue 3, 2007, pp. 15–24, <<http://www.ceeol.com/aspx/getdocument.aspx?logid=5&id=54262842-60a8-48f8-8dd8-bbc98a81334f>>.



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A HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION

All governments in the region have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), a holistic human rights treaty addressing the social, economic, cultural, civil, political and protection rights of children. The CRC emphasizes both the right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity, and the broad aims of education in terms of promoting the fullest possible development of the child. The CRC also affirms the obligation of governments to assure the realization of all rights to every child without discrimination on any ground. This obligation clearly extends to education. In addition, every state has ratified the Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, which obligates governments to ensure that they do not engage in any act of discrimination on grounds of race or ethnicity, and also requires them to take proactive measures, including legislation, to prohibit racial discrimination.⁵⁵ This obligation has been further elaborated by the Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, the international body responsible for overseeing governments' compliance with the Convention, in a General Comment that sets out the need to introduce specific legislation, policies and programmes to ensure the equal right of Roma children to education.⁵⁶

Ensuring the equal right of all Roma children to education necessitates an approach based on a holistic understanding of the CRC. The Committee on the Rights of the Child has identified four rights that must also be understood as general principles to be applied in the realization of all other rights: non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the optimum development of the child and the right of the child to be heard and taken seriously in accordance with age and maturity.⁵⁷ These principles need to underpin all actions to promote the right of Roma children to education. In addition, it is necessary to take into account all other relevant rights. For example, many Roma children will continue to be denied access to education unless measures are taken to address their standard of living, access to sanitation and hygiene, and affordable transport. Many Roma children will fail educationally unless measures are taken to provide access to early education, tackle prejudice and discrimination, and provide protection from bullying and violence. Facilitating universal access to schools is only one part of guaranteeing the right to education, and on its own does not ensure that it will be fulfilled. The barriers are complex, especially for marginalized and disadvantaged populations such as the Roma.

PRINCIPLES UNDERPINNING A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO EDUCATION

A rights-based approach to education is informed by seven basic principles of human rights:

- 1. Universality and inalienability:** Human rights are universal and inalienable, the entitlement of all people everywhere in the world. An individual cannot voluntarily give them up, nor can others take them away.
- 2. Indivisibility:** Human rights are indivisible. Whether civil, cultural, economic, political or social, human rights are all inherent to the dignity of every person.
- 3. Interdependence and interrelatedness:** The realization of one right often depends, wholly or in part, on the realization of others.
- 4. Equality and non-discrimination:** All individuals are equal as human beings, and by virtue of the inherent dignity of each person, are entitled to their rights without discrimination of any kind.
- 5. Participation and inclusion:** Every person and all peoples are entitled to active, free and meaningful participation in, contribution to and enjoyment of civil, economic, social, cultural and political development.
- 6. Empowerment:** Empowerment is the process by which the capabilities of people to demand and use their human rights grow. The goal is to give people the power and capabilities to claim their rights in order to change their own lives and improve their communities.

⁵⁵ UN Convention on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, Article 2.

⁵⁶ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma, 6/08/2000, CERD.

⁵⁷ Santo Pais, M., 'The Convention on the Rights of the Child', *The Manual of Human Rights Reporting*, UN Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Geneva, 1997.

7. Accountability and respect for the rule of law: A rights-based approach seeks to raise levels of accountability in the development process by identifying 'rights holders' and corresponding 'duty bearers', and to enhance the capacities of those duty bearers to meet their obligations.

OBLIGATIONS TO ENSURE THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR ROMA CHILDREN

When governments across the region ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child, they undertook to take all necessary measures to ensure that children's rights are realized. This involves action to:

Fulfil the right to education by ensuring that education is available for all children and that positive measures are taken to enable children to benefit from it, such as by tackling poverty, adapting the curricula to the needs of all children or engaging parents to enable them to provide effective support to their children's education.

Respect the right to education by avoiding any action that would serve to prevent children from accessing education, such as legislation that categorizes certain groups of children with disabilities as uneducable.

Protect the right to education by taking the necessary measures to remove the barriers to education posed by individuals or communities, such as cultural barriers to education or violence and abuse in the school environment.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR PROMOTING THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION

Taking the basic principles together with the overarching government obligations, it is possible to construct a clear conceptual framework to guide the actions necessary to ensure that Roma children are able to realize their right to education. This necessitates a focus on three interdependent and interlinked dimensions: the right to access education, the right to quality education and the right to respect within the learning environment. These dimensions reflect the importance of a holistic approach to the right to education, which requires addressing the realization of all three.

Right of access to education

Every child has the right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity. Roma children are particularly at risk of being marginalized or discriminated against in the realization of this right. Governments need to invest in the following universal and targeted measures to ensure that Roma children are equally able to realize the right to education alongside other children:

- **Provision of free, early childhood education** for at least two years for every Roma child
- **Available, accessible and inclusive basic education** for all children, supported by the necessary resources, and measures within schools to overcome discrimination and exclusion
- **Equality of opportunity** through the removal of social and economic barriers to education faced by Roma children

Right to quality education

It is not enough to provide access and equal opportunities to education. That education has to be of the highest possible quality to help every child reach their potential, and that quality should be consistent across regions, different populations, and urban and rural settings. Although there is no single definition of 'quality education', it is broadly understood to incorporate the opportunity for both effective cognitive learning, together with opportunities for creative and emotional development. In order to achieve these goals, education for Roma children must encompass:



A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum that enables Roma children to acquire the core academic curriculum and basic cognitive skills, together with essential life skills, that are fully respectful of their culture

Rights-based learning and assessment in which the role of teachers is to facilitate participatory learning rather than simply transmitting knowledge, and in which assessment processes are sensitive to the situation of Roma children, including their language and culture

A child-friendly, safe and healthy environment to enable children to reach their full potential, and which adopts a holistic approach to their education, health and well-being

Right to respect in the learning environment

Human rights are 'inalienable' – that is, they are inherent in each human being and must be respected within learning environments, as in all other contexts. In order to realize the right of Roma children to education, other key rights must also be respected, including:

Respect for identity: Recognizing the right of Roma children to their culture and language

Respect for participation rights: The right of children, including Roma children, to be involved in matters concerning their education, at the level of individual decisions affecting them, in the way that their school is run and in relation to broader education policy and delivery

Respect for integrity: Roma children have the right, both within school and when travelling to school, to be protected from all forms of violence, and also to school discipline that is respectful of their dignity



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GOVERNMENT-WIDE STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION FOR ROMA CHILDREN

POLITICAL WILL AND GOOD GOVERNANCE

One of the most important prerequisites in realizing rights, especially those related to such global public goods as education, health, or water and sanitation, is the presence of strong in-country political will and commitment, together with mechanisms for ensuring good governance. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) defines good governance as: “The exercise of economic, political, and administrative authority to manage a country’s affairs at all levels and the means by which states promote social cohesion and integration, and ensure the well-being of their populations. It embraces all methods used to distribute power and manage public resources, and the organizations that shape government and the execution of policy. It encompasses the mechanisms, processes and institutions, through which citizens and groups articulate their interests, exercise their legal rights, meet their obligations and resolve their differences.”⁵⁸ Put simply, governments need to be accountable, transparent, ensure access to justice and the rule of law, and enlist stakeholder participation.

All these conditions are of particular importance in ensuring that the rights of Roma children, a group particularly vulnerable to exclusion, prejudice and marginalization, are adequately protected. The Roma community not only needs legislation and policies to establish the equal right to education and remove the barriers that prevent children from realizing that right, they also need access to information about how those laws and policies are being implemented, as well as how and where money is being spent on their implementation, together with mechanisms for seeking redress when rights are violated or commitments not upheld. Without all these systems in place, it will not be possible to challenge the deeply embedded discrimination and injustice experienced by Roma children in seeking to exercise their right to education. In the context of achieving this goal, recognition of these principles of good governance need to be made across all relevant ministries, and at all levels of government.

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURES

While the primary responsibility for the provision of education for Roma children rests with education ministries, this cannot be achieved without an overarching framework of mechanisms in place across government as a whole. Where possible, a comprehensive national action plan needs to be put in place that commits governments to the necessary structures, laws, policies, and partnerships, which are not only transparent and accountable, but also backed up by appropriate levels of financing. It is not sufficient for the future of this marginalized and excluded group of citizens to be dependent on short-term projects and programmes that will never have the necessary impact on the lives of all Roma children. A comprehensive and intersectoral approach to achieving the right to education for Roma children, including early childhood development and education, has implications for government structures at three levels:

1. Across ministries
2. Within the education ministry
3. Between national and local government

⁵⁸ United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, et al., *Access to Basic Service for the Poor: The importance of good governance*, Asia-Pacific MDG Study Series, UNESCAP, Bangkok, 2007, <<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/publications/MDG-access2basic-service/MDG-access-to-basic-services.pdf>>.

Cross-ministerial strategies

Action is needed across a number of government ministries in order to remove the many barriers that impede the right to education. For example:

- Finance ministries have responsibilities to ensure that budgets are allocated to implement the strategy to realize the right to education. Traditionally, finance ministries have not been involved in the financing of Roma education in any meaningful way. However, without their cooperation, systemic changes are difficult to achieve. Finance ministries also need to be concerned with the quality of education that is being funded.
- Ministries of justice and home affairs have responsibility for implementing laws and proactive policies to tackle prejudice, xenophobia and lack of registration.
- If Roma children are to be able to arrive at school adequately prepared, they need access to improved housing, water and sanitation facilities in many of the settlements in which they live.
- Ministries of social welfare need to establish appropriate social protection policies and benefits to encourage and enable Roma families to meet the associated costs of education.
- Ministries of health need to coordinate, for example, maternal and prenatal health services with early childhood education services.
- Given the fear of prejudice, bullying and aggression when attending school experienced by many children and their families, ministries responsible for child protection need to be involved to explore approaches to tackling vulnerability to violence.
- Ministries of broadcasting and communication need to play a part in challenging xenophobia and promoting tolerance and inclusion.

Overall, ministries need to be aligned in their understanding of the commitment to Roma education in order to achieve an integrated and holistic approach where they are working collaboratively towards a shared agenda. This would reduce the fractured nature of many current services and strengthen accountability for policy-making, funding, regulation, personnel, training, certification and professional development.

Integrated education ministries

In many countries in the region, mainstream schooling and special education are managed under different administrations within the Ministry of Education. The administrations need to be integrated, with a view to bringing an end to the segregation of both Roma and children with disabilities in special education. It is not sufficient just to press for Roma children to be educated within the mainstream. Collaboration with organizations working both with and for children with disabilities would enable both constituencies to strengthen their advocacy and present a more coherent and inclusive approach to governments.

Devolved government structures

There are strong arguments to be made for devolving government responsibilities to the local level. This enables services to be adapted to local needs, and allows for greater local democracy and accountability. However, there are challenges in doing this. Consideration must be given to the need to balance, on the one hand, the establishment of a national strategy for Roma education dedicated to the right of every Roma child to education on the basis of equality of opportunity, with the value of flexibility in implementation at the local level. Devolved structures allow for significant variations in the level of service provided. Devolved structures may be more subject to pressures of local communities hostile to Roma, and may rely for implementation on officials who

lack training, awareness or commitment to Roma education. In order to ensure that local authorities are able to deliver government policies and programmes for Roma children, there must be investment in:

- Capacity-building of local officials
- Clear guidance on the frameworks necessary for local implementation of Roma education
- Dedicated budgets for investing in the necessary services and programmes
- Transparent reporting and enforcement mechanisms to ensure accountability

FINANCING

Government strategies to strengthen Roma education must be underpinned by a commitment to providing the necessary resources to enable its implementation. Article 4 of the CRC stresses that governments must undertake all appropriate measures for the implementation of the right to education to the maximum extent of available resources. This requires that there be sustained public financing of Roma education, rather than one-time measures. Governments need to move away from continued reliance on INGOs and NGOs for provision of that support. However, such investment is not only a government obligation under the CRC, but it also makes strong economic sense. In the long run, societies as a whole benefit economically from financing the universal right to education. Research has indicated that “an investment that makes one young Roma successfully complete secondary school would yield significant direct long-term benefits to the national budget.”⁵⁹ There are thus pragmatic, as well as principled, arguments for greater investment in Roma education.

Levels of investment in Roma education

According to the benchmarks used in the Education for All Fast Track Initiative, the benchmark for the education share of public budgets – defined as public recurrent spending on education as a percentage of total public recurrent discretionary spending – is 20 per cent, and primary education spending as a share of total education expenditure should be between 42 and 64 per cent, depending on the length of the cycle.⁶⁰ However, extra spending to ensure the inclusion of Roma children into the educational system in most CSEE countries will also be necessary in order to reduce the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to be effective, investment needs to be made in both demand and supply-side interventions – that is, providing incentives to encourage school participation, while also improving the quality of the education provided. Adequate and well-designed financing models with a view toward Roma inclusion are a part of supplying quality education for all.

Supply side: Investment in education infrastructure to overcome disadvantage. Roma children, who come from generations that have experienced poverty, exclusion and disadvantage, require dedicated funding beyond that of the majority population if they are to achieve equality of opportunity in education. In order to attract Roma children into schools and ensure their sustained involvement in education, governments will need to commit the resources for early childhood education, as well as universal access to basic education, training of teachers, curriculum development, improved access to schools and improved physical environments in schools, have infrastructure appropriate for the number of pupils and provide quality instruction and support for integrating Roma pupils into an ethnically-mixed school environment.

⁵⁹ Kertesi, Gabor and Gabor Kezdi, ‘Expected long-term budgetary benefits to Roma education in Hungary’, *Working Papers on the Labour Market 0605*, Institute of Economics, Hungarian Academy of Sciences, Budapest, 2006.

⁶⁰ World Bank, ‘Fast track initiative: Education for all’, World Bank, Washington, DC, 2004, annex 1, p. 15.

Demand side: Financial incentives to increase enrolment and retention. Financial incentives to encourage Roma parents to send their children to school will also need to be a part of the educational budget. This might include provision of free school meals for the poorest children, affordable or free transport and easily accessible scholarships coupled with academic support.

