

COMBATING EDUCATIONAL DEPRIVATION OF ROMA CHILDREN
A Policy Discussion Paper

Submitted for discussion by:

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CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY 2
1. PROBLEM STATEMENT 3
2. GOALS AND STRATEGY 6
3. OBJECTIVES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS 7
4. IMPLEMENTATION 13
5. POLICY LEVERS 14
6. CONCLUSION 15
NOTES: 16

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper sets out a policy framework for governments, NGOs, international agencies, external funders and Roma organizations in the countries of East-Central and South-East Europe to develop both short and long-term plans for ending the educational deprivation of Roma children. This goal will require policy and program changes not only in the school system but beyond. Eleven key school related recommendations are listed, including improved pre-school provisions, an end to segregated placement of Roma children, hiring more Roma staff, improving schools, and strengthening ties with Roma parents and communities. Eight key general measures are proposed including strengthening anti-bias provisions, strengthening Roma community organizations, and providing adult education. The paper concludes with suggestions on implementation, focusing on developing specific action plans and timelines in each country and systems of monitoring and evaluation to verify them. The proposed changes would not only increase equity of access for Roma children, but would result in improved education for all children and would contribute to increased social cohesion. Significant improvement in educational outcomes for Roma children is necessary and possible and this paper offers a workable approach to achieve this.

1. PROBLEM STATEMENT

One of the central challenges faced by societies around the world is coping with demographic diversity. A century ago it was widely believed that differences among peoples within a country were something to be ignored if not obliterated, and that the goal should be a common citizenship in which everyone is as similar as possible¹. This belief has been challenged dramatically by events in the last century as well as by changing ideas about human society and worth. It is now recognized that there can be very serious consequences if societies cannot find ways of ensuring that all sections of a population have an opportunity to participate fully in society. When people do not have the opportunity to succeed, there are serious risks of the breakdown of social cohesion which can result in higher social costs in the form of greater health care needs, more social assistance payments and higher rates of delinquency and criminality². Full participation requires not assimilation but rather a recognition and acceptance of different identities as important prerequisites for success³.

Issues of diversity and equity are central themes in education in all countries. Many countries, including those in East-Central Europe are making efforts to improve outcomes for children from minority groups, and in so doing are able to draw on a broader base of international experience and research. Improvements in education for disadvantaged minorities should be an integral part of strategies to provide better education for all students⁴.

A primary issue concerns expectations. In many countries there are still those that believe that minority children will not succeed at the same level as the majority. However the recent OECD Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) study⁵ shows that it is possible to combine high levels of overall achievement with relatively small disparities among schools and populations. The PISA results suggest that inequities in achievement tend to be smaller where there is a more flexible school system and less selection of students into different types of schools. Moreover, PISA draws attention to the importance of motivating students, as the initial analysis concludes that students who enjoy and engage in reading are more successful even when disadvantaged in terms of family background and income. Clearly it is possible both to improve standards and reduce inequities across the population, and this should be the aim of all countries⁶.

1.1 Problems with Current Outcomes for Roma Students

Educational outcomes for Roma children in East-Central and South-East Europe are a cause of great concern⁷:

- In Romania, where the national literacy rate is between 96 and 98% and where Roma may account for at least 9.4% of the population, 44% of Roma men and 59% of Roma women were illiterate according to a 1993 study⁸;
- The school dropout rate in Bulgaria before 11th grade is 85% for Roma children compared to 3.87% overall⁹;
- In Serbia, the dropout rate is 78% for Roma children by the end of elementary school;
- In the Czech Republic, 46.4% (other estimates place this at around 75%) of Roma children are in special schools for the mentally handicapped¹⁰;
- In Macedonia, as many as 10% of school-aged Romani children never enter the first grade. Of those that do enter, half drop out by the fifth grade. Of those remaining, only 35-49% complete compulsory education¹¹.

The existence of a minority group across Europe that faces substantial discrimination and is unable to participate fully in broader community life is a completely unacceptable situation that must be changed.

The educational deprivation of Roma children is the consequence of three intertwined causes: racism and segregation, unequal socio-economic background and minority-insensitive educational systems.

