



MAKING DESEGREGATION WORK!

A Desegregation Toolkit Developed by the Roma Education Fund – 2015

THE EXPERIENCE OF THE ROMA EDUCATION FUND – WHAT IS SEGREGATION IN THE CASE OF ROMA?

In the last decade, there has been a growing awareness among policy-makers and various civil society actors that patterns of segregated schooling pose a major barrier for access to equal educational opportunities for Romani communities throughout Europe.

“School segregation is a problem because it aggravates inherited social inequalities. It is a negative phenomenon both from efficiency and moral considerations. It is especially alarming if it happens on ethical grounds and targets minorities who are distinguishable by their appearance.”¹ Beyond the social injustice involved in school segregation of Roma, there are major problems that are encountered in segregated education as these schools have low efficiency and are offering significantly lower quality services than mainstream schools.

The phenomenon of school segregation affecting large numbers of Roma in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) has different historic roots and manifestations ranging from disproportionate placement of Romani children in special schools for children with mental disabilities to maintenance of Roma-only schools, to separation of Romani children in Roma-only classes within mainstream schools.

Types

School segregation can be defined in the following core categories:

1. Ghetto Schools: Schools with a majority of Roma caused mainly by residential segregation
2. Placement of Roma in special schools for learning and mental difficulties
3. Segregation by Classroom based on ethnicity
4. Zero grades (compensation for lack of school readiness)
5. Private Student’s status (decreasing the presence of Roma within the school)

Consequences

Many Roma children are subjected to education in segregated institutions of lower quality. Because of this, a significant number are discouraged from continuing their education. Reasons for not enrolling or leaving school are numerous and they include family financial situation, lack of adaptation of educational institutions (discrimination) as well as lack of help to children to master the school materials.

¹ Gábor Kertesi: Segregation in the Primary School System in Hungary, Causes and Consequences.



Research also concluded that studying in segregated environment leads to psychological harm of Romani children manifested in diminished self-esteem and self-respect leading to identity development problems.²

Long-term socio-economic effects

“Beyond the human rights violations involved in segregated schooling, research shows that it is not simply a moral need to do something about segregated education, but there is also an economic need. There is a huge potential in Romani pupils, and in few years’ time the economies of Central and Eastern European Member States will heavily depend on those who are now pupils, many of whom are Roma.”

– Livia Jaroka, MEP and REF Board Member

European Court of Human Rights cases against school segregation

The Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) set in 2007 the cornerstone of clear jurisdiction for separate education of Romani children in the case of *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* by clearly stating that overrepresentation of **Roma in special education** constitutes discrimination. The Court made it clear that even if the law is facially neutral, it can still be discriminatory in its effect. At the time of the case in Ostrava (Czech Republic), Romani children were 27-times more likely to be placed into special education in comparison to their non-Roma peers.

In 2008 the Court dealt with another form of separated education of Roma, when **Romani children were taught in a separate building** of the same school. On June 5, 2008, the ECtHR in the case of *Sampanis and Others v. Greece* confirmed that separate education is a violation of the European Convention on Human Rights and banned such practices.

The ECtHR continued to develop jurisprudence guidelines for Roma education on March 16, 2010, in the case of *Orsus and Others v. Croatia*, when in addition to the previous forms of violation of non-discrimination principles, the Court confirmed that **separate education in Roma-only classes** on the basis of language difficulties constitutes discriminatory treatment.

The European Court of Human Rights further dealt with the issue of segregated education of Roma in the beginning of 2013 when it reaffirmed that the **placement of Roma children into special schools on the basis of biased tests** is contradictory to the non-discrimination principles. The case of *Horvath and Kiss v. Hungary* (January 29, 2013) has highlighted that discriminatory principles are present in the education of Romani children even six years after the first ground-breaking ruling.

In its 2013 resolution, the European Parliament (EP) **urged** the Member States to *eliminate segregation in the field of education and the illicit placement of Roma children in special schools, where relevant, and to create the necessary infrastructure and mechanisms to facilitate access to quality education for all Roma children*³; in the context of the progress made in the implementation of the National Roma Integration Strategies. The Member States are now obliged to report annually on progress made at national level.