The pros and cons of conditional cash transfers

Stipends and conditional cash transfers (CCT) can be offered to defray the cost of school materials and other associated expenses of attending school. In many countries around the world, CCTs have been used successfully to enhance enrolment of children from poor and marginalized communities. However, such initiatives in the region have so far not been effective in achieving increased school attendance for Roma children.⁶¹ The explanation seems to lie in the extent of discrimination and segregation experienced by Roma children. This means that the challenges they face within schools constitute a greater constraint for Roma families than for impoverished majority families. Thus, in order to succeed in reducing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma, it is not enough to employ CCTs alone. These subsidies must be accompanied by supply-side measures, described above, in which the education system and schools themselves change in order to persuade Roma children to attend. Evidence to date also points to the need to consider the following measures:

- Where cash transfers are made contingent on school attendance, their level must be sufficient to cover the total costs of sending children to school. This will avoid forcing potential beneficiary families to choose between increased poverty as a result of the costs of sending children to school and increased poverty as a result of the benefits lost by not sending children to school.
- CCTs for education should make mothers the direct recipients of benefits, as mothers' inputs into spending decisions tends to bring larger investment in children's education.
- CCT programmes for education should define eligibility in terms of family income or related non-ethnic criteria, as there is considerable resistance among both Roma and non-Roma communities to government initiatives that explicitly target Roma.
- Regular evaluation of the impact of CCTs is needed to ensure that both parents and schools are complying with the conditions for their payment. There have been cases reported in which children received CCTs but did not attend school, and administrators did nothing to encourage their attendance. In effect, the cash transfers worked against the goal of improving access by reducing the hidden drop-out rate.

⁶¹ Friedman, E., E. Gallová Kriglerová, M. Herczog, and L. Surdu, 'Assessing conditional cash transfers as a tool for reducing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma', Roma Education Fund Working Paper, December 2009.

Distribution of funding to promote equality of opportunity

To make sure schools are adequately and equitably funded, allocation should be per capita according to a formula that is weighted per student. This model should be system-wide across preschool and basic education, and aim to ensure that vulnerable children receive more funding per capita, and that schools with higher percentages of Roma students receive more monetary support to implement the measures necessary for inclusive education.⁶² Higher levels of funding can also be awarded to schools that have adopted or may already be implementing action plans for equal opportunity, integration and inclusion. However, such measures need to be accompanied by guidelines and policies and proper monitoring in order to ensure that such funds are targeted appropriately towards the right to education of Roma children. Where funding is decentralized, central government needs to ensure that policies and financial structures are in place to guarantee poorer municipalities, which often have large populations of Roma, adequate funding to fulfil their obligations to provide quality education for those children.

Financial management

To be effective, programmes need to be integrated into comprehensive packages of context-specific social protection interventions and must involve partnerships including governments, non-governmental organizations, communities, the private sector and donors. Questions of sustainability, corruption in the delivery process and stigma for beneficiaries need to be addressed. It is also important that such schemes are viewed as a social contract between governments and citizens and not just as part of a donor-driven initiative to be abandoned when the project cycle ends.

Funding needs to be set aside for creating more efficient tracking of resources and outcomes in regard to improving education for Roma. Central information systems for education need to be restructured so that detailed disaggregated information is available for each student as they progress through the educational system, and also so the professional development of teachers can be assessed.

Ensuring appropriate and effective use of funds

In order to ensure that funds are used appropriately to achieve the goal of promoting education rights for Roma children, mechanisms need to be in place within existing financial structures and delivery processes to identify any misuse and corruption. Vigilance should be exercised at both central and local levels to monitor how money is spent. The allocation of funds and the financial structures for education also need to be accompanied by strict policies that promote inclusion and non-discrimination. This will be facilitated where the wider economic policies of the government are consistent with education policies committed to achieving the right of every child to education on the basis of equality of opportunity.

Budgets themselves should also be available for scrutiny. Transparency in financing is paramount in order to enable monitoring and accountability. Budgets are useful in assessing how well the State is responding in implementing education rights. Moreover, transparency in funding is also a key component – along with proper legislation, policies, enforcement, and civic participation – in combating corruption.

⁶² The World Bank has laid out a framework for when to use cash transfers: <<http://go.worldbank.org/UQEJK2J5E0>>.

Competitive funding, Educatio Ltd. and the National Educational Integration Network (OOIH)

Hungary

Competitive funding, Educatio and the National Educational Integration Network are part of an integration package whose objective is to mainstream Roma children into the regular Hungarian educational system. Educatio, and within it, the National Integration Network are programmes that support a system of financial incentives for integration. These funds are funnelled through the National Development Authority (NDA), which acts as a treasury and disburses EU funding.⁶³ The foundational piece of legislation for public education and integration is the Public Education Act (PEA), which forms the conceptual framework for this financing system. The PEA includes benchmarks to be met for funding, and a definition of the 'multiply disadvantaged' target group for integration: these are children whose parents did not progress beyond primary education and are receiving welfare benefits.⁶⁴

General funding for education in Hungary is allocated per capita from the MoE. However, the amount that schools are able to access is at a subsistence level and does not cover the extra costs associated with integration.⁶⁵ Hungary's first attempt to introduce incentives for integration was to provide per capita funding from EU funds simply based on making available extra money per disadvantaged child. Schools could apply for extra funding based on their percentage of disadvantaged students. In order to receive more funding above the level provided from the MoE, schools enrolled as many disadvantaged students as possible. These same students were thus re-segregated within schools. In reaction to this misuse – and based on the 2007 PEA – 'competitive funding' was created.⁶⁶

Competitive funding is only awarded to local governments and schools that have met certain benchmarks for integration. These benchmarks, described in the PEA, include: the development of equal opportunity action plans for integration; schools have to have the correct proportion of disadvantaged children in their classrooms; local governments have to fulfil requirements on the demarcation of school districts with a view to having ratios of multiply disadvantaged children. Accordingly, on a school level, it is mandatory to enrol children whose residency is within the new school district.⁶⁷ Application for funding requires that schools attach their results to a table of indicators known as the National Competence Assessment. This assessment is done annually.⁶⁸

The role of Educatio Ltd. and the OOIH in relation to competitive funding is to help local authorities and schools use this funding effectively and provide some central oversight. Educatio Ltd. has a pool of experts who provide professional technical assistance, coordination and guidance to schools to produce and implement their integration action plans. These experts help localities and schools meet the benchmarks for competitive funding. OOIH is headquartered within Educatio Ltd. This is a horizontal network of schools that shares information on integration. The OOIH has school regional coordinators in disadvantaged regions and includes 50 model schools running individual integration programmes. In these 50 schools, Educatio has instructed trainers in methods for integration, such as those of the StepbyStep programme. These trainers now conduct trainings in other schools in order to assist them with their integration efforts.⁶⁹

All of these measures help to ensure that the pedagogical environment as a whole is capable of delivering quality inclusive education to a diverse student body. This includes sufficient funding and oversight with the mechanisms to make certain that every teacher is ready, and that all stakeholders are part of the development and implementation of a school's integration programme.

⁶³ Based on interviews with staff at the Budapest Institute, Budapest, June 2010.

⁶⁴ European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), *ECRI Report on Hungary* (fourth monitoring cycle), European Commission against Racism and Intolerance, 24 February 2009, pp.29–30, <<http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/ecri/Country-by-country/Hungary/HUN-CbC-IV-2009-003-ENG.pdf>>.

⁶⁵ Based on interviews with staff at the Budapest Institute, Budapest, June 2010.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Based on feedback from Szilvia Pallaghy, Ministry of Education, July 2009.

⁶⁸ Keller, Judit, *Equity in Education: Country Report – Hungary*, September 2008, pp. 14.

⁶⁹ Based on interviews with staff at the Budapest Institute, Budapest, June 2010.



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TACKLING DISCRIMINATION

Legislation

Governments have an obligation to ensure the rights of every child without discrimination on any grounds, including race and ethnicity.⁷⁰ Fulfilling this obligation requires the introduction of legislation with a specific prohibition on discrimination on grounds of ethnicity, including Roma.⁷¹ Many countries have introduced such legislation during the Roma Decade. Active investment must now be made to ensure the effective implementation of the legislation. All those responsible for implementation at national and local levels will need support. This will require policies, commitment of resources, training and capacity-building, and campaigns to raise awareness of the law and how to apply it. In addition, there must be monitoring mechanisms to assess progress in implementation and enable action to be taken where it is not being respected. It is important to recognize that legislation needs to address both direct and indirect discrimination, and that the right to non-discrimination does not mean that every child must be treated the same. It is justifiable to introduce positive discrimination in the form of measures intended to enable a particular marginalized group to achieve equal rights.⁷² The Committee on the Rights of the Child has emphasized that vulnerable and disadvantaged groups of children, including Roma, may require specific actions on the part of the state to ensure that they are able to realize their rights.⁷³

Accountability and enforcement

The Roma community needs information about how to challenge breaches of legislation and where to go for help. Ombudsmen and human rights commissioners, where they exist, can play an important role, as can national and international human rights NGOs. Lawyers and judges need to be fully aware of the legislation, the obligations it places on governments and how to hold them to account through the courts. This should include knowledge of EU and international law, relevant case law and how to utilize it in order to exercise rights. There have been a number of successful cases taken to the European Court of Human Rights. The Roma community needs to have access to information about these cases, and be advised about how to pursue a claim through these mechanisms.

STRENGTHENING INFORMATION SYSTEMS

Birth registration

Every child is entitled to registration at birth, without which access to education can be impeded.⁷⁴ There must be a universal requirement to register every birth. Only through universal registration can local and national governments access accurate disaggregated data and information on all children in their locality in order to provide the necessary amount of resources, and to have access to precise enrolment patterns, drop-out rates, barriers to education and achievement rates, among other information.

Governments need to consult with representatives and NGOs from the Roma community to identify the barriers impeding registration and work towards the introduction of policies and programmes to eliminate those barriers. Measures might include, for example, ending the legal requirement that parents present their own identity

⁷⁰ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2.

⁷¹ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma, General Comments, 6/08/2000, CERD.

⁷² Human Rights Committee, General Comment No. 18: Non-discrimination, 10/11/1989, CCPR. Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, General Comment No. 20: Non-discrimination in economic, social and cultural rights (art. 2, para. 2), E/C.12/GC/20, CESCR, June 2009.

⁷³ Hodgkin, R. and P. Newell, *Implementation Handbook on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 2*, UNICEF, New York, 2007, p. 26.

⁷⁴ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 7.

papers and, until there is universal registration, removing any requirement to provide evidence of birth as a condition of enrolment in school. This may involve information campaigns about the importance of registration, simplifying the forms and the process for registration, translating the forms into Romani, following up in local communities where women do not give birth in hospital, and removing any charges associated with registration. Roma children, particularly those in remote areas, need to be proactively sought out. Both parents and Roma children can aid in mapping and assuring that less visible children are accounted for.

Data collection and disaggregation

There is a serious lack of accurate information on Roma in Central, Eastern, and South-Eastern Europe. A recent report from the Open Society Institute found that of the countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, only Bulgaria, Montenegro and Romania had data on the primary education completion rate for Roma children.⁷⁵ Where official census data does exist in these countries, it consistently underestimates the size of the Roma population and provides inadequate information about Roma participation in all spheres of life.⁷⁶ There is reluctance across the region to collect ethnically disaggregated data. Governments often justify this on grounds that EU legislation and regulations on citizen protection and privacy prohibit the collection of such information; in fact, no such prohibitions exist. EU regulations apply to the collection of personal data about individuals and not to aggregate data about groups, or to the recording of data broken down according to ethnicity. Among ethnic groups that have experienced persecution over many years, including Roma, there is also often a widespread fear of how governments may use data identifying their ethnicity. Further obstacles include a lack of any clear policies or strategies for effective data collection, poor institutional capacity, and a lack of engagement with the Roma community on the development of creative approaches to overcoming their concerns.

The consequence of the failure to collect disaggregated data is that the scale of endemic discrimination against Roma remains hidden from view, rendering it harder to introduce measures necessary to overcome exclusion from education and improve quality of life for Roma. It masks the profound disparities in both access to and outcomes from education. Without accurate data, policy and planning cannot be effective and it becomes impossible to monitor change and progress. The absence of data enables governments to avoid taking responsibility for investment in the necessary programmes for Roma education and weakens the potential for advocacy to hold them to account. However, even without detailed and accurate data, it is very clear that the right of Roma children to education is not being fulfilled by governments across the region, with only a tiny minority of Roma completing school that is of a significantly inferior quality.

⁷⁵ Open Society Institute, *No Data – No Progress: Data collection in countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015*, Open Society Institute, New York, 2010, <http://www.soros.org/initiatives/Roma/articles_publications/publications/no-data-no-progress-20100628/no-data-no-progress-20100628.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Open Society Institute, *Monitoring Education for Roma: A statistical baseline for Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe*, Open Society Institute, December 2006.

A model of effective ethnic data collection⁷⁷

In the early 1990s, the United Kingdom made policy changes in its census and data collection systems in response to the government's recognition that "very detailed statistical data are needed to implement positive action policies." The UK is now recognized as a model for how a nation can compile and manage ethnic data. The collection of data on ethnicity and religion is based on laws and regulations that govern the production of sensitive statistics, which make data collection not only possible, but mandatory. Collection is jointly supervised by the data protection authorities, the statistical institute, and agencies specializing in the protection of minorities.

The effective monitoring of inclusion and exclusion by ethnicity in the United Kingdom has been driven by requirements of the Race Relations (Amendment) Act 2000. The Data Commissioner uses the legal obligation within the Race Relations Act to derogate from the prohibition of collecting ethnic data. Though the Law on Statistics and the Data Protection Act have safeguards against the release of individual data except under certain provisions, the aim of equal treatment is specifically mentioned in the list of exemptions. The Data Protection Act and the Race Relations Act are linked by including equal treatment as a reason to waive the prohibition on collecting sensitive data. In this context, there are no further obstacles to the compilation of statistics on ethnicity or religion. In the United Kingdom, the initial and decisive condition is the Race Relations Act's explicit statement that collecting statistical data is a legal obligation.