The pervasive institutionalized racism at all levels of the school system results in segregated education settings that are inherently unequal, and do not lead to adequate skills or needed credentials.

There are three basic types of the educational segregation:

- inappropriate assessment and consequent streaming of Roma children into special education settings;

- within-school segregation in mainstream schools, particularly segregated classes with lower expectations for students;
- Roma-only schools as the result of geographical and socio-economic segregation.

Roma children also lack the socio-economic background of the majority of their peers which prepares the majority children for the educational system. All systems of formal education set certain entrance level requirements so that children may fully benefit from schooling. These requirements, which vary slightly from country to country, typically include some quantum of information and certain level of cognitive, emotional, social and motor skills. These skills or competencies are usually acquired in the family and in preschool education. The socio-economic deprivation of Roma families often leads to weak or non-existent knowledge and skills. A high level of poverty among Roma means that families may lack the income to cover the cost of preschool. The high level of parents' illiteracy and the lack of educational materials in the home promoting school readiness lead to educational disadvantages when children enter school. For all these reasons, most Roma children, unlike their majority peers, enter formal education unprepared: they are not fluent in the language of instruction, nor do they have basic skills and competencies.

But, the inequality does not stop there: for most Roma children it continues throughout school. An average Roma child does not have sufficient family support, known now to be one of the key factors for school success¹²: there is no money for the purchase of books, there is practically no one to help with the homework. A basic lack of space, heat, and often electricity can make homework impossible.

Finally, schools are often completely insensitive to the needs of Roma children. They lack appropriate and meaningful curricula¹³, materials, assessment practices and teaching strategies. Teachers are not trained to work effectively with minority students, their families and communities, while school administrators do not have an adequate understanding of the requirements for success for Roma children and families, or lack commitment to this success. The school environment is very often contaminated with bias toward Roma children and Roma in general. This situation will continue as long as there are no incentives for change and schools are not held accountable to families and communities.

The evident consequence is the lack of trust and poor relationships between schools and Roma families. The drop-out rate is exacerbated by the fact that the education available to the vast majority of Roma children does not lead to marketable skills and employment.

Poor educational outcomes are not only a problem for Roma people, but also for the countries they inhabit. Moreover, in an era of declining birth rates, impending labor shortages, and growing demands on citizens, no country can afford to have a substantial part of its population growing up without adequate skills for citizenship and employment. For Roma, as for other citizens in the region, developing the skills needed to earn a decent living in these new economies is critical. Improvement for Roma will also be improvement for society as a whole¹⁴.

2. GOALS AND STRATEGY

The overall **goals** of educational interventions must be improved educational outcomes for Roma children and youth as reflected in:

- participation at all levels of education equivalent to that of the general population;
- student achievement levels at all ages that are similar to those of the country as a whole;
- secondary and post-secondary school completion rates at national levels;
- education that leads to marketable skills;
- significant participation in adult education and training leading to marketable skills for Roma adults with low levels of formal education.

Any strategy for achieving these goals must have in mind the following:

First, these goals must be reached in ways that are sensitive to and respectful of Roma culture and language and the wishes of Roma communities. Simply forcing minorities into the dominant culture will not work.

Secondly, in addition to changes in schooling, there must also be changes in associated social policy and attitudes, including measures to prohibit discrimination.

Thirdly, the contexts in which Roma children are educated vary greatly and these will require different combinations of measures to achieve the same goals.

Fourthly, the right policies are important but they are not enough. Lasting educational change depends not only on policy but also on ongoing support for change at all levels of the system, and especially in local schools and communities. Policies must be accompanied by appropriate implementation plans and resources, including effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to demonstrate how these have been achieved successfully.

Finally, a successful strategy needs to be based on a comprehensive approach. The Open Society Institute has been a strong advocate for efforts to improve educational outcomes for Roma children. As a result, it has learned a considerable amount about how to achieve better results by using a more comprehensive approach¹⁵.