² The Case for Integrated Education. A School for All, REF 2007.

³ Available online: <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/sides/getDoc.do?pubRef=-//EP//TEXT+TA+P7-TA-2013-0594+0+DOC+XML+V0//EN>: See recommendation 21.



A SOLUTION TOWARDS INTEGRATED EDUCATION

Policy Making: Ensure equity to create skills for life

In Europe, the debate on segregated education has focused a lot on discrimination, and human rights activists and practitioners have tried to demonstrate that segregation is a discriminatory practice that goes against EU principles. But there is still lack of understanding in many European countries that low income groups and/or ethnic segregation in schools creates a discriminatory situation.

While fighting discrimination is important, it is not the only problem posed by school segregation. It is important to acknowledge that integrated education makes sense from the educational and economic point of view, and that additional efforts made to desegregate can generate positive returns on the investment made by the government. The Roma Education Fund has engaged to collect information in a number of studies and to carry out such cost-benefit analyses which should lead to efficient policy making towards integration benefits.

This should be remedied by formulating and implementing policies aimed at preventive measures such as increasing the access of Roma children to early childhood education to ensure improved learning in the early childhood period and the successful transition of Roma children to integrated primary education or the prohibition of segregated education based on ethnicity.

Regardless of whether such policies already exist or have yet to be developed, their implementation should be accompanied by constant monitoring and evaluation. Early childhood education programs and/or services exist in Europe in their segregated and integrated forms. Although arguments in favor of segregation could easily be found in the attitudes of some teachers who believe that work in homogenous classes is easier and therefore student achievements are higher, the ultimate aim should not be measured only in terms of temporary knowledge results but also by the fact that segregation at the school level is very likely to result in long term divisions in society, ***leading not to multiculturalism but to social exclusion and permanent segregation.***

Benefits

There are many benefits of integrated education that have been proved by empirical research.. For Roma, desegregation ensures the continued access to better quality school infrastructure, qualified teachers and mainstream curriculum. As a result of improving the quality of education there are visible effects on improving school attendance rates of Roma pupils and reducing the dropout rates. Integrated education is also improving school results of Roma pupils as demonstrated by research conducted in Bulgaria and Hungary. From the teacher's perspective, integrated education is raising and therefore normalizing their expectations in regards to working with Roma pupils and their future school career. It is important to mention that while these positive effects on Roma are documented by research these effects are obtained in conditions in which the performance of non-Roma pupils remains at the same level.

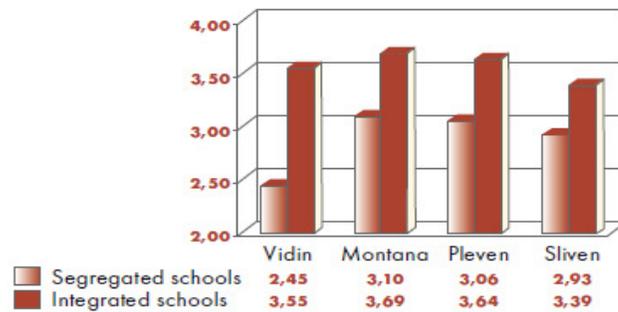
The positive effects that school desegregation have on school attendance and the achievements of Romani children are unquestionable and have been documented in a number of studies. Another



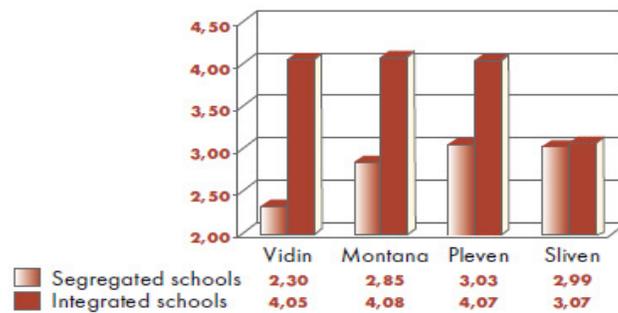
benefit of integrated education is that a considerable amount of knowledge can be obtained through *peer learning*, and a certain amount of competition between children can also produce positive results. It is much easier to keep the level of learning high when the class has a diverse socio-economic composition as opposed to when all pupils come from lower socio-economic backgrounds. There is an emerging positive effect on the educational performance of children as well as an increase in the test scores of students.