In England's education sector, for example, data is collected on the ethnicity of pupils in government-maintained schools using a basic ethnicity classification: white, Asian, black, mixed heritage, and other, with three to five subcategories under each heading. It also allows local education authorities to choose to use an extended list of ethnicity options – such as getting a greater amount of detail regarding the country or region of birth or heritage – for local planning purposes. This allows the production of comprehensive national data on a range of attainment indicators disaggregated by ethnicity, by matching the pupil census records with the national test and examination results held in the National Pupil Database.⁷⁸ The collection and use of data disaggregated by ethnicity allows groups at risk of underachievement in certain areas to be targeted with resources and effectively designed interventions. Along with data on national test scores and permanent exclusions, schools also monitored tiered examinations, the 'gifted and talented' register, pupil withdrawals, attendance and parents' evenings.⁷⁹

This approach in the UK demonstrates that an appropriate legal framework, coupled with clear policy directives, allows the collection of ethnic data that can facilitate the development of more nuanced policies tailored to the population.

⁷⁷ Open Society Institute, *No Data – No Progress*.

⁷⁸ Department for Education and Skills, 'National curriculum assessment, GCSE and equivalent attainment and post-16 attainment by pupil characteristics in England 2005', Dept. for Education and Skills, SFR 09/2006, London, 2006, p. 5, <http://www.dfes.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000640/SFR09_2006.pdf> (accessed 21 May 2010).

⁷⁹ Department for Education and Skills, *Removing the Barriers*; Maud Blair, et al., "Making a Difference: Teaching and Learning Strategies in Successful Multi-Ethnic Schools"; Leon Tikly, et al., *Evaluation of Aiming High: African Caribbean Achievement Project*.

Advocacy is needed both to inform governments of the realities of EU law – and end inaction on disaggregated data – and to support governments in establishing the necessary systems for effective data collection. Where data collection is undertaken, it must not only comply with appropriate safeguards, including respect for privacy and confidentiality, but it must be transparent in meeting those standards if it is to address the fears within local communities. This would be helped by public awareness campaigns conducted jointly between government and Roma NGOs. Training will be needed to build capacity in data collection. In addition, governments should collaborate with Roma organizations in developing methodologies for data collection and sensitive approaches

towards informing Roma communities about its purpose, storage and usage. The wishes of Roma to identify for themselves the designation they want to be given and the group to which they want to belong must be respected.⁸⁰ In terms of scope, disaggregated data are needed on all aspects of education – enrolment, attendance, drop-out rates and attainment. These data also need to be linked to wider socio-economic benchmarks in order to build a better understanding of well-being outcomes for Roma children. It is also important that information is collected on gender. Girls within the Roma community are likely to suffer double discrimination, and only by identifying the scale and nature of this problem is it possible to introduce the policies and programmes needed to address it.

Monitoring and evaluation

Mechanisms need to be introduced to measure and monitor access, quality and respect for rights of Roma children to and within education, including impact assessments of programmes with baseline assessment and situation analysis having been done prior to their implementation. Governments need to monitor and evaluate how effective and efficient its policies are in relation to the attainment of these goals for all Roma children. This information is necessary, for example, at national level to evaluate whether legislation is appropriate and policies are effective, and at local level to assess whether local authorities are translating policies into practice. Information is also needed to identify where teachers require more training or support, and to provide local communities with evidence of the value of programmes to strengthen education, or to highlight where they are failing to meet their targets. Developing a set of national indicators for social disadvantage comparable across the country, such as the PISA assessment developed by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and EGREES, is essential for gathering the required information to assess the efficacy of financing and to ensure the proper use of funds.⁸¹ Furthermore, the findings of monitoring and evaluations need to be transparent and available to the Roma population.

When an intervention is shown to be working, governments need to take action to expand its impact. Evidence-based advocacy should be used to increase the scale of impact through, for example, scaling up, legislative and policy change, and resource allocation. When there are gaps, when goals are not being met, or policies are being misinterpreted and implemented incorrectly, action will be needed to adjust, correct, and provide the necessary technical and financial support to refocus the programme.

Learning from what works

Many innovative programmes have been developed across the region to overcome the exclusion of Roma children from education. The lessons from these programmes need to be written up, learned, shared, replicated and scaled up as widely as possible. It is not sufficient to rely on NGO initiatives operating on a small scale at a local level. Governments need to be encouraged to take responsibility for mainstreaming the emerging lessons into programmes that can impact all Roma children. In addition, there is a need for greater investment in further approaches. NGOs, other civil society agencies and the private sector can contribute to piloting different ways of working. Governments and international agencies need to invest in local and national organizations experimenting with different approaches, partnerships and structures to achieve better educational outcomes for Roma children. Such initiatives need to be monitored and evaluated and scaled up where the findings are promising.

PARTNERSHIPS AND PARTICIPATION

Governments must ensure that marginalized communities are included in decision-making and implementation processes when developing education services. NGOs and independent human rights institutions can play a key role in empowering Roma communities to claim their right to education – to be acknowledged as citizens,

⁸⁰ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma.

⁸¹ See for example, 'Part II. A set of 29 indicators on the equity of educational systems', *European Educational Research Journal*, 4(2), 33-92, <<http://dx.doi.org/10.2304/eeerj.2005.4.2.8>> (accessed 14 December 2010).

not merely consumers. In order to achieve this goal, parents and their children need access to information and support on the following:

- Realizing their legal rights, both the commitments governments have made under international law, as well as national legislation and regulations
- What services are available and how to access them
- Where and how decisions affecting their education are made
- How to advocate, lobby and influence local and national political agendas
- How to challenge violations of their rights, including local complaints procedures, courts and international mechanisms
- Using the media to challenge prejudice and xenophobia
- Accessing available research and evidence to support their effort to realize education rights

Governments must engage with Roma organizations and leaders at all levels of society.⁸² It is important that approaches to provision of education are flexible, as there is great diversity within the Roma community. Good governance, long term sustainability, as well as potential for economic growth all dictate the importance of recognizing Roma not merely as passive beneficiaries of policies, but as active stakeholders with an entitlement both to be heard and to influence decisions that affect them and the development of their communities. Decision-making should “take place at the level most appropriate for the issue (usually the lowest level possible).”⁸³ Municipalities should actively seek out the cooperation of the local Roma community and NGOs to promote local ownership of initiatives. Participation should also happen through regular stakeholder evaluations of the different interventions, policies and the general educational environment.

CAPACITY-BUILDING

Achieving the right to education for Roma children requires that all levels of government, public officials, those delivering services and other duty bearers have the capacity, commitment and resources to implement the laws, policies and programmes in place to support that goal. Governments need to invest in awareness-raising to challenge xenophobia and prejudice, training to inform all relevant duty bearers of their responsibilities under the law and to provide an understanding of the rights of children. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination emphasizes that governments must “take the necessary measures to initiate projects to develop the political culture and educate the population as a whole in a spirit of non-discrimination, respect for others and tolerance, in particular concerning Roma.”⁸⁴

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⁸² Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma.

⁸³ UN Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific, UNDP, Asia Development Bank, *Access to Basic Services for the Poor: The importance of good governance*, 2007 <<http://www.unescap.org/pdd/publications/MDG-access2basic-service/MDG-access-to-basic-services.pdf>> (accessed 14 December 2010).

⁸⁴ Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, General Recommendation No. 27: Discrimination against Roma.



ESTABLISHING THE NECESSARY EDUCATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES

Within the framework of the broader government strategies to create a positive environment for the right of Roma children to education, specific targeted policies and strategies are also needed to address access to, availability and quality of education, and to ensure that their human rights are respected within that educational environment.

THE RIGHT TO ACCESS EDUCATION

The right to education on the basis of equality of opportunity imposes obligations on States to establish the legislative and policy framework, together with sufficient resources, to ensure access for every Roma child. Achieving this goal will necessitate the following:

Early childhood development services

Although the Convention on the Rights of the Child does not require governments to provide early childhood education, the Committee on the Rights of the Child strongly encourages them to do so, recognizing that learning and development starts from the very beginning of life.⁸⁵ The convention calls on governments to ensure that young children have access to programmes of health, care and education designed to promote their well-being, and stresses that the right to optimum development implies the right to education during early childhood, with systematic and quality family involvement. Early childhood development and education, from conception to primary school age, is important to the overall achievement of the full inclusion of Roma into society, and to ensure the equal realization of their rights. As a marginalized and vulnerable population, they are at greatest risk of not having pre- and post-natal and early childhood needs met. Investment in early childhood development and education should be a priority, as this is the stage of life where the most rapid development occurs and is the basis for future learning.

Early childhood development is widely recognized as the foundational stage to developing effective life skills, to socialization and education and to access and inclusion into the regular educational system.⁸⁶ An accumulating body of evidence now exists to indicate that early childhood interventions to remedy disadvantage are more effective than interventions that come later in life. The first few years of a child's life are the most critical period of human development, and early disadvantage, if left untouched, is shown to lead to academic and social difficulties in later years. Indeed, investing in disadvantaged young children is a public policy initiative that simultaneously promotes fairness and social justice for the families involved, while enhancing productivity in the economy and in society at large.⁸⁷

The OECD *Starting Strong* report makes it clear that investment in early childhood services impacts positively on both educational returns and in the social, economic and labour market spheres.⁸⁸ Quality services will alleviate social disadvantage and inequality, and further, it enhances social and economic outcomes by reducing gaps in school achievement, breaking the poverty cycle, improving long-term health and employment options, reducing reliance on social services and avoiding criminality. The findings of research on the benefits of early childhood education for vulnerable and marginalized populations have been summarized by Professor Jeanne Brooks-Gunn of Columbia University: "First, high quality centre-based programmes enhance vulnerable children's school-related achievement and behaviour. Second, these effects are strongest for poor children and for children whose parents have little education. Third, these positive benefits continue into the late elementary school and high school years, although effects are smaller than they were at the beginning of elementary school. Fourth,

⁸⁵ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No. 7: Implementing child rights in early childhood, CRC/C/GC/7, November 2005.

⁸⁶ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, 'Strong foundations: Early childhood care and education', *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2007*, UNESCO, Paris, 2007.

⁸⁷ Heckman, James J., 'Skill Formation and the Economics of Investing in Disadvantaged Children', *Science*, Vol. 312, 30 June 2006.

⁸⁸ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, *Starting Strong II: Early childhood education and care*, OECD, Paris, 2006.

programmes that are continued into elementary school and that offer high 'doses' of early intervention have the most sustained long-term effects."⁸⁹ The strategies found to be most effective in enriching the early years of disadvantaged children are through high quality preschool centres available on a voluntary basis, coupled with home visitation programmes.⁹⁰

Governments need to consider introducing:

A commitment to two years of free preschool education for at least 80 per cent of Roma children by 2012. The segregated location of many Roma communities militates against inclusive early childhood educational environments, as they would involve sending very young children long distances to unfamiliar environments and restrict the active involvement of parents. In remote areas, where there are no local preschools, consideration could be given to temporary measures such as:

- Satellite or mobile preschools run close to communities
- Non-formal kindergartens in Roma settlements
- Community-based or family-based preschool education for children under 4 years old
- Preschool teachers visiting families
- Preschool provision accompanied by literacy courses for parents
- Supported home learning environments by providing books for families, family literacy programmes, and TV/ radio programmes that reach communities⁹¹

However, these measures should not be allowed to develop into permanent lower quality parallel educational systems. Preparation for early childhood education school should be organized according to community preferences, funded at the same level as non-settlement options, and all preschools (state-funded, whether in or out of settlements) should be open to Roma and non-Roma and seek diverse populations. It is essential to ensure training of staff working with the children, either Roma or non-Roma, in order to provide quality education and to ensure links and regular visits to the formal preschools in the vicinity.

Support and education for mothers. Good parenting and the well-being and education of mothers is an important dimension of effective early childhood education. Investment is needed in programmes designed to strengthen mothers' own literacy and capacities to support their children's readiness for school.

Holistic service approaches. Early childhood educational programmes cannot alone address the issues of poverty and institutional discrimination. They need to be comprehensive and linked with other services. For example, for the youngest children up to 4 years, there should be an emphasis on screening, health, nutrition and capacity-building of parents; for children 4 to 7 years, more attention needs to be paid to their transition to primary school. Cooperation is needed to ensure that health and education ministries collaborate to provide effective and holistic services for young children, including wider community-based services.

Building demand. Governments need to undertake awareness-raising programmes on the value of early childhood education, its potential to facilitate the successful transition of children into primary school, as well as the importance of play in children's development, in order to strengthen demand from Roma communities.

⁸⁹ Brooks-Gunn, Jeanne, 'Do You Believe In Magic? What we can expect from early childhood intervention programs', *Social Policy Report*, vol. XVII, no. 1, 2003, p. 1.

⁹⁰ Heckman, J. and D. Masterov, 'The productivity argument for investing in young children', *Early Childhood Research Collaborative*, University of Minnesota, 2006.

⁹¹ 'The Right to Education for Every Child: Removing barriers and fostering inclusion for Roma children', Conference Outcome Document, International conference organized under the Serbian Presidency of the Roma Decade, Belgrade, 2–3 June 2009.

Creating opportunities for Roma parents to visit early childhood educational facilities, play an active role in their design and get involved as support workers will all help in building understanding of and confidence in early childhood services. Parents need to be reassured that the culture and environment within preschool education is receptive to the Roma community and that their children will not experience discrimination. In addition, it is important to create mechanisms through which parents can raise concerns, talk to staff members and lodge complaints where they feel their child has been treated inappropriately.



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Roma Education Initiative in Slovakia: Desegregation of Roma Children through Education—Combating Social Exclusion. *Jarovnice-Karice Roma Settlement, Slovakia*

This project, employing a strong community-based approach, was implemented under the Roma Education Initiative (REI) from 2003 to 2005, with the objective of the long-term integration and improvement of the quality of education for Roma children. It included a home-based preschool programme run by mothers of the participant children, which has been documented as being particularly successful.