This approach operates on several levels:

- The strategy must address children 0-18+ and their families;
- The strategy should pay attention to prevention of school failure, intervention to keep children in school, and rehabilitation for those who have fallen out of the system;
- The strategy must involve the careful review of all levels of the school system and the policies of local and central government;
- Educational policies cannot succeed without supporting actions in other sectors, such as: health, employment, economic development, social protection and civic participation.

3. OBJECTIVES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

A large body of research in education shows clearly that educational outcomes are shaped as much by social structures and students' background and environment as by what schools do¹⁶. An effective approach to improving educational outcomes for Roma must therefore be multi-faceted and extend beyond the school.

In each of the three following sections the first set of policy recommendations is focused on school-related activities, and for that reason is more specific. The second set is aimed at addressing issues beyond the school.

Many of these strategies will yield benefits beyond those to Roma children alone. Processes that strengthen teachers' skills or reduce school failure in the early years or work more effectively with parents will benefit all students. Efforts to improve outcomes for Roma

children and families can reasonably be expected to result in better outcomes for all students. Improved evaluation and reporting can lead to higher overall performance. This is a situation in which all can benefit.

3.1 Moving Towards Successful Integration

A. School-Related Action

3.1.1 *Reduce or eliminate placement of Roma children in special schools, segregated classes and segregated schools that offer inferior programs of study.* This process is already underway in some countries and is a vital first step, though by no means sufficient in itself. It will require a combination of measures including legal and policy changes to prohibit discrimination as well as programmatic shifts. However, the inadequacies of the mainstream education system must be addressed as well. Physical integration of Roma children into mainstream classes and schools will not be sufficient unless there are also changes in teaching practice, school-family relationships, and the overall climate in the receiving schools together with appropriate educational support for students¹⁷.

3.1.2 *The problem of segregated ghetto schools should be approached using diverse strategies.* Wherever possible, Roma children should be transferred into integrated schools as soon as possible, when safe, feasible and educationally sound. Approaches to effective integration include:

- school and community based early childhood development programs to ensure preparedness for school;
- training of receiving school teachers and administrators in child-centered pedagogy, anti-bias education, methodologies for second language learning, multi-cultural education, and effective ways of involving parents and communities¹⁸;
- school environment that respects the diversity of the student population.
- reinforcing basic skills through tutoring and mentoring and catch-up classes to ensure children can succeed in mainstream integrated schools;
- increasing social interaction between children from different communities;
- school-based curriculum development that takes into account the Roma community;

- innovative approaches to provide information, access and skills needed for the job market in the 21 century.
- after-school programs that meet the particular needs of Roma children;
- public awareness campaigns to encourage positive attitudes
- cross community co-operation programs

Successful integration is the ultimate goal. However, while the lengthy process of convincing governments to desegregate schools goes on, efforts should be made to improve education in segregated environments so that integration can be more effectively achieved¹⁹. In such cases the parents' choice should be taken into consideration, as it is their right. Interventions in a segregated environment should, in any case, meet the following conditions:

- a/ they are accompanied by an adequate strategy for integration;
- b/ they prepare students, schools and communities for future desegregation;
- c/ they do not conflict with ongoing desegregation activities;
- d/ their outcomes are used to advocate for desegregation.

Young children should not carry the burden of the failure of the adult community to deal with racism and another generation of children should not be robbed of their right to quality education²⁰.

3.1.3 *Regular, reliable reporting of outcomes for Roma children in comparison with national averages should be established.* Providing public data on the outcomes of the system, not just nationally but regionally and for various sub-populations, is a vital accountability tool. At the same time, outcome measures alone are insufficient; they have to be connected to a positive process of analysis and active planning for improvement at each level of the education system.

3.1.4 *Ensure that national systems of assessment, inspection and reporting support effective education for Roma children – and for all students.* Schools respond strongly to the incentives and sanctions contained in national assessment and reporting systems.

B. Beyond the School

3.1.5 *Strengthen anti-discrimination and anti-bias measures, including both legal and social policies, to reduce discrimination against Roma people and improve public perception.* Effective education cannot compensate for systemic discrimination in areas such as housing or employment. The rights and needs of citizens are intertwined, so it should be understood that improvement in any social sphere is an aid to improvement in other spheres.

3.1.6 *Establish joint civil action (volunteer) programs for Roma and non-Roma youth.* These may only be possible to establish on a small scale at first because of the significant social obstacles to real integration and social engagement. NGO activities will set useful precedents for longer-term projects to achieve more equal societies.

3.2 Unequal Socio-Economic Background

Socio-economic deprivation means that Roma children lack the basic pre-conditions for school success. The most important aspects of this deprivation should be redressed in order to meet at least the minimum of these pre-conditions.

A. School Related

3.2.1 *Develop or improve pre-school programs, with particular emphasis on language acquisition, that strengthen readiness for school among Roma children.* Children, especially from low income communities, can benefit from good quality pre-school programs that help them develop the prerequisites for school success, with particular emphasis on language skills.

3.2.2 *Develop effective, continuing support mechanisms for Roma students, such as mentoring/tutoring programs, to prevent academic failure.* Early support to students that prevents them from falling behind in the early grades is an effective strategy. However, most students will require ongoing academic support throughout their school careers in order to be successful.

3.2.3 *Ensure provision of supplementary programs such as meals, clothing and health care for students in need.* As already noted, educational success is not just a matter of what schools do but is also the product of students' overall situation.

B. Beyond the School

3.2.4 *Establish high quality early childhood development programs that support Roma parents and families.* Children who are born healthy and subsequently receive adequate nutrition have a better basis for success in school. Measures that ensure good prenatal care and support parents of young children generate high returns.

3.2.5 *Strengthen Roma community organizations.* The existence of such institutions as credit unions, cooperatives, language groups, cultural bodies and others is all part of a strong and vibrant community that can demand and support educational success.

3.2.6 *Provide adult education and training in marketable skills for Roma adults (age 18+) with low levels of formal education.* Adults who are able to earn an adequate income are better able to give their children good quality care.

3.2.7 *Review overall social benefits and programs for Roma families to ensure that they work effectively and complement each other.* It is important to ensure that the whole range of social programs work together to support the development of children and families. These measures include income support, health care, recreation, and other social services or financial benefit programs.

3.3 Making Schools Roma-Sensitive

Schools that are not responsive to the needs and specifics of Roma children and their parents do not only alienate, but are also very often perceived as extremely hostile environments. There are a number of things schools can do to address this, including undergoing significant changes in curriculum, teaching practices, the overall school climate and parent-school relations.

A. School-Related

3.3.1 ***Provide education administrators and faculty with the skills needed to create school-based plans which will review the curriculum and services available to the students, and provide in-service training to teachers which will make it easier for them to work effectively with Roma students (for example in anti-bias training, child centered practices, multi-cultural curriculum, second language acquisition, and extracurricular activities).*** Effective implementation depends on educators' having the understanding and skills to implement new practices effectively. The same knowledge and skills should be incorporated into initial teacher training.

3.3.2 ***Increase the number of Roma working in schools by recruiting and training more Roma as teachers and teaching assistants***²¹. Experience in a number of countries shows the value of including adults from minority groups as school staff. Teaching assistants can provide an important bridge between the minority and majority communities. They are also strong candidates for teacher training and becoming fully qualified teachers. Employing teaching staff from minority groups also provides jobs and income to that minority.

3.3.3 ***Revise curricula and produce learning materials to take into account Roma history, culture and values.*** School success is enhanced when students see their own lives and experience reflected in the curriculum and in teaching practices.

3.3.4 ***Provide Roma first language or national second language programs as appropriate***²². ***School success depends on language capacity.*** Other countries have had success with teaching, especially in the primary years, in the students' first language, and also with intensive support in the majority language as a second language. It is important that children can both feel pride in their own language and master the majority language.

3.3.5 ***Strengthen links with Roma parents and communities.*** Support from parents is vital to children's success in school. Educators often view parents of minority children as uninterested or incapable, but often the real need is for schools to find ways of reaching out effectively to parents.

B. Beyond the School

3.3.6 *Schools should work closely with community groups to ensure that efforts are coordinated and that the school is truly responsive to community needs and interests.* This is a major challenge since relatively few educators have much experience or training in this area.

3.3.7 *Introduce significant anti-bias programming for parents, communities and local authorities to assist in improving public attitudes towards Roma.*

4. IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of the kind of comprehensive changes proposed in this paper will not be easy. There are some encouraging signs of change in the region and emerging good practice²³. Barriers are, however, well established and changing the status quo is often strongly resisted, even by those who are its victims due to fear of the unknown. As already noted, progress is likely to take different forms in different countries, and there should be recognition that a number of different paths can yield good results. Nevertheless, the following steps appear to be necessary to support effective action in any country:

1. Each country should, taking into account its own circumstances, define and make public an action plan for improving educational outcomes for Roma children.
2. National action plans should be focused on steps to improve educational outcomes such as those listed earlier and should contain specific short and long-term targets that can be assessed over time to see if goals have been achieved.
3. The plans should outline the proposed model of improvement, the specific steps to be taken and should commit to specific timelines, resources, and other implementation actions. Reallocation of resources will be necessary. Action plans will need to anticipate likely resistance to change and develop strategies to ensure that the changes can indeed be made. For example, one of the consequences of moving towards a desegregated system will be the need to redeploy educational personnel.

4. Various other actors such as funding agencies, national and international NGOs and Roma community organizations should be involved in supporting the kinds of policies described in this paper, including assisting countries in developing their plans and in reallocating resources to support integration rather than segregation.
5. In addition to national planning and implementation, regional and international forums should be established both to assist countries in their work and to give the issue continued prominence. Public support for the changes must be developed if they are to be viable and sustained.
6. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of progress, including longitudinal studies, will be necessary to ensure that actions are yielding the right results and provide guidance for change if necessary.

5. POLICY LEVERS

A variety of potential vehicles are available to advance policy. These include:

- legislation or regulation
- funding of particular programs or actions
- providing services directly
- creating financial or political incentives to encourage desirable actions
- mobilizing public opinion in favor or against certain courses of action
- building capacity within the Roma community and national educational systems by supporting the efforts of others through funding, training, or other means.

As work by the Open Society Institute has shown²⁴, improvements in the education of Roma children can be expected not only to yield significant benefits to Roma people, but also savings to government for other social programs and, even more importantly, economic and social benefits to society as a whole.

6. CONCLUSION

Significant improvement in educational outcomes for Roma children is necessary and possible. The task is not an easy one. There is, however, increasing experience and good grounds for optimism about what can be achieved. This paper outlines a workable approach to this end.

The Open Society Institute believes that with sufficient political will, it is possible to change the destiny of the Roma minority in Europe. This change begins with effective, thoughtful approaches to integration and quality education for all Roma children. OSI will continue to work with all willing partners to advance these vital goals.

NOTES:

¹ Hobsbawm, E. *Nations and Nationalism Since 1980*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1990.

² Wolfe, B. and Zunekas, *Non-Market Outcomes of Schooling*, Madison Wisconsin, Institute for Research on Poverty, May, 1997 (mimeographed); Kamens, D., *Education and Democracy: A Comparative Institutional Analysis*, *Sociology of Education* 61, 1998, pp. 114-127; Bush, K.D. & Sartorelli, K., *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict*, Florence: UNICEF, Innocenti Insights, 2000, p. IX.

³ Coleman, James S. *Individual Interests and Collective Action*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1986; Heyneman, S., *From the Party/State to Multi-Ethnic Democracy: Education and Its Influence on Social Cohesion in the Europe and Central Asia Region*, UNICEF, International Child Development Center, Florence: 1999.

⁴ Publications and special reports of the UN Rapporteur on the right to education contain four elements: availability, accessibility, acceptability, and adaptability (4-A scheme). See for example Tomaševski, K. *Right to education Primers no. 3: making education available, accessible, acceptable, and adaptable*, Stockholm: 2001. www.right-to-education.org.

⁵ *Knowledge and skills for life: First results from PISA 2000*. OECD, Paris: 2000. Hungary and the Czech Republic participated in PISA 2000. The Czech results were about the OECD average; Hungary's results were below average. Both countries had relatively large variations in performance related to socio-economic status of students.

⁶ The European Commission and Parliament, guided by the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*, in order to monitor "respect for and protection of minorities," hold the view that, "the commitment (in article 22) is liable to strengthen the guarantee of non-discrimination and the right to education." European Parliament, Committee on Citizens' Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs, Overview of Article 22 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

http://www.europarl.eu.int/comparl/libe/elsj/charter/art22/default_en.htm

⁷ *Barriers to the Education of Roma in Europe: United Nations Special Session on Children*, European Roma Rights Center, 2002; Susan Rona & Linda E. Lee, *School Success for Roma Children: Step by Step Special Schools Initiative, Report*. Open Society Institute, New York City, NY: 2001; Dena Ringold, *Roma and the Transition in Central and Eastern Europe*. The World Bank, Washington, D.C.: 2000; *Denied a Future? The Right to Education of Roma/Gypsy & Traveller Children in Europe*, Volume I., Save the Children, London: 2001; Noe Medina, *General Policy Recommendations: Roma Education Research Project, Draft*. 2001; *Recommendation No R (2000) 4 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on the education of Roma/Gypsy children in Europe*, Council of Europe, 2000.; *Statistical data for background of OECD Review: Romania*, CEPS, Ljubljana: 2001. See also various reports by the European Roma Rights Center;

⁸ Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C. "Țigani: Intre Ignorare si Ingrijorare," București: Editura Alternative, 1993. (Published in Romanian with English summary);

Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C. "Children at Risk in Romania: Problems Old and New." Florence, Italy: Unicef Child Development Center, 1996.

⁹ Tomova, I. *The Gypsies in the transition period*. Sofia: International Center for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, 1995.

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- ¹⁰ European Roma Rights Center (ERRC), "A Special Remedy: Roma and Schools for the Mentally Handicapped in the Czech Republic." Country Reports Series, No. 8, 1999.
- ¹¹ *Report on the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE area*, OSCE, High Commissioner on National Minorities, 2000, p. 65.
- ¹² *Effects on Student Achievement of Teachers' Practices of Parent Involvement. Advances in Reading/Language Research* 5:261-76, 1991; Moles, O., *Synthesis of Recent Research on Parent Participation in Children's Education. Educational Leadership*, Nov., pp. 44-47, 1982; *Parent Involvement in Education. Policy Perspective*: Office of Educational Research and Improvement, U.S. Department of Education, 1991.
- ¹³ The content of curriculum according to international human rights law should reflect minority cultures. See UNESCO International Bureau of Education, "Capacity Building for Curriculum Development" www.ibe.unesco.org.
- ¹⁴ Eggertson, T. *Economic Behavior and Institutions*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- ¹⁵ *Research on Selected Roma Education Programs In Central & Eastern Europe. Final Report*, Open Society Institute, Budapest: 2001
- ¹⁶ For example, Levin, B. *Poverty and education*, Canadian Journal of Education, 1995; OECD, *Lifelong learning for all*, Paris, 1996; Thrupp, M. *Schools making the difference: Let's be realistic*, Open University Press, 1998.
- ¹⁷ Weiler, J. *Recent Changes In School Desegregation*, ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education, No. 133, 1998; Wilkinson, D. Y. *Integration Dilemmas in a Racist Culture*, Society, March/April 1996, Vol. 33, Issue 3.
- ¹⁸ "Spectacularly low levels of attendance among Roma children suggest an inability, or unwillingness by States to actively promote and adapt education. Education *must* adapt to the individual if it is to be compulsory, which means principally the best interests of the child, and also the wishes of his or her parents." Wilson, D., *Minority Rights in Education: Lessons for the European Union from Estonia, Latvia, Romania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. Right to Education Project, p. 76, 2002.
- ¹⁹ See case study in Linda Petrusati's *Beyond Segregation or Integration: A Case Study from Effective Native American Education*, in *Roma Rights: Race, Justice, and Strategies for Equality*, ed. by Cahn, C. IDEA, New York, Amsterdam, Brussels: 2002 (originally published in *Journal of American Indian Education*, Vol. 27, Issue 1, 1987).
- ²⁰ For a comprehensive overview of the legal framework protecting minority rights in education, see Wilson, D., *Minority Rights in Education: Lessons for the European Union from Estonia, Latvia, Romania and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*. Right to Education Project, pp. 10-17, 2002.
- ²¹ In 2000 The United Nations Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism emphasized the role of teachers in continuing discrimination against Roma, and also suggested a need for a greater representation of Roma among the teaching profession. *Report of the UN Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism*, E/CN.4/2000/16/Add.1, par. 69.
- ²² See also Siemienski, G. *Education rights of minorities: the Hague Recommendations*, Working Paper E/CN.4/Sub.2/AC.5/1997/WP.3, May 5, 1997.
- ²³ In Bulgaria, for example, the government passed the "Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society," on April 22, 1999. The Framework Program has the ultimate goal of "real equality for Roma

in Bulgaria.” In education, the Framework provides for six measures aimed at overcoming discrimination, including: desegregating Roma schools, ending the practice of sending normal Roma children to special schools for the mentally handicapped, counteracting racism in the classroom, providing opportunities for the study of the Roma language in schools, preparing Roma pupils to continue their education at university, and creating literacy and vocational programs for adult Roma.

In the Czech Republic, the government now supports Roma Teaching Assistants in primary grades. Roma Teaching Assistants co-teach in elementary school classes, acting as linguistic and cultural translators for Roma children. Since 1998, the Ministry of Education has funded the salaries of RTAs. The salaries, however, paid by the Czech Ministry are relatively low: approximately one-third to one-half of the monthly salary of the average Czech. The basic monthly salary of RTAs is about 100 USD to 150 USD. Similar policy changes and official recognition of Roma Teaching Assistants is being undertaken in Slovakia and Bulgaria as well.

The Czech Government has also declared the elimination of ethnic segregation into special schools. The Czech Education Minister announced this program in February 2002. From September 2002, the Czech educational government will gradually eliminate the system of special schools, which will be exchanged to a program facilitating the integration of Roma children into primary schools. Also, Roma children who formerly could not participate in secondary education (they were deprived of the admission due to their primary education in special schools) will be provided with complementary education. The Minister plans the program to be completed by the 2004/5 academic year, by which time more and more “experimental” schools will start integrated education, which will gradually take the place of special schools. In 2002, a few “experimental schools” have been teaching in accordance with the educational reform, and they have taken the Roma children educated in special schools into their first year classes.

In Hungary, the new government, which was inaugurated in 2002, in its manifesto for 2002-2006 included a section titled: Actions related to social and political integration of the Roma population in Hungary. The Minister of Education in the decree 57/2002. (XI. 18.) OM, published in the Hungarian Bulletin No. 143, defines the term *preparation for integration* (cf. § 39/E). The purpose of integration is to ensure that children from various social and cultural backgrounds are taught together and have access to education at the same standard of quality.

Although the decree stops short of obliging schools to implement such integration, it nevertheless offers a way out of the present situation when there are over 700 all-Roma classes at regular primary schools. New pedagogical approaches will be launched during the 2003/04 school year, when volunteering institutions will introduce pedagogical systems aimed at integration in the first, fifth and ninth classes.

In Serbia, the Elementary Schools Act envisaged the possibility that minorities who do not have schools in their own language could study their mother tongue and history, literature and culture an elective subject. In 1998, this was introduced as an elective subject for Roma children in nine elementary schools in Vojvodina, was launched by the NGO Matica Romska, and financially supported by the Serbian Ministry of Education and the Vojvodina Secretariat for Education, Science and Culture. Since the government change and the introduction of democracy in Serbia, the country has entered a transition period. The new Ministry of Education has created a strategic working group charged with creating a national strategy for Roma integration into the system of education in Serbia

²⁴ Levin, B. *Costs and effects of the Roma Step-by-Step Special Schools Initiative*, Open Society Institute, New York: 2001.