The graphs below describe the educational outcomes over the course of four years of Roma children in Bulgaria who participated in desegregation programs. The children have accumulated clear advantages in school achievement compared to their peers in Roma-only schools.

Graph 1 shows the results of the tests in mathematics in four cities:



Graph 2 shows the results of the tests in Bulgarian in four cities:



Source: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee. "Pet godini po-kasno: Nepravitelstvenite proekti za desegregacia na romskoto obrazovanie", January 2006.

However, a successful transition of Romani children from segregated to integrated schools cannot be achieved without addressing several crucial factors, such as, parental involvement, creation of a supportive school environment as well as academic and social support. According to educational specialists, 20 percent of learning happens when the child is at home, but in most of the cases Roma children do not have adequate conditions for learning at home. This means that poorer children need additional support in form of tutoring or home support to compensate the socio-economic differences.

KNOWLEDGE: WHAT WORKS

Desegregation is a serious problem in most of the countries of CEE, some countries more serious than others, but most countries have the same list of problems that require innovative and proactive interventions. Furthermore sustainable desegregation is a long process and always requires the close monitoring and control of the newcomers and first graders in order to maintain the proper class composition and quality of education.

Although conditions in these countries vary, the experience of *Roma Education Fund* reveals that a specific set of conditions are essential for the advancement of the desegregation process. These conditions include: motivational work with Romani parents by grassroots Roma NGOs; collaboration between grassroots Romani NGOs, educationalists, school administrators and school maintainers in the planning and implementation of school desegregation activities; academic support for Romani children moved from the segregated into integrated schools; and development of a policy framework at central level of government, including financial commitment to the process.

The provision of equal educational opportunities to all pupils and students requires on the one hand, the provision of equal access of Roma children to the school system in the country, and on the other hand, the provision of quality education to all children. This requires a *thorough, consistent and systemic reform of the educational system* in order to provide all students with equal educational opportunities. The aspect of this kind of reform should consist of the following:

- *The provision of free all-day, two-year long preschool education for all children accompanied by a supportive package of special services to act as a preventative measure against students dropping out on the grounds of socio-economic reasons. It develops the social, emotional and cognitive skills of children so that their competences in communicating in the standard national language are efficient enough for them to fully benefit from the educational opportunities offered in primary school. Such services can include; free didactical materials and school aids, free food and stay, free transport, free extracurricular classes for children with specific educational needs, etc.)*
- *The provision of a package of supportive services including free textbooks, free didactic materials and school aids, free food and stay, free transport, free extracurricular classes for children with educational difficulties, free forms of day-long types of education and study rooms.*
- *Gradual closing and transformation of segregated schools.* In order for this to be achieved it is necessary that the following measures are concurrently carried out: official recognition of the problem with the segregated schools on the part of the respective Ministry of Education. The Ministry has to take concrete measures towards the complete elimination thereof; zero admission of students in the segregated Roma neighborhood schools; the incorporation of criteria for the management of a multicultural classroom setting; overview of the procedures on students transferring from schools to ensure the smooth closure of segregated schools with minimal disruptions to the students' study patterns, thereby ensuring a balance between Roma and non-Roma students in the newly established integrated classes. *Reorganization of the school districts* under the consideration to have a more equal ratio of Roma students to non-Roma students to change the composition of the class rooms to be more equal. This measure



allows combating the educational consequences of the residential segregation in case if the Roma settlement/school is part of the locality and not isolated from the center. City of Hodmezovasarhely fully integrated its Roma student through this method, but also provided many additional supportive activities which ensured the success of the integration: clearly defined message and commitment of the local decision makers towards the local community, methodological preparation of pedagogues, including multiple training courses, covering the local transportation cost of students; social and academic support to the Roma students, cooperation of the educational institutions.

- *The incorporation of a system of external evaluation of the achievements and results made by students after the completion of each educational stage.* It is especially important that this new data is standardized and that the evaluation indicators are used to assess the overall condition of the educational system. Information such as this can be used for system management purposes and in optimizing the allocation of resources.
- *Inclusion and adequate representation of elements of Roma culture into educational programs.* This ethnic representation within the school curriculum would contribute to the strengthening of Roma identity and the establishment of ethnic tolerance and inter-ethnic understanding.
- *Training of teachers on ways to apply new methods of teaching in the integrated school setting. For this purpose, two essential requirements have to be in place.* On the one side, incorporation and institutionalization of bachelor and masters programs on integrated education at the university level. On the other side, the formulation of a package of training materials geared at increasing the qualifications of teachers with respect to teaching in a multicultural setting. These materials would contribute to strengthening teachers' credentials and would open prospects for their further career development. Thus, a system of incentives can be put in place in order to stipulate a reward system for the more initiative and flexible teachers.
- *Incorporation and institutionalization of the position of "teacher assistant".* In all integrated schools where students from a minority group are taught, it is necessary that a similar position to teaching assistants is established and a standardized professional description of what the position of associate teacher entails; this position would have to be added to the national list of professions. In view of the adequate need for associate teachers as a part of the teacher personnel available at schools, it would be necessary that this position is associated with clearly stipulated duties and responsibilities. These responsibilities are to be added to the Law on Education in order for the newly established position to quickly gain legitimacy and thus be subject to legal enforcement by the municipal authorities.
- *Active incorporation of parents into all aspects of the management and organization of the school system.*
- *Informing all parents of the value and benefits of integrated education in their respective language* for the purpose of preventing secondary segregation of students already incorporated into the integrated system of education; this would also be a preventative



strategy against Roma children being enlisted back to Roma neighborhoods schools and would limit stereotypical opinions from disseminating on the basis of minority groups and people with disabilities.

- *In case of class based segregation* supportive measures from above list are also applicable if the local leadership agrees on the reorganization of class composition.

REF ACHIEVEMENTS

The launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005 has been a major impetus for the development and implementation of school desegregation policies, which are formulated as a priority in the area of education in the Decade Action Plans of several governments. As one of the major instruments for the realization of the Decade goals in the area of education, the Roma Education Fund (REF) has sought to promote actions by grassroots organizations and governments to make school desegregation an irreversible process. A wide range of initiatives funded by REF are expected to result in reducing levels of schools segregation in the long-term. In this part, however, we focus on the initiatives which involve direct desegregation action, i.e. discontinuing Romani children's attendance of segregated schools and classes and their integration in mainstream education as well as first year enrolment of Romani children in integrated classes.

REF's overarching principle is that positive practices emerging from grassroots level should gradually move to mainstream policies, while government policies should be substantially informed by civil society experiences and implemented with the involvement of Roma organizations.

REF has been actively supporting the implementation of desegregation projects in multiple countries. The most significant efforts and programs are being implemented in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia, Romania, and Montenegro. These projects involve actions to enroll Romani children in integrated schools, retain them at these schools and ensure achievement comparable to their non-Romani peers; development of methodological tools for integrated education; training of teachers to work with Romani children in integrated schools and other activities to create supportive educational environment for Romani children in mainstream schools; and public campaigns for mainstreaming school desegregation in national educational policies.

To that effect, REF supports both Romani grassroots activities to develop models of engaging Romani communities in the school desegregation process as well as governmental programs to put in place a policy infrastructure for school desegregation.

The school desegregation projects demonstrated in practice that the integration of Romani children in mainstream schools is achievable and that Roma culture is not an obstacle for the integration of Roma. These projects transcended non-governmental action and had a real impact on government policies. The idea for school desegregation also transcended the boundaries of one country and influenced policies in several countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as EU-level policies.

Bulgaria: REF-funded desegregation projects have made a historical breakthrough in the Roma education paradigm in Europe by challenging the stereotypical views of Roma as people who are not capable of integrating in the mainstream society. In Bulgaria, starting in 2005, REF has been supporting school desegregation actions that have been initiated by Romani grassroots organizations



in nine towns (Berkovitsa, Montana, Pazardjik, Pleven, Plovdiv, Sliven, Sofia, Stara Zagora, and Vidin) and school desegregation actions that have been initiated in a mainstream school in the town of Blaoevgrad.

These activities follow a model of integrating Romani children from Roma-only schools into mainstream schools developed in 2000 with the launch of the first desegregation project in the town of Vidin.

Through that scheme, the Centre for educational integration of children and students from ethnic minorities⁴ will fund projects of NGOs and local authorities aimed at enrollment of Romani children from Roma-only schools into mainstream schools according to the model developed in Vidin and practiced in the other eight towns where Romani NGOs pioneered school desegregation actions.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science, there are about 3,000 children who have been taken out of segregated schools and transferred to ethnically mixed schools, while nongovernmental organizations supported by REF put the figure at 3,500. This clearly demonstrates the symbolic pace of the desegregation process, which had been declared as a priority. The Ministry of Education and Science reports indicate that the number of segregated schools in the entire country has diminished from 105 to 64 as the result of restructuring of the school system and of desegregation projects.

These projects demonstrated that when appropriate conditions are created for the successful integration of Romani children in mainstream schools, Romani children achieve good results in these schools. When the process of integration of Romani children is part of a larger civil society action, involving awareness-raising among non-Roma, non-Roma can accept the integration of Roma in mainstream schools. Educationalists accept school integration of Romani children.

Czech Republic: D.H and Others v. Czech Republic: REF together with the Step by Step International Association and European Early Childhood Association submitted an Amicus Brief to the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights, documenting that testing and the related practice of enrolling Romani children in schools for mentally disabled create major segregation mechanism, and thus contribute to serious inequalities in society.

Croatia: REF provided professional and financial support to the county **government in Medjimurje** in order to prevent the segregation in the country, All Romani children in the county have been enrolled to preschool education to acquire basic school competence skills, which is most often the argumentation for establishing segregated settings.

Hungary: REF provided professional and financial support to **local governments** in order to help or to start the desegregation process:

- Szeged and Hódmezővásárhely: REF financed the Student Mentoring program, which provided the social and academic support to the integrated Roma students to prevent them from dropping out, and also before the start of the program provided professional support to

⁴ Office under the Bulgarian Ministry of Education.



the localities. The program has served many times as a good example for other localities and was visited by three CEDEFOP groups.

- **Ács:** in Ács a full educational integration was implemented for 8 years. Children from special schools, Roma and multiply-disadvantaged children have been integrated into one mainstream school and are currently educated in heterogeneous institutions. REF has provided financial support to set up a mentor system for students in educational need. In addition to that the settlements have served as a good example for other localities and took part in knowledge sharing events (CEDEFOP, study visits, conferences).
- **Bicske:** REF has provided professional support and small financial support to start its desegregation process in Bicske. The teaching staff was prepared for the change through professional support and training that included presenting the successful models of the programs in Szeged and Ács.

REF started the involvement of universities, especially their pedagogical departments in the work for Roma settlements to bridge the gap in educational outcomes and home support. Volunteering does not have tradition in this region, and after two years of cooperation the Szeged University (Hungary) agreed to piloting the proposal. Now we have two tertiary level institutions where university students serve as volunteers in REF projects and act as mentors and tutors for Romani children. **Student volunteering activities** were adopted in *Montenegro*; *the process started also in Croatia, Slovakia and Romania*.

Serbia: Development of a sublegal act addressing discrimination in education (in cooperation with the Ministry responsible for human and minority rights); REF participated in public debates open during designing and adopting new Educational Laws and policies and sent comments, which influenced on some of the Laws.

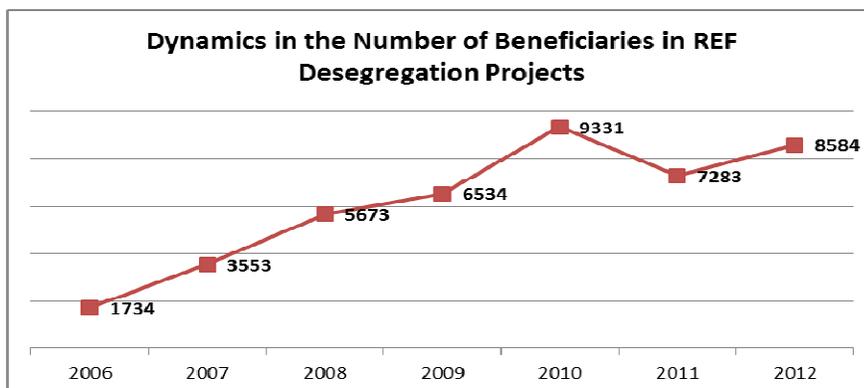
“In Serbia, reduction of Roma children in segregated schools has occurred from 32% in 2008 to approximately 6% in 2012 (according to MoES) and is aiming to be further reduced. This is partially definitely due to REF support to the work of Inter-sector commission and control of the enrolment in special schools.”⁵

Romania: Elimination of segregation and combating discrimination on ethnicity, social status, disability or any other criteria that affect Roma children and youth within educational system; The ministerial order no. 1540/2007 on the interdiction of school segregation of Roma children was revised in 2010 and REF has played an important role in advocating for its revision. A Memorandum of Cooperation was prepared between civil society actors and the Ministry of Education on the ensuring of access of Roma children and youth from Romania to quality education by means of school desegregation and promoting education on identity. REF was an initiator and is part of the NGO coalition that lobbied for the development of these mechanisms for fighting and sanctioning the segregation on ethnic criteria; currently desegregation is mentioned in the Educational Act.

⁵ Impact evaluation of Roma Education Fund, 2012



Dynamics in the Number of Beneficiaries in REF Desegregation Projects (2006-2012)



REF beneficiaries in desegregation projects across the Decade of Roma Inclusion countries⁶

2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	TOTAL
1,734	3,553	5,673	6,534	9,331	7,283	1,301	7,815	3,591	46,815

QUOTES

Student: *“It is a humiliation to get into that class. It is a shame.”* (Experiences of intra-school segregation Roma)

Teacher on segregated Roma classes: *“It is a disaster. We should have integrated those [Roma] children. Now that class is a problem class, totally out of our control.”* (teacher in Hungary)⁷

“[...] segregated education denies both Roma and non-Roma children the chance to know each other and to learn to live as equal citizens. It excludes Roma children from mainstream society at the very beginning of their lives, increasing the risk of their being caught in the vicious circle of marginalisation.” Commissioner for Human Rights, Council of Europe, February 15, 2006

“Many countries often think of education as an expense. We want to say these are the most strategic investments you can make in a country.” Jim Yong Kim, World Bank President

⁶ Roma Education Fund, Annual Report 2014.

⁷ Center for Policy Studies, Central European University, 2015.



From REF's perspective, the desegregation projects which have been most successful have tended to share some of the same strengths. These include: considerable monitoring and a flexible approach to implementation; extensive efforts to communicate with Roma community members affected by the projects; involvement of a wide range of stakeholders from Municipal leaders to businesses and media and inclusion of parents of Roma children especially when issues affect them.

The Roma Education Fund will continue to increase the capacity of the Member States, and Roma civil society in knowledge and expertise to undertake successful school desegregation and to build the capacity an effective monitoring and evaluation system to measure its progress in this field.