In order to influence long-term integration –and considering the fact that parents of the Roma children in Jarovnice-Karice were afraid to transfer their children into mainstream primary schools – the strategy of the project lay in providing quality preschool education and changing local attitudes. To a large extent, this included utilizing the comprehensive educational programmes of StepbyStep, and making central the participation of families and the Roma community. The improvement of enrolment and quality of education were considered connected in this programme.⁹²

Community participation was integral to the initiative, as was the inclusion of a wide array of stakeholders. During the implementation of REI in Jarovnice-Karice, the local community centre “created an operational framework through different partners and different programmes/activities to provide dialogue and communication on the local, national, and international levels. It did so by raising the capacity of the Roma community. Its objectives were to undertake a comprehensive community approach, emphasizing the local needs of the Jarovnice-Karice settlement.”⁹³ The centre’s programming strove to improve inter-ethnic relations and to be a support centre and a source for lifelong learning for Roma parents and their children. Programmes for mothers were offered at the community centre to improve parenting and provide support, such as through family planning counselling and the ‘Mother and Children’s Club’. There were also community-support activities, which included everything from vocational and literacy training to health programmes and the especially important community development training that helped to facilitate empowerment and participation in decision-making around education. Additionally, to support integration, local Roma NGOs helped to organize civic activities in which some non-Roma villagers participated.⁹⁴

At the school level, improvements in early childhood education were brought about with a mixture of methods aligned with the rights-based approach. StepbyStep was employed in all three classes of the state kindergarten in Jarovnice. One of these classes was a Roma-only class. In order to facilitate integration, daily activities were organized to bring Roma and non-Roma students together. The kindergarten also relied heavily on Roma teaching assistants.⁹⁵ The pedagogical approach in these classes was modified to be child-centred and multi-lingual. But the most recognized component of the effort around preschool education in Jarovnice was the home-based preschool programme. This component required that the mothers participate as the teachers. Once a week, a training was conducted at the community centre for participant mothers to review the lesson to be taught to the children that week. The rest of the days of the week, at designated homes, the mothers would hold classes for the participant children. Strong involvement of the parents in this way not only served to extend the scope of educational provision for the children, but also benefited the parents’ own personal self-improvement.

The approach of the REI in Slovakia at large sought to integrate work across different levels of the educational system. This required the cooperation and the creation of good will among many different stakeholders. The initiative involved multi-level partnering and cooperation, including civic engagement through Roma NGOs, the involvement of parents, the community, teachers, school administrators and even the local pastoral centre.

⁹² United Nations Children’s Fund, *Toward Roma Inclusion: A Review of Roma Education Initiatives in Central and South-Eastern Europe*, UNICEF Regional Office for Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States, Geneva, 2009, p. 41.

⁹³ Stake, Robert E., *Multiple Case Study Analysis*, Guilford Publications, 2005, p. 201.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 202-203.

⁹⁵ UNICEF, *Toward Roma Inclusion*, p. 42.

Ensuring access to and availability of education

As outlined earlier, States have obligations to establish the legislative and policy framework, together with sufficient resources, to fulfil the right to education for every Roma child. As a starting point, governments need to commit to a goal of achieving universal access to basic education for every child, including Roma children. However, in order to overcome the barriers facing Roma children, the following additional measures are needed.

Ending segregation and promoting inclusion

Inclusion in both the educational system and in society as a whole is integral to improving the conditions and opportunities afforded to Roma. As an overarching goal, authorities should strive for balanced and diverse classrooms and schools. A holistic policy framework facilitating desegregation and promoting inclusion and diversity needs to be created. Effective inclusion needs to go far beyond simply changing the ratios of children in schools. A move towards inclusion is not simply a technical or organizational change, but involves a cultural and philosophical change of approach based on a commitment to respect for every child, and recognition of the obligations of the education system to adapt to accommodate and address their needs. Governments need to provide a clear definition of inclusion and the specific objectives it is seeking to achieve, backed up by concrete strategies for its attainment.

General measures to end segregation. Desegregation is an important dimension of the move towards inclusion; it brings an end to the physical separation of children, and contributes to ensuring that every child has access to the same form of schools. Governments first need to recognize segregation as a problem, and establish a long-term commitment to move towards inclusive education. This might entail:

- Action plans to promote inclusion, based on in-depth analyses of the factors contributing to segregation, with appropriate financial, legal and administrative steps toward desegregation.⁹⁶
- Governments have to be committed to providing the extra funding needed for inclusive quality education for Roma children.
- Consideration of legislation committing to the gradual elimination of segregated education and the introduction of an inclusive system. Legislation is also needed to prohibit segregation of children on the basis of ethnicity.
- National information and monitoring systems to track school placements in the future to ensure that they sustain inclusive practice. Monitoring and evaluation of programmes to promote inclusion should also be undertaken. The findings of such research and data will build a better understanding of the strategies that work most effectively and can be replicated. It will also highlight those initiatives that fail, providing vital insights to help target policies and investment more efficiently. Consideration could be given to developing a set of indicators for monitoring segregation, taking into consideration proportions of Roma and non-Roma in a region, in classrooms, mainstream schools and special schools. Where it is impractical to gather ethnic data, proxy measures, such as socio-economic status, should be developed and used as the basis for indicators. Baseline data should be gathered and used as the basis for regular updates.
- Introduction of accessible complaints mechanisms for Roma families so that they can challenge inappropriate placement of their children in segregated schooling, discriminatory actions and other barriers to realizing their rights.

Elimination of segregation between schools

Measures need to be undertaken by municipalities, local authorities and schools to address the structural exclusion of Roma children caused by living in segregated settlements. Such measures include:

⁹⁶ 'The Right to Education for Every Child', p. 6.

- A requirement that all local municipalities produce desegregation plans to be implemented over a given time period, and linked with financial incentives. These plans need to be based on direct consultation with both Roma and mainstream communities.
- Ensuring that, for as long as children remain in segregated schools within their own communities, the level of expenditure, staffing ratios and standards among teachers are directly comparable to those in schools in the non-Roma community.
- Investment in affordable and accessible transport to take children from settlements to mainstream schools that do not have a significant Roma population.

One of the challenges is the reluctance of families from mainstream communities to accept a greater proportion of Roma children in the schools. There is a pattern in some areas of 'white flight', whereby parents simply remove children from schools that accept higher numbers of Roma children. There are no easy solutions to the problem, but consideration could be given to:

- Making development assistance conditional upon a clear integration/desegregation plan of municipalities or regions and its implementation
- Ensuring that development assistance covers integration activities such as planning, school transport, monitoring and capacity-building of municipal/regional authorities rather than the pure education work in schools/preschools or Roma education centres, which should be the responsibility of the education authorities through their regular budgets
- In addition, local municipalities need to invest in:
 - Sensitization and awareness-raising within local communities to promote greater understanding of Roma culture and the challenges confronting it. Investment can be made in multi-pronged approaches towards working with communities, building tolerance within schools and collaboration with parents. Whole localities can be made targets of measures to help raise awareness, build tolerance and promote desegregation in all sectors.⁹⁷
 - Improved housing, sanitation, employment and social welfare programmes within Roma communities in order to narrow the socio-economic and cultural gaps that entrench prejudice and xenophobia between Roma and non-Roma communities.⁹⁸

Elimination of segregation within schools

Efforts are needed to ensure that Roma children are not segregated into separate classes, based on assessments of academic ability or attainment, and in which they are simply taught a remedial curriculum. They should be educated within the mainstream student population, with additional support teachers provided where necessary. Instruction needs to be "integrated and differentiated, whereby all students participate together in the classroom and the teacher effectively and efficiently reaches all students in a heterogeneous environment, thus avoiding the issue of placement of students in separate, special or other classrooms."⁹⁹ Accordingly, action is needed to:

- Include a commitment to inclusive classroom teaching in the national action policy and plan on inclusion.
- Develop municipal policies for inclusive classroom environments. Schools, teachers, municipal officials, school administrators, Roma parents and children, as well as other stakeholders should be involved in that process.
- Provide support within mainstream classes to Roma children needing additional assistance.

⁹⁷ Ibid., p.7.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Open Society Institute, 'EC Consultation on Education', OSI EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme, 13 December 2007, <http://ec.europa.eu/education/school21/results/osi_en.pdf>.

- Monitor schools on a regular basis to ensure that segregation is not taking place, either formally or informally. Monitoring should involve Roma parents to ensure that systems are transparent and accountable to them and their children.

Achieving comprehensive desegregation will necessarily take a number of years to implement. Accordingly, in schools with a high concentration of Roma pupils, the quality of education should be improved simultaneously with the implementation of desegregation strategies.

Ending the placement of Roma children in special schools

Urgent action is needed to address the factors that contribute to the practice of placing Roma children in special schools. Having the vast majority of Roma children go through the mainstream school system from the very beginning of their compulsory education should be the goal of policies. This requires examining the process that leads to segregation into special schools and eliminating barriers in accessing regular mainstream schools. Practical measures to work towards that end should include:

Critical reviews of the current school entry testing systems used to assess whether or not a child is ready to enter regular primary school. In order for testing to be fair and accurate, both the testing commissions and criteria need to be reformed in order to eliminate biases and take account of differences in language, socialization, and experience. A baseline assessment of children when entering compulsory education can be an effective tool for teachers to plan their instruction. However, any such assessment should be based on reliable and valid instruments that are fair to students of all backgrounds, should be used to assess all students and not just those considered to have special needs, be conducted in an objective way without incentives for a particular outcome, and be done in a transparent way involving the informed participation of parents. If these conditions are not met, no testing regime should be used.

Remove the financial incentives for special school placements. The current financial benefits that accrue to children with disabilities can and do serve as an incentive for parents to support their child's assessment for a special school placement. It is imperative that public policy should not promote socio-economic incentives that encourage parents to accept a lower quality education for their children. However, measures taken to address the problem should enhance choice rather than reduce it, and not penalize parents. Governments should conduct analyses of the incentives and reasons parents have for sending their children to special schools, and use the findings to help construct appropriate solutions.¹⁰⁰ One approach might be to introduce the same benefits for placing students in mainstream schools as they would receive for attending special schools, such as providing free transport and free school meals.

Opportunities for reassessment. Where children have been placed inappropriately in special schools, mechanisms should be in place to enable them to be reassessed and placed in a mainstream school.

Involve all stakeholders. As with all initiatives, efforts to reduce the number of Roma children in special schools should be done with the cooperation of all stakeholders and with adequate funding, clear policies and guidelines. As special schools close down due to lower enrolment, teachers at these schools need to be a part of the process. Policies can be developed to help integrate teachers from special schools into the mainstream schools, perhaps having them help with the integration of new students transferred from special schools.¹⁰¹ Special schools can also be transformed into resource centres for mainstream schools, providing expertise and support. Municipalities and the central government need to work with the teachers to ensure that most of them will be able to access gainful employment afterwards.

¹⁰⁰ 'The Right to Education for Every Child', p. 6.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

Desegregation Project

Vidin, Bulgaria

Desegregation projects in Bulgaria are widely viewed as some of the most successful in improving access to quality education for Roma children. The projects endeavour to stimulate positive attitudes towards desegregation among all stakeholders and successfully integrate every school in Bulgaria. This has meant transporting Roma children from sometimes very remote ghettos to mixed city schools with the aid of various support services, from providing transportation to extra educational support.¹⁰² Though there are several desegregation projects being run in Bulgaria, this example is from the region of Vidin.

The desegregation project in Vidin dates back to 2000 when, with the support of the Roma Participation Program, the grassroots Roma organization DROM implemented the first desegregation project. Since that time, the project has gone through different funding cycles with each cycle building on the initial one, increasing the number of schools and beneficiaries. The most recent project implemented by DROM is 'Desegregation and support: entry to and exit with quality education'.

The project in Vidin seeks to foster willingness and an insistence on the part of parents to have their children in mainstream schools in order to acquire a quality education.¹⁰³ The primary goals of the project are to increase enrolment and retention rates, and increase graduation rates from secondary schools among Roma children. Improving educational outcomes and the quality of education, has also now been added to the list of measurable objectives.¹⁰⁴

Though the primary component of the desegregation project in Vidin has been providing transportation, there are other parts that have been put in place to support Roma children, including:¹⁰⁵

- Campaigns to help motivate the parents of Roma children to enrol their children in mainstream schools
- Planning the enrolment of Roma children in mainstream schools, making sure they are not re-segregated in classrooms within the new schools
- Academic support and catch-up provisions
- Meals (since discontinued)
- Integrated extra-curricular activities

Currently, the project covers all 12 schools in Vidin. Due to various factors, the peak year, with over 600 students completing the school year, was in 2002/03. The number of Roma students in city schools remains high, with over 500 beneficiaries completing the 2006/07 school year.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, *On the Road to Maturity: Evaluation of the non-governmental desegregation process in Bulgaria*, Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, Sofia, 2008, p. 13.

¹⁰³ Organization Drom, 'Desegregation', <<http://drom-vidin.org/en/aboutus.html>>.

¹⁰⁴ Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, *On the Road to Maturity*, pp. 28–30.

¹⁰⁵ Roma Education Fund, *Annual Report 2007*, Roma Education Fund, Budapest, 2008, p. 15.

¹⁰⁶ Organization DROM, 'About us', <<http://drom-vidin.org/en/aboutus.html>>.

Removing the social and economic barriers to education

Making schools accessible, available and inclusive is an important first step in fulfilling the right of every child to access education, but this does not ensure the full realization of this right.¹⁰⁷ Equality of opportunity can only be achieved by also taking action to remove the barriers in schools and local communities. Even where schools exist, factors such as poverty, discrimination, fear of violence or abuse, attitudes towards girls' education, or a

¹⁰⁷ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *Convention against Discrimination in Education*, Articles 3 and 4.

lack of understanding of Roma culture may serve to keep children out of school. Governments have obligations to develop legislation, policies and support services to remove these barriers in the family and community that impede Roma children's access to school.

Preparation for and retention in school

Preparatory programmes for the start of school, catch-up classes for those students who had dropped out and are re-entering the school system, and extra academic support, especially when transitioning from one educational level to the next, are needed to help increase enrolment and retention rates, and lower drop-out rates. These initiatives should be designed in collaboration with the Roma community and aim to promote confidence and self-esteem, build academic skills, and familiarize Roma children with the school environment, expectations and codes of behaviour. Short-term focused interventions can also be provided for children struggling with language and reading. As argued earlier, affirmative action policy measures are needed to ensure high-priority early enrolment of children in poor communities, including free access to preschool for Roma children and abolishing enrolment prioritization of children whose parents are both employed. Efforts need to be made to provide information to parents through Roma civil society activities in order to encourage and support early enrolment into preschool.¹⁰⁸

Addressing poverty

Governments need to take steps to address the poverty that is a primary cause of low enrolment and high drop-out rates among Roma children. Any such measures will need to reflect the particular needs and barriers faced by different Roma communities across the region. One of the challenges is the reliance of families on having their children work. In the short term, this might be accommodated by the creation of flexible school years for families that migrate for seasonal work, or differing school hours for working children. Ultimately, the goal needs to be the elimination of children from child labour, together with a minimum age for leaving school that is consistent with the age at which children can begin to work. In addition, in order to overcome the gender-based dimension to school exclusion and the long-term poverty of women, a minimum age of 18 years should be established for marriage. Active measures would be needed to promote raising the age for both work and marriage, including community engagement, awareness-raising and social support to encourage Roma communities to understand the potential benefits to their children and to the wider community of these measures.

Building bridges with the Roma community

The active participation of parents in their children's education is a key factor in ensuring both the child's continued engagement in their education, as well as successful educational outcomes. Given the challenges faced by many Roma parents in engaging in the formal school system, including their understandable wariness in the face of prejudice and hostility, extra investment is needed to enable these parents to play a role in supporting their children's education.¹⁰⁹ School and local authorities need to make positive efforts to actively seek out Roma parents and involve them as partners in their child's education. Mechanisms to support parents and encourage their increased participation include:

- Inviting Roma parents to visit schools, building partnerships between them and local schools, encouraging them to join school boards and developing programmes that explicitly address their concerns
- Providing adult education classes, adult literacy and local or mobile libraries to help overcome the barriers caused by low levels of education, especially among Roma mothers, which can inhibit involvement in their children's education

¹⁰⁸ 'The Right to Education for Every Child'.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., pp. 8–9.

- Increasing parental skills and encouraging their involvement in their children's development and learning at home and in kindergartens, or community-based services through parental counselling offered by the preschool professional team, such as parent-to-parent counselling, mother-child clubs, or civil society outreach through house visits
- Gradual and respectful inclusion of parents in preparing children for school, taking into account the beliefs and needs of local families, their social values and experiences
- Increasing the number and enhancing design of parent meetings, and opening schools prior to enrolment and in the first months of attendance
- Supporting early preschool enrolment through the joint action of preschool institutions and Roma civil society organizations
- Engaging Roma pedagogical assistants and/or mediators

Analysing local barriers

Local authorities, in collaboration with community partners, have responsibilities to promote awareness of the value of education among Roma communities and enlist their support for local schools and the rights of all children to education. Local authorities, in partnership with the Roma community, need to undertake an analysis of where the barriers to education lie. Action can then be taken to address the specific barriers that arise. Actions might include:

- Raising awareness of the right to education
- Promoting the value of education for both girls' and boys' future opportunities
- Stressing the importance of play as part of children's learning and development
- Providing information about any available stipends, cash transfers or food for education programmes
- Addressing parental concerns, such as violence when travelling to school, and adapting school timetables to accommodate domestic labour commitments
- Highlighting the role that parents can play in supporting and strengthening their children's learning
- The importance of active engagement in the life of the school and the ways in which parents and communities can contribute
- Listening to children and engaging them as active participants in their own learning
- Promoting respect for children as learners and ending all forms of violence in schools

THE RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Education has to be of the highest possible quality to help every child reach his or her potential, and governments must ensure that Roma children in all schools, including preschools, are able to receive the same quality of education as all other children. The Committee on the Rights of the Child stipulates that the curriculum, in early childhood and in school, must be of direct relevance to the child's social, cultural, environmental and economic context, and to his or her present and future needs, and take full account of the child's evolving capacities.¹¹⁰ Curriculum must therefore be inclusive and adapted to the needs of children in different and/or difficult circumstances. Quality in education can only be achieved through the development of child-friendly learning environments that have a holistic approach to children's development. All learning environments

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¹¹⁰ Ibid.

and educational content, teaching and learning processes should reflect human rights principles. This means addressing children's multiple rights, using strategies that build links between the school and the family and community. Child-friendly learning environments seek not only to equip children with basic learning skills, but also to enable them to take control of their lives and to promote justice, democracy, peace and tolerance.

Child-friendly schools and preschools

UNICEF has established specific benchmarks for educational environments within its child-friendly schools (CFS) framework. The CFS framework conceives of the learning environment and all of its components as an interdependent whole, rather than concentrating discreetly on different aspects of the learning environment. This holistic approach is fundamental to the creation of environments in which Roma children can learn effectively. In the larger context, the CFS framework is "a means of translating the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) into school management and classroom practice, and ensuring the right of all children to have access to quality basic education."

For preschools, schools and education systems in CSEE to be child-friendly, they should:

- Be **inclusive** of all children, particularly Roma, children with special educational needs and children with a disadvantaged social background
- Offer **good quality** teaching and learning processes with individual instruction appropriate to the developmental level, abilities and learning capacities and outcomes of all children, thus ensuring that no child is left behind; the curriculum and educational content must be **relevant** to the needs of the society, its social cohesion and labour market
- Provide a **safe, healthy and protective** school environment in which children are protected from violence, abuse and harm and in which essential life skills and values of respect, tolerance and democracy are promoted
- Be **gender-sensitive** and promote gender equality in both enrolment and achievement; adequate attention must be given to the situation of girls in some countries, but also to the growing disadvantage of boys in upper-secondary and higher education throughout the region
- Promote the **participation of stakeholders** – children, families and communities – in all aspects of school life encouraging the involvement of parents and families through the development or strengthening of effective parent-teachers associations (PTAs), and fostering local partnerships in education through working with the civil society – NGOs and community-based organizations.¹¹¹

In particular, early childhood education needs to meet the following criteria:

- Be close to communities
- Link with other services
- Be flexible and openly managed
- Be physically and emotionally secure
- Have a child-centred pedagogy
- Involve parents
- Have a curriculum reflecting diversity
- Be a democratic learning environment
- Involve teachers with an understanding of child development

¹¹¹ Ibid.

A broad, relevant and inclusive curriculum

Roma children, together with all other children, have a right to acquire the core academic curriculum and basic cognitive skills, together with essential life skills that equip them to face future life challenges, make well-balanced decisions, develop a healthy lifestyle, good social relationships, critical thinking and the capacity for non-violent conflict resolution. The curriculum must develop respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and promote respect for different cultures and values and for the natural environment.

The curriculum needs to be reviewed to ensure that it is inclusive of all children, and all teaching and learning materials are free from harmful or negative representations of Roma communities and from gender stereotypes. Furthermore, the curriculum should include the teaching of Roma language, culture and history. Roma students should be encouraged to maintain a strong sense of Roma identity while concurrently building literacy and other skills for full inclusion into mainstream society. The learning environment should be stimulating and efforts must be made to make teaching as relevant as possible to the realities of children's lives. In order to achieve this objective, national curricula should be developed in consultation with parents, children, teachers and local communities. For example, school materials and books could include aspects of Roma life with which Roma children would be familiar, and through which non-Roma children would benefit by learning tolerance and diversity.

Rights-based learning and assessment

Every child should be valued as an active contributor to their own learning rather than a passive recipient. This recognition of the inherent value of each child is particularly important in building confidence and self-esteem among Roma children, who commonly experience profound prejudice and lack of respect.¹¹² The role of teachers and others involved in creating or strengthening learning opportunities is to facilitate participatory learning rather than simply transmitting knowledge. This involves utilizing interactive teaching methodologies instead of a top-down approach. A human rights-based education requires that learning environments be sensitive to the needs of Roma children and conducive to the optimum development of their capacities. A child-centred methodology would allow children, in part, to follow their own interests, discovery and learning. Schools should support the introduction of individualized instruction, taking into account the specific developmental level, interests, skills, and knowledge of each child.

Assessment of learning also needs to be sensitive to the situation of Roma children, including their language and culture. A commitment to ensuring that Roma children are able to fulfil their educational potential implies the need for sensitive and constructive methods of appraising and monitoring their work that take account of their cultural context, and do not discriminate against those whose first language is not the medium in which education is provided. In addition, given the poor educational outcomes for Roma children, there is a need for clear and measurable expected results and indicators in order to track their learning achievements over time and monitor progress.

Improving teaching quality

Investment is needed to support teachers to understand their role and responsibilities in delivering quality education, promoting equal access and retention in schools.¹¹³ This might include:

Teacher training. Training of head teachers to strengthen their capacity to build inclusive learning environments is of fundamental importance. The leadership provided by head teachers is essential if the prevailing negative culture of schools towards Roma children is to be challenged. In addition, teacher-training

¹¹² Končoková, Eva, 'Building Effective National Early Care and Education System: How to improve the school and classroom environment for Roma children so that they succeed in integrated early childhood education?', Concept paper, Slovakia.

¹¹³ 'The Right to Education for Every Child', pp. 7–8.

courses should instruct teachers in how to work positively and respectfully with Roma children and their parents.¹¹⁴ It will be necessary to review both initial and in-service training and to develop a flexible programme to provide all teachers and administrators with such training. These courses should include an emphasis on the following:

- Child-centred methodology
- Sensitization to Roma culture and identity
- Gender awareness
- Teaching in inclusive and multicultural environments
- Non-discrimination as a human right
- Understanding and recognizing both direct and indirect discrimination
- Positive strategies for promoting tolerance and tackling discriminatory behaviour
- Working in a bilingual teaching environment

Minimum standards. Governments need to establish and implement minimum standards for all teachers and Roma teaching assistants. These standards need to be enforced equally across all schools and municipalities. Additionally, governments need to establish desired student teacher ratios, and those ratios should again be the same across all schools and localities. Consideration could be given to building in a system of ongoing support for teachers – through, for example, fortnightly or monthly meetings of teachers in schools in the local community – to allow for opportunities to share ideas, challenges, strategies and solutions. In addition, tools and resources should be developed for teachers on how to promote positive and inclusive learning environments. Support should also be given to members of the Roma community to become teachers or classroom assistants.

Roma assistants and mediators. Commitment needs to be given to the development of a network of Roma assistants, mediators or coordinators working within mainstream schools, with clearly defined responsibilities for supporting students in class, providing out-of-school academic support and working with parents and the Roma communities. Efforts should be made to raise awareness of their role and importance so that their work is appreciated by the school and accepted by the Roma parents. Proper training and payment for their services is essential.

Supporting teachers If teachers are expected to respect the rights of children, it is equally important that their rights are upheld. They need to be supported, adequately paid and respected. Lack of support, low status, poor pay and inadequate training and supervision diminish the motivation of teachers and the quality of their work. Improved management, higher pay, effective appraisal systems, forums through which teachers can influence policy, acknowledgement of their concerns and opportunities for them to identify their training and other needs would all contribute to improving morale and motivation and, in consequence, raise teaching standards. In addition, stipends for teachers working in unpopular schools might be considered. Research evidence from the region indicates that such approaches have improved educational outcomes. Efforts are also needed to encourage Roma to become teachers.

¹¹⁴ Končoková, Eva, op. cit.

Equal Chances: Integrating Roma children and youth into the educational system and Equal Chances in secondary schooling¹¹⁵

Nis and Kragujevac, Serbia

The Equal Chances projects employed a comprehensive programme to improve the quality of education and facilitate the inclusion of Roma students in Nis and Kragujevac. The Equal Chances projects had an inclusive approach with a view toward systematic change on all levels: in the government (national and local), in the community and in the schools themselves. The philosophy behind approaching both improvement of access and academic performance was to change the educational experience for Roma students by promoting a tolerant, accepting environment where they would feel safe, respected, valued and equal. Accordingly, the participation of the Roma community in the projects was considered vital.

At the school level, the educational practice in institutions receiving Roma children was improved through a number of effective approaches in both projects. Teachers were made to be more sensitive to the needs and cultural differences of Roma children by going through Education for Social Justice training (ESJ). The curriculum and teaching practice was modified to be more child-centred, and the 'Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking' programme was also employed. ESJ training and the child-centred methodologies were just two programmes, among others used, to improve the class environment and pedagogy. A school team trained to help make reforms and improve the school setting was formed, and school staff created mini projects to facilitate the participation of parents and adjust the programme to the needs of the children.

On the preschool and primary school level much emphasis was placed on the role of the Roma teaching assistants (RTA). In evaluations, this component, in combination with the implementation of Step-by-step methodologies, was shown to have positive effects not only on the Roma students, but on non-Roma too. The establishment of RTAs included comprehensive training and the official drafting of their job descriptions.¹¹⁶

¹¹⁵ UNICEF, *Toward Roma Inclusion*, pp. 27–32.

¹¹⁶ Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, 'Evaluation of the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation International Programme: Project Evaluation of Equal Chances in Secondary Schooling, Serbia, Southeast Europe', 2007, p. 2.

A child-centred, safe and healthy environment

For learning environments to be optimized to enable children to reach their full potential, schools need to take a holistic approach to their education, health and well-being. Roma children, in particular, may also need additional targeted assistance, such as extra financial aid, in-school meals, extra homework and academic support. This will necessitate attention being paid to the following concerns:

Physical health. In order for children to be able to maximize their learning experience, they need to be in proper physical condition to learn. Schools need to take an intersectoral approach in order to bridge gaps in health and nutrition for Roma children. This could mean working together with the health ministry and other relevant bodies to provide basic health screenings, vaccinations and the provision of free meals to the poorest.

Basic health and safety standards for school buildings need to be set and equally implemented. Schools should take measures to contribute towards children's health and well-being, taking into account the differing needs of children – for example, consideration as to the location of schools, travel to and from school, factors which might cause illness or accidents in the classroom or playgrounds, and appropriate facilities for girls. It

also requires the proactive provision of facilities, services and policies to promote health and safety of children, and the active participation of the local community. A healthy environment also needs to provide safe and stimulating opportunities for play and recreation.

Design and equipment. All schools should be equipped with appropriate and adequate educational equipment and materials, with attention paid to special needs such as multilingual texts books in Romani-speaking areas. The design of the schools and kinds of facilities, materials and equipment to be included should be developed with the input of the local community, parents, teachers, children and other stakeholders. For instance, the socio-economic position of some Roma children may affect their chances of having appropriate places to do school work. Many live in cramped housing conditions or may be homeless. For these children, it is important that schools provide facilities to enable them to study safely and quietly, after formal school hours.

Inclusive education

A multi-sector and cross-departmental approach to promoting inclusive education would involve:

Sensitization to the rights of all children to education. National campaigns and information dissemination are necessary to challenge many of the cultural barriers and discriminatory attitudes and beliefs that impede access to education for Roma children.

Parental and family support. Roma parents need to be supported to promote both their willingness and capacity to ensure their children's attendance at school.

An inclusive ethos and environment. Schools need to be provided with policies and guidance on how to create learning environments that respond to and value the needs of Roma children. Schools should promote a culture of respect for differences and introduce approaches to support all children, irrespective of gender, language, ethnicity or disability.

A flexible structure and timetable. Schools should adapt to children rather than requiring them to adjust to a pre-defined and rigid system, especially during early years and through the first grades of primary school. If Roma children, particularly those who may be required to work, are to realize their right to education, it is necessary to explore options for a more flexible and inclusive approach to the organization of schools. However, flexibility should not extend to the exclusion of Roma children from mainstream classes. Offering alternative curricula for Roma children can serve to discriminate and limit their future opportunities. Of course, children are entitled to protection from economic exploitation and from any work that interferes with their health, education or development.¹¹⁷ The first priority must be to ensure that children are not forced into work that limits their access and opportunity to benefit from education. However, until this goal is realized, such children are entitled to an education that accommodates the competing demands on their time.

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¹¹⁷ Convention on the Rights of the Child, Article 32.

RESPECT FOR RIGHTS WITHIN THE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT

A human rights-based approach to education needs to ensure that the human rights of children are fully respected in school. In addition to the equal rights of every child to quality education, non-discrimination and optimum health and safety within schools, schools also need to introduce policies and practices that ensure that all other relevant rights in the CRC are understood and respected. In relation to Roma children in particular, efforts must be made to address children's rights to respect for their culture and language, to protection from all forms of violence and to the right to express their views and be taken seriously within the school environment

Right to respect for identity, culture and language

Article 30 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child stresses the right of children to enjoy their own culture, practice their own religion and use their own language. UNESCO's Convention against Discrimination in Education protects the educational rights of national minorities. The educational policy of each State establishes the right for minorities to use or be taught in their own language, provided this does not exclude them from understanding the language and culture of the larger community and that minority language instruction is not provided at a lower standard. The Convention on the Protection and Promotion of Diversity in Cultural Expressions (2005) introduces obligations to respect cultural diversity, including through educational programmes. There is no one correct approach to addressing the challenge of language and education. However, whatever approach is adopted, governments have obligations to ensure that children do not experience discrimination, that respect is afforded to their culture and religion, and that every effort is made to prevent social exclusion and educational disadvantage as a consequence of speaking a minority language.

Religious and cultural rights within educational environments

The core obligations of States in upholding religious and cultural rights within educational environments are as follows:

- Respect must be afforded to the freedom of parents and guardians to have the religious and moral education of their children in conformity with their convictions.
- Education in the general history of religion and ethics is permitted if it is given in an unbiased and objective way that is respectful of freedoms of opinion, conscience and expression. However, parents must be provided with the possibility of alternative education that accommodates their wishes.
- Indigenous children or those belonging to a minority shall not be denied the right to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practise their own religion, or to use their own language.
- Members of national minorities are entitled to develop their own educational activities, provided that this does not serve to exclude them from the culture and language of the wider community, and that the standard of education is not lower than the general standard provided for others.
- Parents and guardians can choose other than public education for their children as long as the schools comply with the aims of education elaborated in Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and minimum standards established by the government, such as a prohibition on physical and humiliating punishments. Inspection and regulation systems need to be in place to ensure compliance with these standards.
- Respect for the liberty of parents and guardians must not be allowed to lead to extreme disparities of educational opportunity between different groups in society.

Bilingualism

Research demonstrates the importance of building a strong educational foundation in a child's first language if she or he is to be successful in the second and additional languages. The use of children's mother tongue in the early school years is pedagogically sound. It encourages community mobilization and social development, overcomes exclusion and marginalization, provides the child with a political voice and increases economic opportunity and mobility in the longer term.¹¹⁸ Furthermore, States can realize a cost saving through a reduction in the numbers of students who repeat grades when children are educated in their mother tongue and in bilingual schooling systems.¹¹⁹ However, the case for continuing mother-tongue education throughout school is less persuasive:

- Exclusive mother-tongue education could inhibit the development of inclusive education
- Children who are not proficient in the majority language risk being marginalized from higher education and employment as they grow older
- There are unlikely to be sufficient numbers of Roma teachers to fulfil the education needs of all Roma children
- There is less clear-cut evidence on the educational benefits of bilingual education at upper levels
- The lack of a standardized written language would restrict the potential for effective education for Roma at higher levels

Overall, in order to fulfil their obligations to Roma children, governments need to adopt clear policies on the issue of bilingualism that would commit to:

- Provision of preschool learning for Roma children in their mother tongue
- Progressive transition to the majority language and bilingual education in the first or second year of primary education
- Opportunities for all children to learn Romani at school as an additional language

Multicultural learning environments

Learning environments should respond to, respect and value differences in culture, religion, gender, abilities and socio-economic backgrounds. An environment of intercultural communication and understanding needs to be fostered in order to give Roma children the best chances for success.¹²⁰ Creating a child-friendly inclusive school, based on respect for the cultural rights of every child, will necessitate the development of policies and guidance for schools on how to create supportive multicultural learning environments. These tools should use the child-friendly schools framework as a guide, and involve the Roma community, parents, teachers, children and other stakeholders. Individual schools should also develop policies, in collaboration with children, on commitment to tolerance and respect for diversity. These should be promoted actively and monitored on a regular basis to ensure that they are implemented effectively. They should be accompanied by mechanisms through which children can raise concerns or register complaints if they feel they are not being treated appropriately.

¹¹⁸ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, *EFA Global Monitoring Report 2006: Literacy for life*, UNESCO, Paris, 2005, p. 216.

¹¹⁹ Dutcher, Nadine, *Expanding Opportunity in Linguistically Diverse Societies*, 2nd ed., Center for Applied Linguistics, Washington, D.C., 2004, pp. 11, 27.

¹²⁰ Končoková, Eva, op. cit.

Respect for participation rights

Article 12 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes that children are entitled to express their views on all matters of concern to them and to have them given due weight in accordance with their age and maturity. This principle of participation is affirmed by other rights to freedom of expression, religion and association. These rights apply to all aspects of their education. They do not simply extend to the pedagogical relationships within the classroom, but also across the school and in the development of educational legislation and policy.¹²¹ Children's participation in all aspects of school life should be promoted. It is of particular importance that Roma children, who face widespread social exclusion and discrimination, are able to articulate their views and have them taken seriously in order that they can address those challenges. Action to give effect to this right needs to take place at a number of different levels:

Governmental level

- Introduction of legislation guaranteeing school children the right to establish democratic bodies such as school councils, and requiring that such bodies comply with principles of non-discrimination and promote inclusion of Roma children, both girls and boys
- Development of guidance to local municipalities and schools on creating opportunities for children to be heard that emphasizes the necessity for inclusive and non-discriminatory approaches
- Consideration could be given to the creation of advisory groups of Roma children to provide guidance to governments on the development of policies on issues such as segregation, transitions between stages of education, tackling dropout, multicultural education or inclusive schools

Municipal level

- Creation of forums where Roma children can meet and share experiences, concerns and ideas on how to improve the quality of their school experience. Such forums would need administrative and financial support from the local municipality, which could also encourage and train local adult members of the Roma community to act as facilitators for the children.
- Establishing dialogue between children's forums and local policy-making bodies in order that their decisions are informed and influenced by the direct experiences of Roma children
- Support for individual schools in developing inclusive mechanisms for listening to children
- Introduction of mechanisms for ensuring that children are able to express a view on school placements, and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity
- Support for Roma children to undertake audits of schools and local education authorities, based on child rights indicators they have developed within the local community

School level

- Establishment of school councils in which both girls and boys from the Roma community play an active role
- Development of school policies in partnership with children on rights, inclusion, respect for diversity and non-discrimination
- Introduction of circle time where children can share issues of importance and concern and learn to respect each other's right to be heard and to be treated equally

¹²¹ Committee on the Rights of the Child, General Comment No.12: The Right of the Child to be Heard, CRC/C/GC/12, July 2009.

- Peer counselling programmes in which Roma children play an active part and through which they can access support if they are experiencing problems in school
- Introduction of safe and confidential complaints mechanisms through which children can raise concerns

Right to respect for personal and physical integrity

The CRC demands that children are not only protected from all forms of violence, but also that school discipline is administered in a manner consistent with the child's dignity.¹²² Physical and other forms of humiliating and abusive treatment, whether experienced by teachers or other children, are not only a violation of the child's right to protection from violence, but also can result in long-term physical harm, emotional distress and mental illness, as well as being highly counter-productive to learning.¹²³ In the regional consultations for the UN Study on Violence against Children, physical and psychological punishment, verbal abuse, bullying and sexual violence in schools were repeatedly reported as reasons for absenteeism, dropping out and lack of motivation for academic achievement.¹²⁴

Nearly all countries in the region have banned corporal punishment in schools. However, building a culture of non-violence requires more than a legal framework of protection. Schools themselves also have an important part to play, both in ensuring that Roma children are protected from violence at and en route to school, and also in promoting a culture of peace, tolerance and non-violent conflict resolution. They need to be encouraged to contribute towards breaking patterns of violence by giving children, their parents and communities the knowledge and skills to communicate, negotiate and resolve conflicts in more constructive ways. This involves explicit recognition that all children, including Roma, have equal rights to education in settings that are free of violence, and that one of the functions of education is to produce adults imbued with non-violent values and practices. In order to achieve this, the following goals should be met:

- All forms of violence in schools should be explicitly prohibited by law.
- Governments need to promote a strong message that all forms of violence against children are unacceptable, and that schools should be rights-based and promote and practice human rights principles. This should be accompanied by local campaigns to promote zero tolerance of violence against Roma children.
- Promoting non-violence should be accompanied by policies with clear enforcement mechanisms. These policies must also give attention to the particular vulnerability of some groups of children, including Roma children, as well as the gender-based dimensions of violence, and take specific measures to ensure their protection. Violence-prevention programmes need to be implemented throughout the education system.
- When planning and designing schools, governments should ensure that safe physical spaces are provided so that both girls and boys have equal access to facilities and can participate fully in school life without fear of violence.
- Clear codes of conduct reflecting child rights principles should be established and promoted widely for all staff, students and their families and communities. Governments should ensure that schools have trained and trusted adults to whom students can safely and confidentially report incidents of violence and receive advice.

¹²² Convention on the Rights of the Child, Articles 19 and 28.

¹²³ See for example Csorba, J. et al., 'Family- and School-related Stresses in Depressed Hungarian Children', *European Psychiatry*, 16: 18–26, 2001. Cited in Durrant, J.E., 'Corporal Punishment: Prevalence, predictors and implications for child behaviour and development', in Hart, S.N., ed., *Eliminating Corporal Punishment*, UNESCO, Paris, 2005; and Due, P., et al., 'Bullying and Symptoms among School-aged Children: International comparative cross-sectional study in 28 countries', *The European Journal of Public Health*, 15(2): 128–132, 2005.

¹²⁴ Sergio Pinheiro, P., *World Report on Violence against Children*, UN Secretary General, New York, 2006.

- All school staff should be trained and supported in the use of non-violent and respectful classroom management strategies, as well as specific skills to prevent patterns of bullying and other gender-based violence and to respond to it effectively.
- Children, including Roma children, should be actively involved in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes, including having access to confidential complaints or reporting mechanisms.
- Governments should ensure that the curriculum, textbooks and teaching methods promote child rights, support diversity and knowledge of the Roma community, and emphasize tolerance, respect, equity, non-discrimination and non-violent conflict resolution.
- Rights-based life skills programmes for non-violence should be promoted in the curriculum through subjects such as peace education, citizenship education, anti-bullying, human-rights education, and conflict resolution and mediation.
- Schools should be supported as a resource to build closer relationships with the community to address violence in and around schools between Roma and non-Roma populations. Students, staff, parents and other partners, such as police, health services, social services, faith-based groups, community recreation groups and cultural groups should all be encouraged to be involved.
- Data collected should ensure that the views of students and potential students are considered along with those of teachers, parents and the wider community, with a special focus on the experiences of vulnerable children. Information should be incorporated into existing education management information systems established at local, district and national levels.



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ROLE OF NON-STATE ACTORS

States cannot fulfil their obligations with regard to education for Roma children without the active support and engagement of many other actors, including parents, extended family members, unions, teachers, religious communities, NGOs or local politicians. Human rights are not simply legal entitlements that can be realized through enactment of legislation and policy. They are standards and principles that directly affect the day-to-day relationships between individuals in their communities. The creation of an environment in which Roma children can learn without discrimination and on the basis of equality of opportunity requires that the concept of education is understood and owned by parents, families and all members of the community. The actions, attitudes and behaviours of all members of communities impact on the realization of a child's right to education.

The nature of the obligations for parents and members of communities differ from those of the State, and it is essential that clear and appropriate lines of accountability are drawn. For example, parents cannot fulfil their obligations to ensure that their child is prepared for and attends school on a regular basis unless the government has provided the schools and the economic environment to support that attendance. Recognition also needs to be given to the fact that every adult has rights as well as responsibilities. Teachers are entitled to respect, remuneration and appropriate training and support, and cannot fulfil their obligations to children unless these rights are realized. There is, then, a close interrelationship between rights and responsibilities. Respect for human rights is not contingent on the exercise of responsibilities, but their realization is necessarily dependent on those responsibilities being taken seriously.

It is also necessary to acknowledge that some of the actors involved in the lives of Roma children can and do serve to erect barriers to the right to education. A necessary dimension of a human rights-based approach is to work with the Roma community to overcome those barriers. Roma children's opportunities to attend school will be influenced by parental recognition of their right to an education, the extent to which the school welcomes their attendance, and freedom from the necessity to work. Children's commitment to education will be influenced by the regard in which it is held within their own community, by the relevance and the quality of the education they receive and by the respect with which they are treated within the school. Children's achievements in education will be influenced by the degree of support they receive at home, the quality of teachers, the teaching methods employed, the extent to which they are engaged as actors in the educational process, the availability of the necessary teaching aids and resources, and a willingness to offer the necessary flexibility to facilitate their regular attendance. All these factors can be supported through government action. But for their implementation, they rely on the mobilization of all members of the community.

Parents and other caregivers

Parents are key stakeholders in their children's education. It is important that they are engaged at every level in the building of educational opportunity for their children.

Provision of education for parents

Many Roma parents, particularly mothers, have not been to school, lack literacy and are therefore restricted in their ability to support their children's education. Local authorities, together with national governments, can help parents to improve their levels of literacy through community-based programmes, and in so doing prevent the transmission of poor educational outcomes across generations. If parents acquire skills in reading and writing, they can not only better understand what their children are doing at school, but they can help them in their school work and communicate better with their children. Parenting education programmes are also needed that acknowledge the different support and information required by parents at different stages of their children's lives. Such programmes also need to include the promotion of equal gender practices. It is often assumed that parenting support is only required for preschool children. In practice, the demands of parenting change and parents can benefit from advice and information on the evolving capacities of children throughout childhood.

With education, parents will acquire greater capacity to support their children's education from birth, greater understanding of their children's needs and more confidence in collaborating with schools to help improve the quality of education provided.

Consultation and engagement with parents

Programmes to improve access, quality and respect for rights within education should involve and consult with parents of Roma children at every stage. This will not only serve to ensure that the barriers to education are more effectively understood and challenged, but will also encourage the active engagement and participation of Roma in their children's education. There is a need for engagement with parents in all areas, including:

- Policy development at the national, local and school level
- Local analyses of the barriers to education for Roma children
- Data collection
- Placement of individual children in school
- Progress reports of individual children
- Development and design of accessible complaints mechanisms to address problems as they arise
- Participation on parent-teacher associations or governing bodies of schools

Provision of information

Parents need to be provided with information on legislation, policies and services available to them and their children. Only with accessible, accurate and comprehensive information, provided in the Roma language where necessary, can parents ensure that they are receiving the services to which they and their children are entitled. They need to know who to approach when they face difficulties, who is responsible for what services and how to approach them. They also need information about the school their child is attending, the school curriculum, the expectations of parents and the role that they can play in the school. Finally, they need information on where to go and how to make a complaint if their child is discriminated against or treated inappropriately in school.

Parents as partners and advocates

Parents need to be recognized and supported as advocates for their children's right to education. They can play a critical role in holding schools and education authorities to account in fulfilling their obligations to children, pressing for stronger legislation where needed, monitoring progress, identifying weaknesses in implementation of education policies, ensuring compliance with the right to education and challenging rights violations. Some parents may need support to enable them to organize among themselves to advocate for enhanced education rights for their children. For example, support could be provided on how to: form and run an organization, write funding proposals, deal with the media, advocate for a cause, get help from national or regional organizations.

Parental responsibilities

If governments provide appropriate support and provision for the education of Roma children, their parents can contribute to fulfilling their children's right to education through:

- Provision of an environment in the early years that ensures the child's preparedness to start school
- Support and recognition of the right to education and its value for all their children
- Ensuring that children are not over-burdened with domestic and other work to the detriment of attending school

- Ensuring that children are prepared for school and able to arrive ready and on time when school is in session
- Getting involved in the school and supporting its work through participation in fundraising, meetings with teachers, committees, consultations and governing bodies
- Showing encouragement and support for their child's work and helping with homework where possible
- Ensuring to the greatest extent possible that their children are healthy and well-nourished and hence able to learn
- Ensuring that local traditions and customs, such as early marriage, do not prevent their child going to school

Civil society organizations

Within the CEECIS region, there are a growing number of international, regional and national civil society organizations playing a key role in promoting the rights to education of Roma children. In the absence of state provision, these groups have often played an important role as a service provider in the field of Roma education. Clearly, NGOs cannot be a substitute for properly funded government provision of education for all Roma children, nor should they be seen as a stop-gap solution to problems within municipal education. However, they can and do also play a key role in strengthening education provision and they can play a vital role in empowering Roma communities to advocate for the right to education. Building partnerships with these organizations is therefore of considerable importance.

Collaborating in the provision of education

NGOs are often the source of considerable expertise not only on where gaps in provision exist within local communities, but also on the strategies needed to address those gaps. It is important that national and local governments collaborate with civil society organizations to ensure that their experiences are reflected in the design and development of programmes to achieve the right to education for Roma children. NGOs are often the source of experimentation and piloting of innovative methods of achieving improved educational outcomes that can subsequently be scaled up by governments. For example, in Serbia, the Roma Education Fund has supported the following initiatives in recent years:¹²⁵

- Inclusion of Roma children in preschool education one year before compulsory schooling
- Development and provision of a new model to help Roma finish primary school and gain a first vocational certificate through second-chance education
- Piloting a programme on inclusion of Roma parents in school boards and school councils, and development of a regional Roma integration action plan
- Mentoring of Roma students, research into the needs of the employment market and helping Roma students who have graduated to start careers in accordance with their education level, as well as promoting the concept of university studies to meet the needs of the Roma community
- Preventing discrimination and segregation of Roma children within the education system
- Scaling up the approach of the obligatory preschool programme for all Roma children into a complete support system for the Roma community, educational institutions and municipal governments

In Hungary, the Roma Education Initiative, sponsored by the Open Society Institute, has collaborated with civil society partners to support programmes with the following goals:¹²⁶

¹²⁵ *Advancing Education of Roma in Serbia: Country assessment and the Roma Education Fund's strategic directions*, Roma Education Fund, 2007.

¹²⁶ <http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/index.html>



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- Develop new, culturally appropriate, sensitive and non-biased tools for measurement of children's educational abilities in order to prevent their inappropriate placement in special schools or classes
- Develop a model of cooperation between the Teacher Training Institute and School for Student Teacher Practice promoting school success for Roma children in an integrated setting
- Develop a Roma family/school coordinator as a registered profession.

Initiatives such as these, which exist in all countries in the region, provide an invaluable resource for governments, serving to complement and strengthen their role in ensuring the right to education for Roma children. Open and respectful dialogue between government and civil society organizations is vital if the optimum benefit is to be achieved in moving the education agenda forward. Funding for NGO programmes to encourage the exploration of innovative practices, including those initiated and managed by the Roma community themselves, is also needed.

Mobilizing and capacity-building

Despite their numerical strength in a number of countries in the region, Roma in Central and Eastern Europe are significantly under-represented in political life.¹²⁷ A combination of factors – including poverty, stigma, discrimination, and lack of citizenship status – all serve to marginalize Roma. This absence from political participation weakens the capacity of Roma to influence the agenda and advocate effectively for their rights, including the right to education.

Civil society organizations, particularly those of Roma people themselves, can play a key role in helping members of the Roma community overcome this political marginalization. Within the CEECIS region, such organizations have worked with the Roma population to develop their capacities and assist in identifying opportunities to engage with governments to realize their rights. Some groups have worked to connect more marginalized Roma communities with middle-class peers who can serve as effective spokespersons, resource persons and leaders.¹²⁸ The Spolu International Foundation, for example, has engaged in programmes to achieve the following goals:

- Empower Roma to be heard and visible to stimulate activism and create leadership among Roma on all levels of society to gain collective influence
- Facilitate grassroots Roma to establish their own representative structures, networks and alliances
- Help Roma to promote their own agenda and influence policies and programmes targeting them
- Create conditions to enable European Roma Grassroots Organizations (ERGO) members and partner organizations to function professionally and effectively
- Facilitate and support the international ERGO network to become a reliable partner of national and European institutions, as well as organizations dealing with grassroots development
- Develop effective strategies towards equal opportunities for Roma
- Create a support base among Roma and non-Roma in the Netherlands and in Europe to be involved in the grassroots Roma movement

While this agenda has not focused specifically on education, it contributes towards the foundation of an empowered community base that can support effective advocacy on education rights.

¹²⁷ European Network against Racism and European Roma Information Office, 'Political Participation of Roma, Traveller and Sinti communities', *Fact Sheet 32*, Brussels, May 2007, <http://cms.horus.be/files/99935/MediaArchive/pdf/FS32_Roma_political_participation_may2007.pdf>.

¹²⁸ Spolu International Foundation, 'Strengthening the Roma Voice', *Annual Report 2006*, Spolu International Foundation, Utrecht.

The work undertaken by NGOs can play a role on both the demand and supply side. On the demand side, NGO efforts strengthen advocacy, lobbying and ensure accountability and transparency of duty-bearers – for example, monitoring whether governmental policies and programmes have been effectively implemented. NGOs can also play a role in helping guarantee the continuation of successful programmes when there are changes of government or administration. On the supply side, NGOs have contributed by building capacity of:

- Roma communities, parents and traditional leaders, through training, awareness and sensitization that enables communities to participate in, for instance, social auditing and monitoring exercises of government services
- Governments – by training and sensitization of public officials

The international community

The international community has a key role to play in providing support to build the capacity of both governments and individuals in the realization of the right to education for Roma children. The Dakar Framework for Action expressly introduces a role for the international community, for example, in the allocation of a larger share of resources to support primary and other forms of basic education, and in ensuring that education strategies complement other efforts for poverty elimination. The Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness moves development partners towards human rights-based approaches in terms of capacity-building, accountability and outcome measurement.¹²⁹ This role has been further affirmed in the OECD Report, *Integrating Human Rights in Development*¹³⁰, which calls upon development partners to do the following:

- Deepen their institutionalization of human rights considerations, looking at their systems, procedures and staff incentives and allocating adequate resource to better translate their policies into practice
- Support the strengthening of national ownership of human rights in the context of development partnerships, in particular around poverty reduction strategies
- Push for the integration of human rights into thinking and practice around new aid effectiveness processes, instruments and modalities of aid delivery

Strategies for promoting human rights-based education

Development partners can utilize a range of strategies in their programming for human rights-based education, including:

Providing technical expertise and building capacity to help states meet their international human rights commitments.

Facilitating the capacity of stakeholders to claim their rights. This will involve training and support on human rights to enhance the capacity of the Roma community to advocate for and claim their rights, and the creation of opportunities for them to do so.

Holding states to account. Partners with a commitment to the human rights of children have obligations to hold states to account on the commitments they have made both in ratifying international human rights treaties, but also the global strategies for the realization of those rights.

¹²⁹ 'Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness: Ownership, Harmonisation, Alignment, Results and Mutual Accountability', High Level Forum, Paris, 2005.

¹³⁰ OECD. *The Development Dimension: Integrating Human Rights into Development: Donor Approaches, experiences and challenges*. OECD, Paris, June 2006.

Building strategic partnerships to strengthen efficiency. Agencies need to collaborate effectively in order to ensure the greatest possible efficiency and effectiveness in programming and development co-operation both at the global and national levels. The NGO sector also needs to collaborate with partners to maximize effectiveness.

Building systemic change. Efforts need to be made to avoid pilot programmes that never go to scale. Segregated services that provide no linkage for children from minority groups to mainstream education provision should also be avoided. Overall, investment needs to be made in programmes that have the potential to achieve large scale systemic change, although experience indicates that many equity policies imply a continued need for some targeted interventions such as compensatory and positive discrimination programmes. A human rights-based approach necessitates giving priority to the most disadvantaged. Clearly, in the long run they are best served by a non-discriminating and fully inclusive education system. But until such reforms have been introduced, it will be essential to continue to target support on the most vulnerable groups. Targeted interventions will only cease to be necessary when national standards are set, adhered to and monitored by communities.¹³¹

Support collection and analysis of data from a national, regional and international perspective to facilitate informed policy-making. This will also allow for cross-country comparisons of progress, will help identify promising programmes or practices as well as analyse the conditions under which those best practices can be adopted by countries facing similar challenges.

CONCLUSION

The barriers faced by Roma children in realizing their right to education are huge: acute poverty, inadequate housing, xenophobia and prejudice, social exclusion, learning in an unfamiliar language, biased assessments, an alienating curriculum, inadequate teaching and chronic underfunding. These barriers are not insurmountable. However, as this paper demonstrates, investment in a coherent and consistent strategic approach that systematically targets each of the barriers is needed if real change is to be achieved. Piecemeal measures are not sufficient. Recognition must be given to the right of Roma children not only to access education, but for that education to be of appropriate quality and for their rights to be respected within the school environment. Only by addressing these three dimensions of the right to education will they be afforded an education on the basis of equality of opportunity that is consistent with Article 29 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which calls for measures to ensure the “development of their personality, talents and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.” Achieving this goal will require the following:

- Coordinated action across government
- Legislation to establish both entitlement and mechanisms of enforcement, backed up by the policies and resources to translate them into practice
- Investment in designing and supporting inclusive school environments, together with training for teachers, revisions to the curricula, adaptations to assessment tools and recruitment of Roma teaching assistants
- Acknowledgement of the social and economic barriers that impede access, and the introduction of social protection measures designed to help overcome them.
- Governments must extend an open hand to the Roma community, inviting them to join as partners in building an education for their children

¹³¹ United Nations Children’s Fund, *Thematic Report on Girls’ Education: Analysis of issues, challenges and achievements in 2004*, UNICEF, New York, 2005.

Without a commitment to working in collaboration with Roma people and respecting the experience and expertise they can bring to the table, it is unlikely that any efforts to fulfil the obligations to the right to education can be realized for Roma children. It is only the Roma people, including children themselves, who can provide the analysis and understanding on the ground of how the current system militates against them in gaining an effective education and who know the changes needed to make that happen. In addition, the long-standing experience of xenophobia and marginalization faced by the Roma community over decades have inevitably led to a deep mistrust of the majority community, and governments in particular. Governments will need to communicate a commitment to challenging that history and working towards a different future if they are to overcome the understandable mistrust and demonstrate a genuine desire to offer Roma children equal opportunities with all other children.

All the governments in the region have ratified the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Many have also signed the Roma Decade of Inclusion. In so doing, these governments have undertaken obligations to fulfil the right of every child to education without discrimination. There is an urgent imperative to act now on those obligations. The scale of the rights violations that Roma children continue to experience is unacceptable in humane and civilized societies. Action to bring about change is not just right in principle. There is also a powerful pragmatic case for doing so. Quality education has the potential to empower the Roma community to participate and contribute as citizens on an equal basis with others. This can only benefit the whole society, promoting social cohesion, reducing unrest and building economic capacity. Championing quality education is a win-win opportunity that governments need to grasp as a matter of urgency.



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SUMMARY OF KEY ISSUES

APPROACHES TO REALIZING THE RIGHT OF ALL ROMA
CHILDREN TO EDUCATION

1 GOVERNMENT-WIDE MEASURES

Political will and good governance

- Measures to promote accountability, transparency, access to justice and the rule of law
- Recognition of and commitment to comprehensive and sustained measures to tackle the extreme marginalization and exclusion of Roma children in the education system
- Scaling up of programmes, policies and strategies that have been successful – evidence-based advocacy should be used to increase the scale of impact
- Investment in new and innovative programmes to overcome the barriers to the right of Roma children to education

Government structures

- Government-wide strategies to address Roma education involving collaboration across all ministries
- Integrated education ministries – a commitment to achieve integrated administration of education to bring an end to separate structures for special education
- Devolved government structures – devolving responsibilities to the local level to strengthen local accountability, to be accompanied by capacity-building, guidance, dedicated budgets and transparent reporting

Financing

- Action to address both demand and supply side of education – investment in education infrastructure to overcome disadvantage and financial incentives to increase enrolment and retention
- Commitment to equitable allocation of funding to promote equality of opportunity
- More effective tracking of expenditure to strengthen accountability, transparency and ensure more effective use of funds
- Investment in improved housing, sanitation, employment and social welfare programmes to narrow the socio-economic gaps that fuel discrimination

Data collection and monitoring

- Improved disaggregated data collection to provide accurate information on the Roma community and identify disparities, inequalities and exclusion from education
- Advocacy to overcome the resistance to disaggregated data
- Consultation with Roma community on measures needed to ensure protection of integrity, privacy and appropriate designations of ethnicity
- Capacity-building in data collection
- Mechanisms to strengthen monitoring and evaluation of programmes to promote Roma children's right to education
- Monitoring schools regularly to ensure that formal or informal segregation is not taking place
- Monitoring preschool and school attendance for regularity and dropout
- Evidence-based advocacy to replicate programmes, policies and strategies that have been successful and increase the scale of impact
- Development of national indicators of social disadvantage

Legislation

- Prohibition of discrimination on grounds of race and ethnicity, backed by commitment of policies, resources and training to promote its implementation
- Guaranteed equal right to education for Roma children to bring an end to segregation and promote inclusion
- Prohibition of all forms of violence against children, backed up by policies to ensure its implementation
- Legislation to require registration of every birth, backed up by a commitment to achieving registration of all Roma children through:
 - consultation with local communities to identify barriers to registration
 - information campaigns to raise awareness of the importance of birth registration
 - simplifying forms and registration processes
 - translating forms into the Romani language
 - removing the requirement for parents to present their own identity papers
- Raising the age of marriage to 18 years for both boys and girls, with effective mechanisms for implementation and enforcement
- Raising the legal minimum age for full-time work to align it with the school-leaving age, accompanied by both effective enforcement and social protection measures
- All laws and policies to be backed up by effective monitoring and enforcement mechanisms that are effective, accessible and ensure access to justice
- Establishment of children's ombudsmen or commissioners with a mandate to promote and protect the rights of the most marginalized children

Partnerships, participation and community mobilization

- Involvement and consultation with Roma communities in policy development and implementation
- Investment in civil society programmes to promote empowerment of Roma communities to claim their rights
- Involvement of children in development of education and school policies
- Respect for and recognition of diversity within Roma communities
- Sensitization of local communities towards the Roma population, including multi-pronged approaches to building dialogue and promoting tolerance
- Development and dissemination of mechanisms through which Roma communities can make complaints or challenge decisions, actions or treatment of their children in schools
- Active collaboration with NGOs and other community-based organizations to engage their commitment to programmes designed to promote the right to education of local Roma children
- Schools to be utilized to build closer relationships with the community, especially to address issues between Roma and non-Roma

Capacity-building and awareness-raising

- National campaigns to challenge xenophobia and prejudice against Roma communities
- Training and capacity-building for all those responsible for Roma education, including national and local government officials, school administrators and teachers
- Awareness-raising for Roma communities to inform people of their rights and how to use them



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2 EDUCATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE RIGHT TO ACCESS EDUCATION

Measures to make school accessible and available

- Investment in early childhood education for every Roma child that offers on an inclusive basis wherever possible:
 - a minimum of two years provision of quality education¹³²
 - a holistic approach to addressing health and nutrition needs
 - collaboration and awareness-raising with local Roma communities to encourage demand
- Investment in promoting parental literacy to strengthen support for children's education
- Provision of an accessible school place for every Roma child in primary and lower secondary education, together with sufficient numbers of adequately trained teachers and appropriate resources and equipment, with consideration given to:
 - numbers of places needed
 - location of school building programmes
 - type of schooling required
 - availability of transport
 - wishes and needs of local Roma communities
 - achieving inclusive educational environments
 - the particular barriers facing girls in accessing education

Measures to end segregation and promote inclusion

- Comprehensive policies to implement a long-term commitment to inclusive education that include:
 - national and local action plans to promote inclusion, supported by financial, legal and administrative measures
 - commitment to address segregation both between and within schools
 - national and local monitoring systems to track progress in achieving inclusion
 - introduction of complaints mechanisms for Roma families to challenge breaches of their right to inclusion
 - provision of specialized training for teachers in mainstream schools to work in more inclusive environments
 - requirement for local municipalities to produce desegregation plans
 - financial incentives to promote desegregation
- Commitment to ending inappropriate placement of Roma children in special schools by:
 - abolition of current school entry testing systems to ensure that bias against Roma children is removed
 - removal of the financial and material incentives for special school placements in ways that do not penalize Roma parents or parents of children with disabilities
 - introduction of opportunities for reassessment of children placed in special schools
 - involvement of all stakeholders, including parents and teachers in both mainstream and special schools, to maximize support and utilize all available expertise in transferring children to mainstream schools
- Integration of special school staff into mainstream schools
- Financial support for local municipalities taking measures to address 'white flight'

¹³² Although UNICEF's overall regional policy is for a minimum of one year early childhood education, in view of the extreme deprivation and marginalization of Roma children, it is considered that two years is necessary.

Measures to remove the socio-economic barriers to education

- Preparatory programmes and additional academic support for Roma children:
 - to facilitate readiness for school
 - to support the transitions from one educational level to the next
 - to re-engage those who have dropped out of school
- Financial incentives to overcome the poverty that impedes access to school including:
 - free school meals or food programmes
 - free transport
 - stipends
 - help with school materials
 - conditional cash transfers to mothers at a level high enough to compensate for the costs of sending a child to school
 - scholarship with additional academic support
- Measures at the local/municipal level
- Opportunities for Roma parents to play an active role in the design, development and delivery of early childhood education facilities
- Collection of disaggregated data on local populations to identify the numbers of preschool and school places needed and where they should be located
- Provision of temporary satellite or mobile preschools in areas where no preschools exist until more permanent solutions are found
- Local desegregation policies to be implemented within a given time limit, which include a commitment to inclusive classroom environments
- Supporting schools to develop their own action plans on inclusion
- Investment in accessible, safe and affordable transport to enable Roma children older than preschool age to travel to schools outside their local communities
- Involvement of Roma parents in monitoring to ensure transparency and accountability
- Investment in local programmes, including through local NGOs, to support children at risk of dropping out, provide catch-up classes, facilitate transitions between educational stages and promote readiness for school
- Mechanisms through which parents can raise concerns, talk to staff members and lodge complaints where they feel their child has been treated inappropriately

3 EDUCATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE THE RIGHT TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Child-centred learning and assessment

- Commitment to child-centred learning that engages children as active contributors and recognizes the inherent value of every child
- Provision of individualized instruction that takes account of the different developmental levels of individual children
- Introduction of assessment procedures that are sensitive to the culture and language of Roma children and enable them to fulfil their potential without discrimination

Curriculum development

- Development of a broad-based, relevant and inclusive curriculum for all children that:
 - promotes academic and cognitive development together with essential life skills
 - includes human rights education promoting peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity
 - is free of any negative stereotypes or representations of Roma communities
 - is free of gender stereotypes
 - includes the teaching of Roma language, culture and history
- Commitment to ensuring that Roma children are taught the core curriculum on an equal basis with other children and not marginalized by a remedial curriculum

Improving teaching quality

- Investment in pre- and in-service training for teachers to enhance their capacity to provide appropriate teaching for Roma children
- Revision of the teaching curriculum to address children's rights, sensitization to Roma culture and identity, gender awareness, teaching in inclusive and multicultural environments, understanding and addressing discrimination, working in a bilingual environment and promoting positive strategies to promote tolerance
- Introduction of minimum standards for teachers to be applied equally across all schools
- Introduction of appropriately trained and paid Roma assistants and mediators
- Improving support for teachers through higher pay, including stipends for those working in challenging schools, better management, effective appraisal systems and opportunities to influence policy
- Investment in measures to encourage greater numbers of Roma to become teachers
- Tools and resources developed for teachers on how to promote positive inclusive learning environments

Creating child-friendly, safe and healthy school environments

- Development of intersectoral approaches to promote the health and nutrition of Roma children in order to maximize their potential for learning effectively
- Establishment of basic health and safety standards for children to ensure that both girls and boys have equal access to facilities and can participate fully in school life without fear of violence, taking into account location of schools, safe travel to and from school, appropriate facilities for girls, safe spaces for play and physical standards of school buildings
- Provision of appropriate and adequate educational equipment and materials, including multilingual textbooks where needed
- Access to spaces in school or in other appropriate locations where Roma children who lack the facilities and support at home can study after school hours

Measures at the local/municipal level

- Forums for teachers to share experiences, challenges and strategies for working in multicultural environments
- Audits of local schools, in consultation with children and parents including from the Roma community, to assess issues of quality, health and safety
- Consideration to be given to building a system of ongoing support for teachers –for example, through

fortnightly or monthly meetings of teachers in schools in the local community – to allow for opportunities to share ideas, challenges, strategies and solutions

- Building capacity and links with Roma communities including:
 - inviting Roma to join school boards
 - providing adult education and literacy programmes
 - increasing parental skills and encouraging their involvement in children’s learning through mothers’ clubs, outreach programmes and parental counselling services
 - involvement of parents in programmes to promote children’s readiness for school
 - engaging Roma pedagogical assistants or mediators

4 EDUCATION POLICIES AND STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE RESPECT FOR RIGHTS WITHIN EDUCATION

Promoting the right to identity and respect for culture and language

- Recognition of the right of Roma children to retain their own language and to the optimal linguistic environment to support their learning through:
 - provision of preschool learning for Roma children in their mother tongue
 - bilingual education in the first year of primary education
 - opportunities for all Roma children to learn Roma at school as an additional language
- Development of policies and guidance for schools, in partnership with representatives from the Roma community, on how to promote multicultural learning environments

Respecting children’s participation rights in education

- Consideration of legislation to provide children with the right to establish democratic school councils, based on principles of inclusion and non-discrimination
- Development of guidance to local municipalities and schools on the right of children to be heard, and approaches towards its implementation, which emphasize the necessity for inclusiveness and non-discrimination
- Establishment of advisory groups of Roma children to provide guidance on development of legislation and policies in relation to segregation, inclusion, school dropout or transitions between educational stages

Protecting children’s right to respect for their personal and physical integrity

- Legal prohibition against all forms of violence in schools, backed up by a strong message that all forms of violence against children are unacceptable, that schools should be rights-based and promote and practice human rights principles
- Promotion of non-violence, accompanied by policies with clear enforcement mechanisms, recognizing the particular vulnerability of Roma children as well as the gender-based dimensions of violence
- Clear codes of conduct reflecting child rights principles, established and promoted widely for all staff, students and their families and communities
- Schools should have trained and trusted adults to whom students can safely and confidentially report incidents of violence and receive advice
- All school staff to be trained and supported in the use of non-violent and respectful classroom management strategies, as well as specific skills to prevent patterns of bullying and other gender-based violence and to respond to it effectively

- Children, including Roma, to be actively involved in the design, development, implementation and monitoring of policies and programmes, including through access to confidential complaints or reporting mechanisms
- Schools supported as a resource to build closer relationships with the community to address violence in and around schools between Roma and non-Roma, involving students, staff, parents and other partners such as police, health services, social services, faith-based groups, recreation and cultural groups

Measures at the local/municipal level

- Development of school policies in partnership with children on rights, inclusion, respect for diversity and non-discrimination, accompanied by mechanisms through which children can raise concerns or register complaints if they feel they are not being treated appropriately
- Monitoring of school policies on a regular basis to ensure that they are implemented effectively
- Consideration of forums – which would need administrative and financial support from the local municipality and could include adult Roma facilitators – where Roma children can meet and share experiences, concerns and ideas on how to improve the quality of their school experience
- Establishment of school councils in which both girls and boys from the Roma community play an active role
- Introduction of circle time where children can share issues of importance and concern and learn to respect each other's right to be heard and to be treated equally
- Consideration of peer counselling programmes in which Roma children play an active part, and through which they can access support if they are experiencing problems in school
- Introduction of safe and confidential complaints mechanisms through which children can raise concerns
- Support for individual schools in developing inclusive mechanisms for listening to children
- Introduction of mechanisms for ensuring that children are able to express a view on school placements, and have their views taken seriously in accordance with their age and maturity
- Initiate local campaigns to promote zero tolerance of violence against Roma communities, including by majority children against Roma children in and travelling to school

ACRONYMS

CCT	conditional cash transfers (CCT)
CEECIS	Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
CFS	child-friendly schools
CSEE	Central and South-Eastern Europe
EU	European Union
INGO	international non-governmental organization
MDG	Millennium Development Goals
MICS	multiple indicator cluster surveys
NDA	National Development Authority
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OOIH	National Educational Integration Network
PEA	Public Education Act
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
REF	Roma Education Fund
SEE	South-Eastern Europe
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund





