

Education of Roma children in Europe

Education and Training of Roma Children and Youth: The way forward

European Conference on Roma Education



**European Conference on Roma Education
Bratislava 8th – 9th April 2008**

***“Education and Training of Roma
Children and Youth: The way
forward”***

Conference Report

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Acknowledgements

The Government of the Slovak Republic and the Council of Europe wish to acknowledge with sincere gratitude the hard work of all those who organised the conference, who presented thoughtful and informed papers to the plenary and workshop sessions, and all those whose positive endeavours contributed to the very successful outcomes of this important event. The aforementioned also wish to thank all the participants who responded so enthusiastically to the invitation to attend and who contributed so generously from their expertise and experience.

Introduction

This conference report sets out to provide an accurate overview of the proceedings of the important gathering of experts, key players and interested parties, that took place in Bratislava on the 8th and 9th of April 2008. The conference must be viewed as a very constructive contribution by the Slovak Republic as part of their Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The conference was organised by the Slovak authorities in co-operation with the Council of Europe. It was held under the auspices of Mr Dusan Caplovic, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities. The event was coordinated by the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Affairs, Ms Anina Botosova in co-operation with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Culture of the Slovak Republic.

The conference aimed to provide an opportunity to share and reflect on all the positive measures taken by Member States to implement the Council of Europe's Recommendation (2000)4 on the education of Roma children in Europe, and on the national strategies and action plans, their characteristics and their stage of implementation. Thus, the conference provided an important opportunity to focus on an educational issue with high relevance to most Member States of the Council of Europe.

It is no coincident that the conference covered the date of the 8th of April which is 'World Roma Day' and this is reflective of the wise and respectful planning that went into achieving this very successful international event.

The Conference's Aims and Objectives :

- The conference aims to bring together the sources of expertise and experience that will allow for an audit of progress to be made as measured by models of effective practice and also to provide pointers for future directions and actions that will contribute to eliminating the marked educational outcome gaps that exists between Roma and non-Roma populations.

- It is aimed that the tripartite sources of expertise and experience referred to hereinafter will result in the conference programme achieving an effective triangulation of assessment and analysis and this will be secured by Member State invitations that include three high interest groups, namely, a representative of the Roma community (civil society and or consumer of education), a senior official of the ministry of education (policy/decision maker) and a practitioner (teacher and or other professional player).
- It is also aimed that the models of effective educational policy, provision and practice selected for the structured presentations to the different working sessions, will have assessed and proven value in their innovative potential for wider applicability to educational reform agendas, sustainability and ‘scaling-up’ across the Member States.
- The conference will provide opportunities for key issues to be openly discussed within the context of positive and lively debate, while at the same time exposing ideas, proposals and existing polices and practice to their compatibility with Council of Europe policies and national and international law and conventions/directives concerned with anti-discrimination and human rights.
- A key objective of the conference will also be to establish a clear hierarchy of responsibility for educational policy decisions, implementation and practice. This will involve all the key players, but in a way that roots responsibility in the right quarter without blaming the Roma.
- The penultimate aim is also to ensuring that the conference deliberations will include and address the need for integration at two levels. The first is the need for an integrated approach since the education cannot be considered in isolation, but in relation to cultural identity and heritage, integration into society, preparation for employment and involvement in the community, housing, justice etc. and secondly, the need for the integration of Roma and Traveller communities into mainstream European society with dignity and respect.
- Finally, it is also aimed that the conference will lead to a post conference publication which will help in identifying “*the way forward*”. This is that publication.

Opening the Conference

The conference's opening session was chaired by the Ambassador, Mr. Emil Kuchar, Permanent Representative of the Slovak Republic in the Council of Europe and Chairman of the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe. A formal welcome was extended to all conference participants to this European Conference on "*The Education of Roma Children and Youth – The Way Forward*". Its importance was stressed and the Chairman predicted that the conference would result in very fruitful outcomes.

The first speaker to be introduced by the Chairman was Mr. Dusan Caplovic, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities.

Official Position Statements

The Deputy Prime Minister opened his presentation by reminding the audience of the old Chinese proverb which says, "An educated person represents the wealth of a country". He acknowledged the honour and welcomed the valuable opportunity to be able to open such an important international conference and expressed his pleasure that this coincided with International Roma Day. He was pleased to report that during the Slovak Chairmanship of the Council of Europe we were able to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the existence of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for European Regional and Minority Languages. The conference would allow all present to reflect on the long-standing work of the Council of Europe in the field of Human Rights and the special emphasis on the rights of minorities including the education of Roma communities.

The Slovak Government was fully aware of all of the international evidence and undertakings in relation to the situation of national and ethnic minorities and is open to ideas for improving policies at all levels. The special circumstances of the Roma are acknowledged. The Deputy Prime Minister said that he made the full participation of Roma and the implementation of all the associated developmental programmes, a personal priority. The achievement of this goal was a long-term and strategic challenge for the society, but that the

Government was prepared to devote outstanding efforts and resources to achieve it.

The Government of the Slovak Republic had adopted the National Strategic Referential Framework 2007 – 2013 in relation to EU funds whose horizontal priority are marginalized Roma communities. A further noteworthy initiative has been the approval of the Medium-term Concept of the Development of the Roma National Minority in the Slovak Republic for the Period 2008-2015. These initiatives will lead to the creation of a more favourable environment for Roma communities and which will enable their full integration into civil society. Added to these reforms, education and training is also seen as a priority and programmes are in place which will improve the quality of upbringing and education for Roma children and students.

The Slovak Republic is a democratic society which fully respects the rights of minorities and is always looking for ways to secure constant improvement in policies for national and ethnic minorities which will allow all citizens, without discrimination, a dignified and full life in all social fields. The Deputy Prime Minister wished the conference very successful outcomes and firm conclusions that would help with the implementation of long-term and strategic goals of the Government of the Slovak Republic in the field of Roma education.

Mr Jan Kubis, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, continued the opening ceremony by welcoming everyone to the conference on the occasion of the first ever chairmanship of the Slovak Republic over the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. He went on by saying that Slovakia appreciates the Human and Civil Rights work of the Council of Europe as it contributes to the protection of pluralist democracies, the principles of the rule of law and the recognition of European cultural identity and diversity.

“The opportunity to chair the Council’s Committee of Ministers is in my opinion both a great honour and a binding responsibility. During its chairmanship, Slovakia seeks to consistently promote the fulfilment of the aforementioned fundamental values and goals of this pan-European organisation. It is also one of the reasons why we have made the support for our common fundamental values, those of human rights and the rule of law and democracy, one of our key priorities. The more the general public, non-governmental organisations and citizens are engaged, the more successful we will be

in accomplishing our goals. The Slovak chairmanship emphasises the need for the openness of the organisation, for responsibility, effectiveness, solidarity and the engagement of non-governmental organisations and civic society in relation to the activities and further development of the Council of Europe as such. At the same time, this approach helps us focus the attention of Slovakian society on the issue of the Roma community living in Slovakia, and to resolving existing problems in this area.”

The Roma in Slovak society are considered by the Government to be very important. The Council of Europe have positive goals for the Roma community and their integration within wider society. Currently the aims and goals on education are very important in that they allow us to focus our discussion matters on the educational needs and problems of the Roma community. These matters are not pertinent to a single Member State alone, but to almost the whole of Europe. The Roma are very often the victims of negative stereotyping in the perception of majority society and this is mainly because of a lack of information about Roma history and culture. A main priority must be on Roma integration. With the efficient use of funds from taxes and the European Union, we are able to focus on the education and training of Roma children and youth and this has been a long standing objective of the Slovak Republic.

The Minister for Foreign Affairs went on to say that the conference will represent a major step forward in seeking solutions to the educational needs of one of Europe’s most populous minorities. He noted the impressive representation at the conference of Roma communities and also that of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), the international community, state institutions and local authorities. He said that it was good that all the key stakeholders, including experts in the field, were gathering together and he expressed his thanks to all those who had managed to stage this important conference.

In concluding, the Minister of foreign affairs reminded the conference of the first World Roma Congress in 1971 and the adoption of the national symbols of the Roma anthem and flag. He finally then wished everybody a nice stay in Bratislava.

Ms Bibiana Obrimcakova, State Secretary of the Minister of Education on behalf of Mr Jan Mikolaj, Deputy Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, and Minister of Education of the Slovak Republic, welcomed every one to the Slovak Republic and to the conference on Education and Training of Roma Children and Youth – the way forward. The conference has been planned to facilitate professional discussions with all the key stakeholders and to seek practical solutions. He said that the Roma communities needed education in order to access the labour market. It was said that the education of Roma demanded a model that fits the needs of disadvantaged communities, as for example, approaches that ensure access to, and good pre-school provision. The Government's priority objective is to create adequate conditions for access of Roma to education. There was a need for a focus on pre-school provision, on improving the levels of achievement at the primary stage of their education, and to improve the situation in regard to access and attendance at secondary school level and beyond. There was also a need to decrease the number of Roma placed in special schools and the encouragement of adults to participate in the process of Life Long Learning.

The Deputy Prime Minister concluded by saying that this specialist seminar was reflective of the Ministry of Education paying due attention to the education and training needs of Roma communities. The Minister commented on the lack of reliable data and it would be useful to know the actual number of pupils who have to repeat their grades. Through the provision of scholarships and respect for the UN Rights of the Child, all efforts are being taken to prepare the Roma children for adult society, while at the same time respecting the identities of minorities. He finally wished the conference very constructive outcomes.

Mr Milan Zver, Minister of Education and Sport of the Republic of Slovenia, opened his presentation by saying that it was a great pleasure to greet everybody on behalf of the Slovenian Presidency of the EU and thanked the hosts of the conference, the Slovak Republic and the Council of Europe.

Mr Zver said that as a result of enlargement the EU had witnessed a growth as never before in diversity. The EU strives to harmonise economic integration with social cohesion and inclusion and this involves the protection of fundamental rights and policies on non-

discrimination. Thus such rights need to be guaranteed for ethnic minorities by all Member States.

The Roma represent Europe's largest ethnic minority of over ten million and they have often been victims to imposed policies so much so that their situation is still vulnerable in terms of their marginalisation, poverty and poor health standards. Their situation is one of the most pressing issues on the political agenda. He went on to say that it is imperative that immediate action is taken and the special focus on education is a step in the right direction. Education is vital for economic and social inclusion. The education of Roma is known to be a concern and although it does not solve all problems, it can help to break the vicious cycle of inequality and discrimination.

The EU takes the situation of Roma education seriously and there have been a number of relevant and beneficial programmes together with other activities such as the European Year of Equal Opportunities and in the current period of the Slovenian presidency, the year of Intercultural Education which is seen as vital to building a humane and tolerant Europe and which in turn, constitutes the foundation for the co-existence of all European citizens.

Mr Zver continued by referring to the positive policies of some Member States in relation to legislation and programmes designed to cope with Roma issues. In addition, international organisations are playing an important role in protecting the rights of the Roma. The Republic of Slovenia has ratified relevant international conventions and has also adopted the Roma Community Act in 2007 with the aim of eradicating discrimination against Roma. His presentation continued by talking about educational strategy.

"We have also adopted the Strategy for Roma Education. The Strategy lays down starting points, principles, objectives, and basic solutions for successful inclusion of the Roma on all levels of education. One of the most successful mechanisms is the introduction of Roma assistants in schools. In 2007, Expert Council adopted optional subject the Roma culture intended to promote the Roma culture and language. With the support of the European Social Fund, a dictionary, grammar and textbook of Romani language are in the process of preparation. On the basis of the Roma Community Act, a national programme of measures for the Roma is currently being prepared and will be adopted by the Slovenian Government. It will lay down the obligations and tasks

regarding living conditions, education, employment, health, social care, preservation and development of the Roma culture.”

In concluding, the Minister of Education and Sport said that he welcomed the involvement of the international organisations and was convinced that the way forward required the cooperation and coordination of activities between different partners. He announced that Slovenia would host an international conference on Roma education next year. He wished the conference to have very fruitful outcomes.

Mr Pekka Haavisto, Member of the Finish Parliament, President of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland (Finnish OSCE Chairmanship), continued the opening deliberations by welcoming the opportunity to address the conference and saying that Roma rights have occupied an increasingly prominent place on the agenda of the OSCE. The situation of the Roma was said to be one of three priorities under the human dimension of the Finnish Chairmanship programme in 2008. Mr Haavisto drew attention to the OSCE’s comprehensive Action Plan for improving the situation of the Roma and Sinti within the OSCE area. He stressed that words needed to be followed by actions. Despite there being a multiplicity of formal commitments which should lead to multiple-impact it was important to remember that success will only be achieved if there is meaningful consultation with Roma communities themselves. He committed himself to make things happen as Chair of the Finnish Advisory Board on Romani issues.

The speaker referred to the work in OSCE to produce a status report on the implementation of the Action Plan and he invited participation in the forthcoming meeting in Vienna on Sustainable Policies for Roma and Sinti Integration. Finland stresses the importance of education and raising the awareness of majority populations. Because of the comprehensive nature of the action plan, the OSCE strongly recommends both teamwork by all the key players including local authorities, and inter-institutional cooperation and coordination. He also stressed the importance of continued efforts with close cooperation between the EU, UN, and the various NGOs and many other actors involved. In concluding he saw the involvement of the European Roma and Traveller Forum indispensable. He finally wished the conference every success in securing equal opportunities for Roma children as this was the way to ensuring non-discrimination and true integration into our societies.

Mr Gabriele Mazza, Director, Directorate of Education and Languages, Council of Europe, welcomed the opportunity to represent the Secretary General of the Council of Europe at the opening of this major international conference on Roma education and to be able to thank the Deputy Prime Minister for the initiative to host and co-organise this event under the Slovak Presidency of the Council of Europe.

Following these opening remarks, Mr Mazza was pleased to remind the audience that the Council of Europe had focused attention on Roma and Traveller issues for over three decades with a view to the promotion of human rights, social cohesion and intercultural understanding. The Council's education programmes were a central part of the fundamental mission to protect and promote pluralist democracy, the rule of law and human rights including the rights to education under the European Convention (Protocol No.1. article 2). The Council's education policies link with its social inclusion policies which aim at equal opportunities for all including minorities and vulnerable groups.

Mr Mazza said that the Council was aware of the obstacles to be overcome for Roma children to get a good basic education and achieve their full potential and he hoped that this conference, with its opportunities for sharing experience and expertise, would contribute to policies guaranteeing rights to inclusive education and as demonstrated by many projects supported by the Roma Education Fund which are aimed at breaking the vicious circle of social exclusion. All of this work poses a challenge for the training of educators and the need for a child-centred approach responsive to Roma needs and this approach has been a long-standing objective of the Council's work in education.

The speaker continued by commenting on the current focus on intercultural education and its positive impact on knowledge and understanding by majority populations about the need for positive attitudes to Roma and to respecting their culture and language. This is an integral part of the multicultural and multilingual fabric of our societies. He was pleased to note that in many Member States the Romani language was being taught in many primary schools. The Council of Europe have launched a project in cooperation with the European Roma and Traveller Forum to produce a curriculum framework for the teaching of the Romani language.

Mr Mazza reported on the impressive range of work being produced by the project “Education of Roma children in Europe” which was launched in 2001. Of particular importance was the initiative put forward by the Council of Europe fifteen years ago in connection with the appointment of Roma school mediators. The Council’s acquired expertise in the field of Roma and Traveller education placed it in a strong position to embrace and support all relevant proposals and recommendations. Those stemming from this conference will be assisted in every way possible. The conference will provide opportunities to pool experience and expertise and explore new ideas, policies and plans for the future and so our time together will be well spent. He wished the conference every success.

Summary Observations

- **The warm welcome by the Slovakian Government and the Council of Europe was loud and clear for all participants present at the opening session**
 - **The seriousness of the situation of Roma in Europe is acknowledged and accepted by Member States**
 - **Roma issues are recognised and seen as first and foremost issues of Human Rights**
 - **Forceful statements of commitment by senior government Ministers and other officials**
 - **The lead and guidance provided by the international institutions, and particularly the Council of Europe, needs following-up and building on by national governments**
 - **A number of Member States have passed enabling legislation in the interest of Roma and often linked to anti-discrimination**
 - **General recognition that much still remains to be done to improve the situation and education of the Roma communities across Europe**
 - **General recognition that the Roma have to be involved and enabled to participate in consultation and decision-making processes**
 - **A number of positive examples of successful projects/practice are in evidence and the conference was to examine these during formal and informal sessions**
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Keynote Presentations

1. Ms Anina Botosova, Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government of Roma Communities started her presentation by saying that no single minority in the world had gone through so many social and educational ‘experiments’ with no monitoring and evaluation. She reported that in the neighbourhoods in which Roma live the infrastructure has collapsed. Their living areas are nothing more than terrible sub-standard slums which tell of the extreme nature of their social exclusion. The Roma are forced to live in isolation and so in many ways the Roma have lost contact with civil life in Slovak society.

The speaker continued by saying that in the realm of education the schools the Roma attend are often a long way from their houses and few teachers have any sound professional knowledge about special educational needs. Although the Roma have learned to live in segregated isolation policies aimed at desegregation are very hard to achieve. Ms Botosova went on to report an incident in which 90 Roma houses were burned to the ground and despite the wishes of the residents to stay in the area while their houses were rebuilt, the local authority only offered them to relocate to other houses in the city centre. The situation of the Roma needed a multidimensional assessment and analysis of their needs if the problems they face are to be solved. She regretted that the Roma have no real political platform and this situation leaves just the state to try and solve the many problems.

Anina Botosova went on to state that the Roma are not seen as citizens of the Republic of Slovakia and the majority population has very little knowledge and understanding of the culture and background of the Roma minority nor of their views and needs. The government now needs to focus sufficient funds towards specific activities which should be open and transparent. The majority of Slovak people see the Roma in a way which makes them victims to living on the edge of society. Policies directed towards them still have a negative approach and in consequence of all of this the Roma are still fearful of ethnic and cultural self-ascription.

The speaker concluded by saying that participation by Roma was essential but that the process would take time. As a Roma she wanted to address and send a message to all Roma worldwide which was that

the ignorance and misunderstanding of the Roma will come to an end one day. The Roma are a very proud people and she looked forward to working together at this conference.

2. Mr Thomas Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, welcomed the opportunity to address the conference and reported that he was pleased to have arrived in Slovakia slightly early and that this had allowed him to visit a number of Roma neighbourhoods. In one town he visited the Roma minority of between 500 and 600 people made up 20% of the population of the town. He asked some of the Roma residents as to what he should tell the Ministers in Bratislava. The respondents are reported to have said, “That they (*Ministers*) should work hard and it is good that they have a conference on our problems. We hope that they will solve our problems”.

In commenting further, Mr Hammarberg said that their problems in education included an unfulfilled right to education, premature dropout from school, too many Roma pupils placed in special schools and classes and too few staying on in secondary schooling and fewer of these going on to university. This was the reality of the situation of Roma in terms of education and their situation not only represented a major social problem, but it was first and foremost a Human Rights problem.

The Commissioner for Human Rights went on to comment on the correct harsh conclusions by the European Court of Human Rights in the case brought against the Czech Republic in relation to the discriminatory practice of placing Roma children inappropriately in special schools and special classes within mainstream schools. The children's rights had clearly been abused and the Court had found that the system and pattern of too many of these pupils being placed in special schools/classes meant they could then not go on to further and higher educational opportunities. The Court also said that segregation in education is a serious problem.

Mr Hammarberg said that many of his respondents in the Roma locations he visited were sceptical about the talk on human rights. What they wanted was ‘Rights in action’. He went on to say that the Roma were victims to a number of vicious circles and that this situation was replicated across every country in Europe. In all countries the Roma are behind the majority populations and other minorities in terms of all the Lisbon sectoral fields and in many

countries, well behind the average levels of provision because their situation is not treated with sufficient seriousness. All of these areas needed to be addressed in order to break these multiple vicious circles. He said that the Roma's history of repression and disadvantage needed to be recognised as a legacy of racism and discrimination which is rooted in European society. He said forcefully that he did not blame Roma parents but saw them as the victims of a discriminatory system. Society needs to stretch out its hands and welcome the Roma. There should be an emphasis on pre-school education as this will provide much better life chances for Roma children and governments should invest heavily in this aspect of education. The valuable role of Roma teacher assistants was also referred to by Mr Hammarberg.

In concluding, the speaker said that conferences can focus on problems, but what is needed is that the good practice stemming from successful projects needs to be shared and disseminated. He wished the conference very successful outcomes.

3. Mrs Miranda Vuolasranta, Vice-Chair of the European Roma and Travellers Forum ERTF, welcomed the chance to address this conference and not least because it is on International Roma Day and also because she was able to tell the conference of the role and structure of the ERTF and its current work. Membership included more than 1500 national Roma organisations including those in Slovakia. The ERTF had a partnership agreement with the Council of Europe which was a model that Member States should learn from.

She also welcomed the previous speaker's references to the importance of Roma policies being given adequate seriousness and the clear statement that Roma rights are not just about social rights, but about Human Rights. The social problems encountered by the Roma are a consequence of a failure of their Human Rights being respected. Mrs Miranda Vuolasranta continued by expressing her appreciation to the previous speaker from Finland for his honest admission about the plight of Roma children in Finland.

The speaker gave details of her family and her parent's keenness on education and her resulting career as a teacher of the Romani language in a number of countries. She had also benefited from her participation in the Council of Europe's development of a European wide Framework Curriculum for Romani language which will be followed as a guideline by all Member States. The speaker continued by recounting a disturbing story which illustrated the 'total darkness and

unconsciousness' of the general public to the reality of the Roma across Europe. A very senior European official concerned with European civilization had asked her at a meeting, "...what I don't understand is why the Roma in Europe do not want to educate their children. Why do you choose to remain illiterate and socially marginalised?" So, after a 1000 years of living side-by-side, there is still total ignorance about Roma and they continue to suffer gross social exclusion and are denied their rights as citizens. Contrary to advice, this conference needs to address and understand the history of what has happened to the Roma in European society. This is an important learning process for all children in schools, and for all the participants at this conference.

Miranda Vuolasranta went on to tell how the Roma have been the victims of oppression over many centuries and at the current time the Roma are still subject to abject poverty and almost total marginalisation. Poor housing, education and health care leads to unemployment and misery. In recent years the international institutions have been responsive and positive towards Roma issues and a mountain of well documented evidence exists which spell out the many extreme problems faced by the Roma and the solutions to these problems. The conference needs to seek new solutions to the problems of education, but unless the mistakes of the past are recognised and admitted to, and legislation is enacted to ensure fundamental changes in approaches, then nothing will change.

This keynote presentation continued with the speaker mentioning the vital importance of Roma consultation and participation in all policies for Roma. 'Nothing for Roma without Roma.' If the Roma are to be treated as equal citizens then the general atmosphere of intolerance and anti-Gypsism has to be addressed and this will also require major reforms in educational structures. The curriculum for all children needs to include the history, culture and language of the Roma. Such inclusion is also necessary in teacher training and politicians and those who control the mass media need to take equal responsibility to stand up against intolerance and discrimination. She commended the Slovak government's commitments to the Council of Europe as part of their presidency and hoped that these would be the aims of all Member States.

Speaking of projects, Ms Vuolasranta said that many had been disappointing in that they did not sufficiently involve Roma in the decision making processes. She described the vicious circle of social

disadvantage and poor education. While comprehensive and sustainable policies are needed in all sectoral fields at the same time, quality education is paramount. The multiple aspects of poor Roma education both in terms of inputs and outputs were explained but segregation and placements in special schools were identified as major causal factors for the unacceptable poor outcomes for Roma children. Governments need to ensure that all the hindrances to education for Roma communities are eliminated. Pre-school education should be a priority. Clearer policies based on sound analysis, followed by actions, is what is needed now. The presentation concluded with a list of key recommendations on education stated by the ERTF.

Summary Observations

- **The situation of Roma is first and foremost a Human Rights issue and robust actions are now required**
- **Most Roma are not seen as citizens and have a history of being treated with racism and discrimination by European society**
- **The Roma's majority extreme social exclusion is betrayed by their terrible living circumstances and poverty born of poor education and unemployment**
- **Knowledge and understanding the history and culture of Roma is vital to the implementation of sound policies which avoid blaming the victims**
- **Past mistakes and abuses of Roma communities need to be acknowledged by governments**
- **The voices and needs of Roma communities are not heard or treated seriously enough and so all future actions need the full participation and consultation of Roma communities at all levels**
- **Coordinated policies across all the Lisbon sectoral fields need to be implemented at the same time**
- **Anti-Gypsism needs to be seriously addressed through political leadership, public education and control of the mass media**
- **Decisions by the European Court of Human Rights represent important markers in securing justice for Roma communities and these need to be respected**
- **An emphasis is needed on ensuring access to good quality pre-school education**

The Themes of the Conference

The conference was structured around three interrelated themes. In order for these themes and the rationale for their inclusion to be clearly understood, a number of paragraphs were written and intended as briefing notes for the conference presenters as well as participants within the working groups. Given the importance attached to this conference by the Government of the Slovak Republic and the Council of Europe, it was felt at the planning stage that it would be helpful to all concerned to receive this clarification in regard to the actual programme aims for the conference.

Theme 1 Shaping the socio-educational environment for children and youth

The roles and hierarchy of responsibilities of the Ministries of Education and other key players. Integrated policies, the rights to education and human rights.

Formal presentations linked to Theme 1

**Keynote Presentation 1 – by Professor Hristo Kyuchukov
(Researcher, University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria)**

“The Role of Communities, Parents and Mother Tongue in the Education of Roma Children.”

Professor Kyuchukov opened his presentation by drawing a number of parallel observations between Roma and certain Indian tribes in terms of traditional attitudes to the significant vale of informal education within the home setting. He went on to highlight the similarities between the two different informal education systems within the home, family and community. The evidence presented provided strong indications that Roma families have a very positive attitude to education. However, he quoted from research work by Tracy Smith which shows that traditional formal education frequently fails to recognise and respect the informal education that the Roma child has acquired from the family and community.

The positive attitude of Roma families to education was emphasised by his own research work on Roma and non-Roma parents in three

cities in Bulgaria. This work carried out in collaboration with E. Gerganov, confirmed that Roma parents are relatively more interested in education than other groups of parents in Bulgarian society. The research also showed that the level of parental education had a strong influence on the attitudes and interest in education held by their own children. Parents with higher education are far more likely to have children who are keen and interested in education. This is seen as a key feature in influencing the attitudes of parents to the issue of school attendance. Parents with good education have a stronger interest in intellectual spheres and less interest in material processions and these parents have a much greater interest in seeing that their children attend school. In light off this research, the speaker concluded that with the generally poor level of education in Roma communities, it is not surprising that there are relatively low levels of school attendance by Roma children. The same dynamic is seen as being responsible for issues of irregular patterns of school attendance and premature dropout from school in Roma communities. The presentation also included the research finding that residential location is also a determining factor in the interest and motivation of Roma families towards education with relative difficulties of accessing the labour market playing a part. The more isolated Roma settlements appear to have greater interest in education as parents can see that their children will be unable to access the labour market as jobs are so few and far between in such areas.

Hristo Kyuchukov continued his presentation by turning his attention towards the importance of the Romani language and culture for the education system. Children's first language is also vitally important in the early childhood education of the child both within the family and community, and, indeed, within early childhood formal setting. Again drawing on previous research evidence, the speaker demonstrated the importance of children's early cognitive and language development and its dependence on learning about key relationships within families and communities. In light of the strength of Roma extended families and close nit communities, it was possible to demonstrate that Roma young children have a distinct advantage over non-Roma children from much smaller nuclear families living in relative isolation from their larger extended families. This makes Roma children better prepared for school although it does depend on the schools being positive to the use and support of the children's Romani first language for this advantage to be capitalised upon. To illustrate these important research findings, Professor Kyuchukov provided the audience with test results from a study of kindergarten children who were both Roma

and non-Roma. The Roma children scored higher in terms of both ‘Mental State Verbs’ acquisition and comprehension.

The speaker’s conclusions and recommendations included:

1. The oral communication skills of Roma children developed in the Roma community is something which comes from their Indian roots and it has an important role in the cognitive development of the child.
2. The extended Roma family plays an important role in the early acquisition of ‘Mental State Verbs’, which helps the children to understand the relations between the people in the family and community and to get prepared for school education.
3. The attitudes of the parents towards education play an important role in the motivation and attendance at school by Roma children. Families where the attitudes towards intellectual values is positive the children attend school. If the parents have higher level education the children also attend school but children from small towns with isolated Roma settlements are more motivated to study than children from big cities.
4. At kindergarten level Roma children show much better results in comprehension and production in Romani than in Bulgarian. Romani should be used as a bridge towards better acquisition of the official language of the country.

Keynote Presentation 2 – by Mr Calin Rus (Director – Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, Romania)

Shaping the socio-educational environment for children and youth within the theme:

“Roles and responsibilities of policy makers, teachers and Roma mediatorsassistants.”

Calin Rus introduced the psychological model of ‘discounting’ which he explained relates to a physical mechanism by which people minimise or maximise an aspect of reality, themselves or others. The four levels of the ‘discounting’ mechanism include *‘discounting the existence of a problem; discounting the significance of a problem; discounting the change possibilities; and discounting the ability to actually carry out the change.* ‘Discounting’ leads to several types of negative behaviour that will not solve the problem.

- Passivity (doing nothing)

- Agitation (mainly making it look as if something/a lot is being done)
- Over adaptation (exaggerated attention to the problem but no focus on the solution)
- Violence (rejection)

Mr Rus then thoughtfully brought this theoretical model to the issue of Roma education. He listed for the audience a number of types of ‘discounting’ in this context. These included:

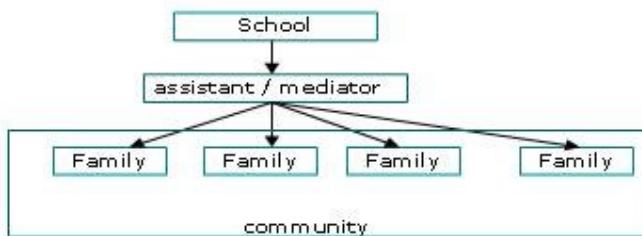
- Is there a problem?
- Three types of issue are usually associated with Roma education:
 - a) access and participation
 - b) quality and school success
 - c) cultural and linguistic recognition
- Discounting the existence of the problem
 - a) our education system is open to all children, regardless of their ethnic background, we do not make any differences
 - b) There are no serious statistics showing differences/we are not allowed to collect ethnic-based data
- Discounting the significance of the problem
 - a) its normal that in the case of Roma, only some children go to school, that they quit school earlier and that they perform less well than their peers.
- Discounting the possibility of change
 - a) “Nothing can be done, they just don’t like school. Probably that’s how they are, they have been like it for centuries and that’s how they will stay. Nothing can be done.” (Teacher attending a focus group with Roma parents, Timisoara, 2006.)
 - b) “It is nice to visit a site about Roma education, but I have never met a Roma guy who would LIKE to learn. Wish you a lot of success. I am from Austria and we have also a few Roma pupils in our schools but most of the time they don’t come to lessons, or don’t want to learn anything – it is a mission impossible!” (Message received in 2005 on a website of the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, dedicated to Roma education.)
- Discounting the ability to carry out the change

- a) What can we do? We have always done our best for the Roma children to come/stay/succeed in school, but with no results
 - b) Nothing will change unless they change their attitude/mentality/behaviour.
 - c) Maybe these solutions work in other places, but not with our Roma.
 - d) EU/Council of Europe/foreign consultants should do something, maybe they will make a difference.
- Similar discounting appears often in relation to the cultural and linguistic recognition that Roma need to find in school.
 - a) Discounting the existence of the problem: There is no such thing as 'Roma culture' or 'Roma language'.
 - b) Discounting the significance of the problem: It's not a 'real culture', it has no place in schools and it has always been like that; Learning Romani in schools will prevent Roma children from learning better the majority language.
 - c) Discounting the possibility of change: It's an oral culture/language, there are no books, no teachers and too many dialects.
 - d) Discounting the possibility to carry out the change: We don't have and can't get information, books, teachers etc.

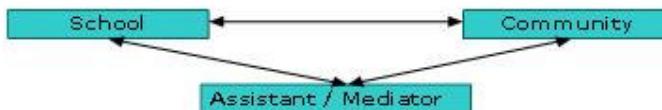
The speaker went on to reiterate the consequences of such negative patterns of behaviour by policy makers and practitioners: Passivity/Agitation/Over adaptation/ and Violence. He then went on to tracing the process by which policy makers and practitioners blame each other and how together they blame the Roma parents and communities. In response to the negative actions by policy makers and practitioners who frequently fail to take appropriate responsibility, Mr Rus identified alternative strategies and listed the facilitating function of the Council of Europe in its work over many years. The Council has focused on identifying the change needed for constructive and sustainable solutions at each level. He referred conference participants to the Recommendation R(2000)4 of the Committee of Ministers and the many opportunities that the Council has provided for policy makers and practitioners to meet and exchange possible solutions. The Council has also provided many practical tools that can be used or serve as a source of inspiration, including: Roma history fact sheets and information and resources on Roma mediators and assistants.

The presentation then moved to the key element of the relationship between the school and the family/community. Although research evidence indicates that teachers discount their ability to make any change before 'The Roma change', it has also been found that the presence of Roma assistants/mediators has been very effective in changing attitudes and bringing school and community closer together. In these beneficial circumstances, it is important that the links created between the school and community lead to a shared responsibility between the two key players. This then avoids the risk of the Roma assistant/mediator being awarded the responsibility for change and development.

A key element: the relationship between school and family/community (1)



A key element: the relationship between school and family/community (2)



In concluding, Mr Rus encouraged all stakeholders to become unconditionally active and particularly policy makers who need to accept the main responsibility for action. They should avoid 'discounting' and focus on implementing the necessary change in order to ensure that Roma children and young people have full access

and participation to quality education with satisfactory levels of attainment and in a learning environment that recognises and respects their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

Summary Observations

- **Educational policies which fail to acknowledge and respect the culture of the family and its important role in providing informal education, and which is the foundation to eventual formal education, is doomed to be counter-productive**
- **The vision of Roma culture as a deficit model is a travesty of sound professional practice and betrays poor training and prejudiced attitudes**
- **The poor education of parents and the resultant lack of appropriate aspirations for their children is a situation that requires informed intervention rather than always blaming the victims**
- **Educational policy makers and practitioners need to be acutely aware of the vital importance of a child's first language (Mother tongue) and its irreplaceable role in all subsequent intellectual and linguistic development**
- **The Romani language should be conceived of as providing a vital bridge to the acquisition of the official language of the country/instruction**
- **Politicians, decision makers and practitioners, all need to be aware of 'discounting' as a mechanism for justifying the denial of the existence of a problem, its significance and their inability to implement change**
- **Discounting the 'problem' of Roma education generally results in politicians, decision makers and practitioners blaming, firstly each other, and then jointly the victims**
- **Discounting is frequently facilitated and motivated by racist stereotypes which portray Roma culture and language as a cultural pathology or deficit model and this can be used to justify inaction or distorted actions**

- The role and work of the Roma mediator/assistant in bringing schools and families/communities to a mutual respect and understanding of each other, represents a constructive policy development and a wise use of resources.
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Theme 2 Key issues and models of effective practice which are compatible with anti-discrimination and human rights.

Keynote Presentation 1 – by Ms Alida Matkovic (Member of the Council of Europe’s Steering Committee for Education, Croatia)

“I. Access; II. Assessment; III. Attendance; IV. Transition”

I. Access

The right to education of Roma children is guaranteed by several international legal instruments such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention of the Rights of the Child, the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms (ETS No. 5), Protocol No. 12 (ETS No. 177) and Protocol No. 14 (ETS No. 194), the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157), the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ETS No. 148); and the revised European Social Charter. Recommendation R(2000)4 and its implementation through the Council of Europe project “Education of Roma Children in Europe” as well as the 3rd Warsaw Summit Action Plan, Istanbul Ministerial Conference as well as the Recommendation CM/Rec(2008)5 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on policies for Roma and/or Travellers in Europe, also provide a legal basis for ensuring the right to education to Roma children. This right implies the access to education as well as the right to quality education.

However, member states are aware that although the door to education is widely open to all children, the percentage of Roma children included in the education process is still considerably lower. This

should be remedied by formulating and implementing policies aimed at 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 primary education. 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 programmes and/or services exist in Europe in their segregated and integrated forms. Although arguments for segregation would be easily found by stressing 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 started at school level is very likely to result in long term divisions in society, leading not to multiculturalism but to social exclusion and permanent segregation.

In efforts to ensure efficient early childhood learning, formal programmes should be accompanied by non-formal programmes and concerted efforts including the involvement of the local community, Roma community in general and especially Roma parents, is essential. The involvement of parents as primary educators is crucial in education matters and education authorities should undertake measures to raise awareness among the Roma parents on the importance of education for future success and social inclusion of their children. Free-of-charge training courses for parents should be offered not only to raise awareness on future benefits of education for their children but also on different approaches in helping children on their way toward educational achievements. Whenever necessary, access to education policies should include financial support to families as well (e.g. free textbooks, school meals, transportation and other services).

Access to education for Roma children would imply providing support for a special language learning course, prior to, as well as during the course of their education, in order for pupils to be able to follow classes in the language of instruction together with other non-Roma children. Multilingual language policies would at the same time allow Roma children to follow at least certain courses in their own Romani language, especially in order to maintain their own language and culture. Placing Roma children in special schools based on linguistic, cultural or even social differences should be avoided as it would lead

to segregation and in the long run further divisions in society. Moreover, language policies which may also envisage offering optional basic Romani courses to the non-Roma population may truly enhance multiculturalism.

As for curriculum and programme content, policies aimed toward social inclusion would include topics on Roma culture in mainstream curricula for all children.

Affirmative measures should be developed in order to ensure access of the Roma population to upper secondary education, vocational training, as well as to university education and lifelong learning in general. These should envisage educational personnel able to teach in Romani languages so special grants and quotas should be ensured for future Roma teachers as well as mediators.

II. Assessment (compatible with achievement and inclusion)

Every educational policy and every child should be monitored in order to measure their achievement. The need increases with the vulnerability of a group. Therefore, in the case of Roma children, because their position in education in comparison to the majority population is in general underprivileged, assessment approaches should be more carefully developed.

Ultimate achievement of Roma children should be measured by the amount of education which would allow their full participation and inclusion in the society as well as the maintaining of their own language and culture.

However, in the classroom the role of assessment is not only to provide a measure of achievement of an individual Roma child compared to other children, but above all the progress of each individual Roma child should be measured. Consequently, the progress should be used as a tool to motivate individual Roma children for further learning in terms of content as well as values and attitudes. These should be reflected in assessment methods.

Special attention should be paid to avoid the perception among the Roma that discrimination is coming from teachers and children, ranging from humiliating treatment, lack of sufficient attention and harsher punishment, to bullying and ostracism. Assessment criteria

should in any case be sensitive to and take into account the specificities of the Roma culture.

III. Attendance (prevention of drop-out)

Data shows that the percentage of Roma children dropping out of education is significantly higher compared to non-Roma children. The percentage of Roma continuing their education at the secondary and/or tertiary level is even lower compared to the non-Roma population. As a result, in times with greater demand for a skilled working force, the Roma are likely to enter the labour market as unskilled workers, and the vicious circle is likely to continue unless governments undertake decisive measures.

Raising awareness on the importance and possibilities education can provide in the life of every citizen a crucial role in enhancing school attendance. Both parents and students should be informed of the possibilities education offers. The Roma community in general, not only individual parents, should be included in the awareness raising process and it should be made clear that education and social inclusion should not necessarily imply abandoning the Roma culture and community.

Awareness-raising should be accompanied by constant supportive measures in terms of compensative educational programmes and catch-up classes. These are generally known to be more efficient the earlier they start, the longer they last and the greater the involvement of parents. The role of Roma mediators is indispensable in providing support to attendance.

Given the fact that, unfortunately, the Roma very often belong to financially underprivileged groups, financial support to the families in terms of free textbooks, free meals and transportation would be essential. National and local authorities, having in mind long term goals of Roma inclusion in societies, which can only be achieved by school completion, should consider other supportive and financial measures that would prevent the parents from making decisions leading to the premature dropping out of their children from education.

Special measures should be envisaged to facilitate the return to school of those Roma children who have prematurely dropped out and thus have not finished compulsory education. It is in the interest of

governments to offer Roma a second chance as well as to adopt affirmative action measures, such as special quotas and scholarships, in order to increase their enrolment rates in secondary and higher education.

IV. Transition (between education phases)

Roma children start their education disadvantaged in comparison to their non-Roma peers. They also face prejudice and discrimination and their culture and values are not sufficiently recognised. Many are subjected to education in segregated institutions with low quality education. Because of this, a significant number are discouraged from continuing their education.

In order to ensure the transition between phases of education, authorities should provide comprehensive educational and financial support for the successful continuation of education.

This would include specially made curricula that would help the Roma children, and this would not be possible without constant partnerships between early childhood facilities and primary schools. Cooperation among kindergarten and primary school teachers, parents and Roma pupils, in order to define the specific needs of particular Roma children and ways of complying with them, should be envisaged.

The same should be envisaged for successful transition between primary and/or lower and upper secondary education which would include offering extra tuition in order to improve achievement of Roma children.

Again, measures should be undertaken by the authorities to financially support the continuation of education. Also, special measures to support the enrolment of Roma children at universities including special entry quotas and scholarships should be envisaged.

Education is the most effective way of supporting the development of the Roma community, as this would allow their escape from poverty, which in the long run brings benefits not only to Roma but to societies at large.

Keynote Presentation 2 – by Ms Mihaela Zatreanu (Director of the Roma National Cultural Centre, Romania)

“Key issues for Roma communities in Europe in accessing quality education with equality, dignity and respect”

The presentation was introduced by a list of the key issues facing Roma communities in Europe in regard to education. These included:

- Mutual understanding : changing public opinion, control of the media, raising awareness on Roma history and culture, changing attitudes, training of teachers
- Democratic and neutral participation and empowerment
- Respect for ethnic identity and
- Linguistic diversity (Romani language as Mother tongue)

Alarming Evidence of the situation of Roma is to be seen in the *Regional Human Development Report “Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Avoiding the Dependency Trap”* made public on January 16, 2003, the United Nations Development Programme, which estimated that:

- only 37% (1 out of 3) of the Roma respondents graduated from primary school,
- only 6% (1 out of 18) graduated from secondary school,
- and only 1% attended higher education.
- parents send their children to special schools and institutions (meant for ‘mentally disabled’ children) because they mistakenly believe that “the curriculum is less demanding and the child has a chance to succeed.”

The presenter went on to detail the main causes of this situation. In an attempt to give an answer to this problem, some specialists have identified the following main causes which they believe to have led to this state of affairs:

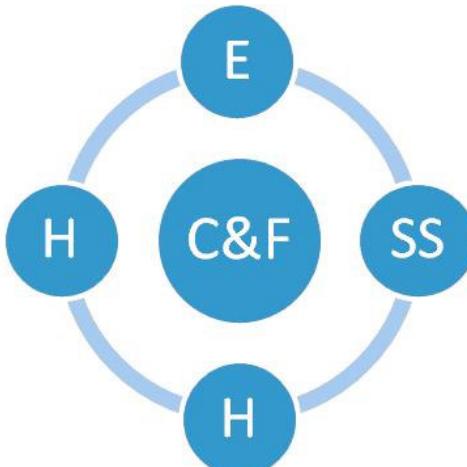
- **The system:** the lack of adequate social policies, the failure of the social system to answer to certain needs;
- **The social exclusion** of the Roma population, discrimination, poor access to social services;
- **Individual self-marginalization** and/or existential particularities: cultural patters, other individual characteristics—the lack of information, education etc.

Mihaela Zatreanu suggested the following solutions.

- The solution to the complexity of problems of the Roma disadvantaged groups can only be - through INTEGRATED SERVICES (IS)
- The term "integrated services" refers to the delivery of education, health, housing and social services for both children and families
- This is a coordinated, holistic approach to address the needs of children, particularly the complex interrelated problems of at-risk children, by providing a comprehensive range of educational and human services.

In continuing this analysis, Ms Zatreanu went on to detail the essential interrelated nature of INTEGRATED SERVICES which is graphically represented below.

- Education (E)
- Health (H)
- Housing (H)
- Social services (SS)
- Child & Family (C&F)



The essential characteristics of integrated services were clearly set out as:

- There is no one model for school-linked integrated services programmes,
- Some programmes are school-based, with services delivered on-site by school personnel,

- While other programmes provide services at community agencies, human services offices, churches, or in the student's home.

MODEL PROGRAMS ARE:

- family-focused,
- prevention-oriented,
- community-centred,
- and responsive to local needs.
- In addition, they offer a comprehensive continuum of services;
- they avoid duplication and gaps in services through effective communication and collaboration among service providers;
- and they are designed so that each child and family has a personal relationship with programme staff-personalized intervention

SCHOOLS SHOULD FOCUS ON:

- prevention,
- promoting well-being for children and their families,
- and, providing services that overcome barriers to school readiness and academic success.

IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER TRAINING:

- Teachers need to be trained to identify students who need intervention;
- to handle problems in the classroom;
- to locate sources of help for students;
- to take part in the collaborative process;
- and, to view themselves as part of a team effort to address the academic, social, emotional and health development of students.

CONCLUSIONS

- Institutions should adapt to the human needs, not the other way around,
- The school is one of the institutions that must follow this principle.

Out of school phenomenon represents a failure, both of the individual but also of educational policies!

Summary Observations

- National governments should be reminded of the host of international conventions and legal instruments which should guarantee the Roma community's unimpeded rights to quality education
- Stark and undeniable evidence exists of the chronic educational disadvantages faced by Roma communities
- The gap between rights and reality for the Roma need firstly to be addressed by robust actions to secure access to quality pre-school and primary education
- Constant ethnic monitoring and evaluation must be an essential aspect of all educational policies which set out to secure rights for Roma communities
- Segregation which starts at the school level is very likely to result in long term divisions in society, leading not to multiculturalism but to social exclusion, permanent segregation and a continuation of discrimination
- Governments have a duty to ensure that Roma parents are helped towards an informed and empowered involvement in the education of their children and the life and work of their children's schools
- Hindrances to education rooted in poverty must be addressed so that appropriate assistance is received by parents and pupils
- Roma culture and language must be respected and an integral part of the education of all children
- Affirmative measures need to be taken to ensure equality of Roma access to secondary, further/tertiary/vocational, and higher and 'life-long' educational opportunities
- Ongoing culturally sensitive assessment is needed to monitor individual progress and as a tool for measuring issues of equality outcomes for minority groups
- Regular attendance and the prevention of premature dropout from school must be given the highest priority by policy makers and the Roma

communities in the interests of personal development, equal citizenship and equality in the labour market

- A range of innovative strategies with adequate support structures are needed to ensure the seamless transfer of Roma children between all phases of education
 - Solutions must be found through the provision of integrated services which need to be: family focused; community centred; prevention orientated; responsive to local needs; well communicated and coordinated; and personalized intervention with individual families
 - Teachers need to be properly trained at all levels – Schools which are truly professional need to respond to their communities – not the other way round.
-

Theme 3 Reinforcing and implementing education policies -

The contribution of the international organisations/NGOs

This third and final theme addressed the role and responsibilities of the international players and provided an opportunity to hear of their respective programmes and actions together with exposing these to the conference within the context of the keynote presentations and a three theme discussion plenary session.

Keynote Presentation – by Mr Arthur Ivatts (Senior policy advisor, United Kingdom.)

“The Ambulance Drivers – International Agencies and NGOs”

Mr Ivatts started his presentation by drawing attention to the wealth of international evidence in relation to the situation of Roma in almost all Member States. It was noted that the nature of such evidence is beginning to use stronger and stronger language and this may well reflect a growing frustration with the seeming lack of action by the key players. The amount of undeniable evidence provided by a host of respected international organisations and NGO authorities, including

the World Bank, the United Nations' Agencies, EUFRA and the Open Society etc, points to a clear *prima-facie* case for serious and urgent actions by national governments. He warned that national governments can no longer say in defence that they did know the seriousness of the situation of the Roma.

In linking with a previous notion of 'discounting', the speaker continued by detailing the key factors which appear to prevent or slow the pace of change. Those with political power have their hands chained behind their backs on account of the ubiquitous race hatred toward the Roma within majority populations. This reality frequently results in actions by those responsible but which are distorted at different levels of government. He categorised these distortions of policy as: blind eye/deaf ear; discriminatory; data/research findings challenge; slight-of-hand; disproportionality; untouchability; trickery; burial; laundering and invisibility. A number of illustrative examples were given.

The presenter then went on to explore the role and responsibilities of the international agencies and NGOs in strengthening the evidence base with graphic and embarrassing case studies; monitoring the situation and maintaining records so that those responsible for a wilful neglect of the rights of the Roma, will eventually be held accountable; maintaining concerted and unrelenting political pressure on national governments; and forming productive and cooperative partnerships with governments which are willing to take appropriate actions. Mr Ivatts made a recommendation to the conference by suggesting that the international agencies and NGOs hold a seminar to explore ways of exerting maximum pressure on national governments in tandem and cooperation together so that Roma communities across Europe will not continue to be ignored and betrayed by 'distortions of policy' in consequence of a lack of political leadership and the seemingly unchallenged race hatred towards them.

Response by the International Organisations and NGOs

1. Council of Europe – Ms Aurora Ailincai ('Education of Roma Children in Europe Project')

The presentation outlined in colourful and graphic form the conception and framework of the project. The Council of Europe has attempted within the project's short term impact, to have an influence on the national policies of Member States in the form of drafting strategies and the adoption of National Action Plans. The development of policies have been translated from Recommendation (2000)4 of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, into a series of projects and their implementation including the development of tools in the form of working tools and teaching and training materials. The long term impact has been to secure as a reality the access to quality education for Roma children across Europe.

The framework documents that have underpinned these initiatives have included the Reference Framework of Educational Policies in Favour of Roma, the Council of Europe texts and activities in the field of Roma education and the legislative and political framework for the education of Roma through reference texts and support systems. All of this has required inter-sectoral and inter-institutional co-operation.

The project has incorporated a 'global' approach with four mutually inclusive and equally important elements of: the promotion of schooling; social inclusion; cultural identity and the empowerment and participation of Roma communities. The Education of Roma Children in Europe Project has focused on the production of accurate information and the provision of training. All of this work has been targeted on multiple audiences including students, teachers, trainers and the wider public. The materials produced have included history facts sheets, pedagogical publications ('Le témoignage du survivant en classe'), facts sheets on Roma culture, pedagogical kit for preschool education and the Guide for the Roma school mediator/assistant.



The Council of Europe has worked closely and productively with many other organisations and international agencies including UNESCO, REF and OSCE/ODHIR.

2. Council of Europe - Mr Henry Scicluna (Roma and Travellers Division)

Eight years ago and precisely on 3 February, 2000, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe adopted a recommendation addressed to its Member States deplored school segregation in education and recommended, *inter alia*

- pre-school education schemes
- school mediators to make parents aware of the need for education
- support structures to help the Roma children during their schooling
- a curriculum which takes into account the cultural identity of the Roma
- special training for teachers

The follow-up by the Council of Europe has been well-described by Aurora Aulinai. But at the national level, what has happened after

eight years of conferences, seminars, workshops, political statements and good intentions?

Some things have happened. First of all every European country with a Roma population is more than aware that segregation must go – and some have moved into action. A few examples:

- Hungary and Bulgaria have passed legislation prohibiting segregation in education.
- In 2006 the Hungarian authorities proposed to end widespread segregation by 2008 through subsidies to schools to encourage integration.
- Serbia has introduced a new law on compulsory pre-school education and the Czech Republic, last month, set up an agency for social inclusion in Romany localities, which focuses, *inter alia* on education.
- A few days ago, the Chairman of the Council of Ministers of Bosnia-Herzegovina, Mr Nikola Spiric, called on all the authorities to regulate the educational system so as to provide equal access to education for Roma and end segregation.
- A Bulgarian court has condemned segregation and the European Court of Human Rights, in a landmark decision on racial discrimination in Czech schools, has ruled that segregating Roma students into special schools violated fundamental human rights.

These are some examples of a rising consciousness of a scandal that must be stopped.

Mr A Mirga, the OSCE Senior Adviser for Roma issues, in a recent interview in Helsinki said “Education is the key to everything.” And Mr Hammarberg, Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, in a statement issued a few days ago, maintains that quality education is essential to break the vicious cycle of misery. Early and inclusive education is the key to the promotion of Roma rights. And this he has repeated yesterday at this conference.

But has the situation evolved in proportion to its urgency and importance? Many think it has not.

The ERRC, in a 2007 report, maintains that “although inequalities experienced by Roma in education, including segregated education, have been given attention by governments in Central and Eastern Europe, as of the end of 2006, there was no evidence that the

measures implemented by governments could reverse or even challenge segregated education of Roma.”

And Mr Costel Bercus, Board chairman of the Roma Education Fund, referring to countries that had made progress in collaborating with the Fund, said that “the quality of education to which Roma children have access has not improved and has even declined in some places. Segregation of Roma communities has increased, further harming equal access to education.”

Desegregation is more complex than simply making it compulsory by law. Roma children living in secluded ghettos need to be prepared for school and assisted during their schooling. Obstacles are many. A study carried out in Macedonia in 2003-4 by the European Centre for Minority Issues concludes that living conditions are a major obstacle: transport difficulties, lack of money to buy school material, poor clothing in winter, lack of space to do homework, not to mention the unfriendly school environment which de-motivates the Roma child. And Regional guidelines issued by the same Centre mentions among specific measures pre-school education, after-school centres and teacher education – the same recommendations made four years earlier by the Council of Europe, and which we are repeating today hopefully for the last time before real action is taken.

Other obstacles exist. The indifference of the majority population towards the Roma cannot be done away with by legislation. In Hungary, with more Roma children integrating into normal schools through substantial subsidies paid by the state, middle class families have been withdrawing their children from such schools. The Council of Europe has tried to cope with this problem through a campaign called ‘Dosta’ (meaning ‘Enough’) which has been carried out in five Balkan countries and has met with considerable success. It is now proposed to launch it in other countries. There is no short-term solution to this problem. But the larger the number of educated Roma the quicker the image of the Roma will change and the differences disappear.

One further difficulty: local authorities. In a report of the International Steering Committee Meeting of the Decade of Roma Inclusion held last October, Mr Alexandre Marc, Director of the Roma Education Fund, maintains that discrimination in education is the result of decentralisation, where it becomes difficult to control how local authorities are implementing legislation. In several countries the

local authorities are responsible for condoning discrimination against the Roma.

At a meeting of the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers held last week it was agreed to set up an ad hoc group jointly with representatives of the European Congress of Regional and Local Authorities to discuss this issue and to see how local authorities can be made aware of the important role they play in the social integration of the Roma population.

To conclude: do international organisations have a role in promoting the education of the Roma?

They have, provided European governments are politically committed to changing things.

Responsibility for change remains with the national governments. Europe and European institutions should not be an alibi for passing the baby. Once there is that commitment then international organisations can provide assistance as long as they get their act together. Agree on common priorities and develop a common approach. It would not help any government if each organisation went its own way.

I would like to finish with a small reflection. Yesterday we saw a wonderful spectacle with a number of Roma artists, amongst them two young, talented violinists. I shudder to think what would have happened to those two violinists if, as children, they had been put in a special school with so-called ‘mentally retarded’ children simply because they are Roma.

3. Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR) (Mr Andrzej Mirga)

Mr Mirga pointed out that national governments have the responsibility of ensure adequate provision for Roma communities on an equitable basis with non-Roma communities. In too many cases actions were being taken only by the NGOs. He said that the EU was much stronger now to be able to have a greater influence on national governments. Having said that, he went on to say that some countries were doing encouraging things. He referred conference participants to the Legal Framework and the OSCE Roma Strategy. He indicated that the issue of Roma migration was not being addressed. In concluding

his remarks, Andrzej Mirga said that there was a need for good ethnic data so that progress can be monitored and measured.

4. The High Commission for National Minorities (Mr Brendan Moran)

Mr Brendan Moran said that in line with the current Finnish Chairmanship of the OSCE, the High Commissioner attaches a high priority to issues concerning the Roma community in so far as these come within his conflict prevention mandate and the applicability of many of the Hague Recommendations Regarding the Education Rights of National Minorities, to the Roma.

5. European Commission (Ms. Natalia Dianiskova)

Natalia Dianiskova wished to congratulate the Slovak Authorities for hosting the conference to promote a better educational policy for Roma youth. Representing the European Commission in this forum, she wished to acknowledge the difficult conditions faced by Roma communities throughout Europe. Low educational achievements of some Roma represent a serious obstacle not only to their own position in the labour market and possibly a lower quality of their personal life, but also to their countries in the context of the economic growth. They also represent a huge waste of talent and resources at a time where Europe is facing a demographic crisis which implies an increasing lack of labour supply. Ensuring equal access for all citizens to education, training and jobs is not only a question of social justice, but it also makes sound economic sense.

Considering that more than 10 million Roma in Europe are particularly exposed to high rates of unemployment or largely functioning in the informal economy, supporting Roma education and a social and labour market inclusion can have an important impact on the delivery of the EU Lisbon targets for growth, jobs and competitiveness. The simple truth is, without including Roma Europe will be unable to reach these targets.

For Roma to feel like fully-fledged European citizens, they first must be fully integrated into the society in their own countries. Being the largest ethnic minority group in the EU, their treatment has become one of the most pressing issues on our political agenda.

To be effective, the EU delivers concerted actions in co-operation with the Member States at the national, regional and local levels. EU policies are seriously assisting efforts of all stakeholders to promote the social and labour market inclusion of Roma. For over a decade now, the EC has financially backed actions to promote the inclusion of Roma through different funds (pre-accession funds, cohesion funds, structural funds – in particular ESF and ERDF). The EU has put in place the legislative framework to tackle the discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin. The EU support the civil society actors, such as the European Network Against Racism, or very simply every year it runs in co-operation with the Open Society Institute a traineeship scheme allowing ten young and talented Roma students to spend a 5 month period in the EU different services.

So this is a brief overview of some of the most important or most visible ways in which the Commission is participating in the synergic efforts of many states and organisations to improve the social inclusion of Roma. The speaker asked to be allowed to give the participants a couple of figures.

The Structural and other EU funds are hugely contributing to the implementation of the national strategic policies of Member States. Over the last five years, more than €275 million of EU funding has been allocated to projects specifically targeting Roma. This amount invested by the EU triples when one includes "mainstreamed" funding that is designed to benefit Roma together with other disadvantaged groups.

In the next structural funds programming period 2007-2013, this amount will be multiplied. The Slovak Republic alone has earmarked in its National Framework the amount of 200 million EUR for the complex projects exclusively targeted to Roma marginalised communities in Slovakia. This comprehensive approach will link several activities and projects (health care, housing, education, employment, and infrastructure) into an overall development strategy of a particular location, with an emphasis on the interaction between activities and the active involvement of the local community in project implementation.

Naturally, other actors recognise the importance of this issue as well. The December 2007 European Council has recognized that Roma face across the EU a specific situation and that Member States and the Union need to use all means to improve their social inclusion. To this end the European Council has invited the Commission to examine

existing policies and instruments and to report back on progress by June 2008. The Communication of the Commission is under way.

The speaker ended by saying how very happy she was when she learned that she had this excellent opportunity to address at the one place the most recognized representatives of the Roma society, international organisations, Member States of the Council of Europe, regional and local authorities, and non-governmental organisations. The Commission has to admit that the Roma still do not enjoy their full rights as European citizens as regards education, employment, health care or housing. Ms Dianiskova wished to express her genuine belief that based on the commitment of all the stakeholders and also the participants “today we are on a best road to accomplish results”.

6. EU Fundamental Rights Agency (Mr Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos)

A key European value is equality of opportunity. This applies particularly in education, which influences future life chances and acts as the main vehicle for social mobility. It is therefore essential to ensure that educational systems are equitable so that their benefits can be enjoyed by all without any discrimination. In this sense equal access to education is a fundamental right. Education is also a key instrument for promoting social cohesion, which is one of the main three objectives of the 2000 Lisbon strategy aiming at making the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge driven economy”, because, apart from providing knowledge and developing skills, education shapes attitudes and empowers young people to adapt to rapidly changing social and economic conditions. As the European Commission has stressed, efficiency and equity are mutually reinforcing. In 2006 the Agency¹ (at the time “European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia”) (EUMC) published a comprehensive overview of the situation of Roma and Travellers in the public education systems of the EU Member States² based on national studies provided by the Agency’s RAXEN³ national focal points.

The report found that the educational situation of Roma and Traveller pupils remains unsatisfactory, despite efforts by the Community and its Member States, corroborating earlier report findings by other bodies, such as the Council of Europe. And the report went further by bringing together available evidence from all Member States of the European Union. The evidence shows that many Roma and Traveller pupils are subject to discrimination and exclusion in education

resulting from a variety of interrelated factors including poor conditions of life, especially high unemployment, substandard housing conditions and poor access to health services. Roma pupils tend to leave education early, which deprives them of the qualifications that would enable them to compete later in the labour market. Segregation, in all its forms - sometimes as the unintended effect of policies and practices, and sometimes as a result of residential segregation - remains a major obstacle for Roma and Traveller children in the education system in a number of Member States. Wrongful assignment and hence over-representation of Roma pupils in special education for the 'mentally handicapped' remains particularly common in some Member States.

While Member States have introduced elements of cultural or intercultural education strategies and initiatives addressing minorities and migrants, including the Roma and Travellers, it is clear that isolated projects cannot be sustainable unless more systemic changes are introduced. The availability of official statistical data regarding Roma and Traveller education remains poor. Although Member States provide detailed educational statistics for the general population, there is a marked absence of ethnically differentiated data on Roma and Travellers on basic indicators, such as school enrolment and attendance, as well as on school performance and attainment. Furthermore, educational statistics are not directly comparable between countries due to the different data collection methodologies employed and given the different structures of the educational systems. Member States need to improve or develop data collection structures and mechanisms covering ethnic minorities in education, ideally in collaboration with the European Commission and EUROSTAT in order to improve data comparability by establishing common indicators. This will allow an effective and accurate assessment of the impact of policies, measures and initiatives taken at Community, national and local level. Effective policies are evidence based policies.

Clearly, the importance of education cannot be overstated, as it constitutes one of the most important vehicles for the integration of Roma into mainstream society. While anti-discrimination legal provisions and equality policies at EU and national level are now in place, systematic action, particularly at local level, is now necessary to apply anti-discrimination and social inclusion measures in education effectively. To improve the situation, the Agency has called for the development and urgent implementation of comprehensive strategies,

which among else should focus on removing administrative requirements for enrolling, providing truly free access to education for Roma pupils, establishing parent-teacher programmes, reducing adult illiteracy, and setting up pre-school programmes. The Agency has also recommended close monitoring of Roma pupils' assignment to special education. Furthermore, the Agency has proposed the integration of intercultural education into national education programmes and curricula with measures that could include mother tongue teaching in the Romani language at early stages, the inclusion of Roma and Traveller history and culture in textbooks, training and employment of more Roma teachers, and specific inter-cultural training for all teachers. Finally, the Agency has stressed that an official system of systematic data collection in line with standards on data protection must be put in place to assess the impact of policies on Roma education.

In November 2007, the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights delivered a groundbreaking judgment in the case of D.H. v. the Czech Republic.⁴ The Court held that there had been a violation of Art 14 (prohibition of discrimination) read in conjunction with Art 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education) of the European Convention on Human Rights on account of the fact that the applicants had been assigned to special schools as a result of their Roma origin. This decision vindicated the efforts of the European Roma Rights Centre. The court judgement referred also to the work of our Agency, which demonstrated that more than half of the Roma children studied in special schools and that only a very small percentage of Roma enter secondary education.

Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos went on to list the findings from their work in relation to Roma children and young people. Areas of concern included issues around enrolment, attendance and achievement in education for Roma pupils with examples being drawn from a number of Member States. In addition he listed their findings in relation to access to education and attainment, and drew attention with illustrative examples to the following: forms of school or classroom segregation, including the wrongful assignment to special school for the 'mentally handicapped'; schools that are located away from Roma encampments or settlements without adequate transport facilities; teachers who are not properly trained to deal with ethnically mixed classes, not sufficiently supported in their work by intercultural mediators and not adequately paid risking early burnout and developing an indifferent attitude; prejudice expressed in harassment,

racial slurs and scapegoating at school; and lack of pre-school education crucial for assimilation of school norms and expected behavioural patterns, but also for developing proficiency in language.

The speaker's full text ended by providing exemplary cases in courts and tribunals, and also examples of good practice in different Member States. His presentation concluded by identifying the nature of the current situation in terms of policies and measures. These included:

- Positive steps evident in many Member States
- Project based rather than systemic approach
- Holistic integrated approach often lacking
- Reliance on EU funding
- Projects rather than systematic change
- Lack of data on the measurable impact of projects
- and Resistance by some local authorities and parents

In conclusion, Mr Dimitrakopoulos made a number of firm statements:

- Integrated approach is necessary (Effective policies need to address key factors affecting education, like housing and employment)
- Multi-agency partnerships improve impact (School/Parents/Pupils/Community/Local Authority; Roma involved in both design and implementation of measures)
- Key-school education is key to improving school attendance, attainment and performance
- Equal access to education is a fundamental right (Enforcing it is a challenge requiring coordinated efforts, strong leadership and political commitment)
- Racism and prejudice affect access to education preventing social integration of Roma and Travellers
- Mainstreaming anti-racism in national curricular and textbooks essential for combating prejudice
- Roma are not a problem – racism and prejudice are!

4 ECHR, Grand Chamber Judgment D.H. v. the Czech Republic, application no. 57325/00, 13 November 2007.

1 EUMC was replaced by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights on March 1, 2007. For more information please visit the Agency's website at [www.fra.europa.eu](http://fra.europa.eu)

2 Report available at http://fra.europa.eu/fra/material/pub/ROMA/roma_report.pdf

3 See

http://fra.europa.eu/fra/index.php?fuseaction=content.dsp_cat_content&catid=3e4fca599fa38

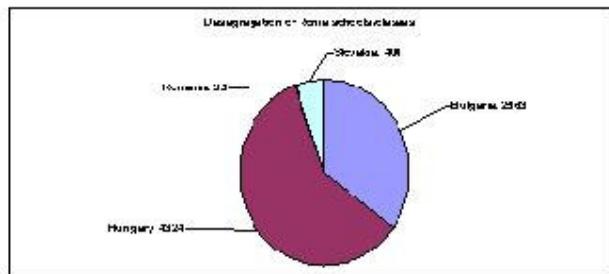
7. Roma Education Fund (Mr Julius Varallyay and Ms Beata Olahova)

The joint presentation started with a detailed description of the objectives of the Fund. The key objectives included the following:

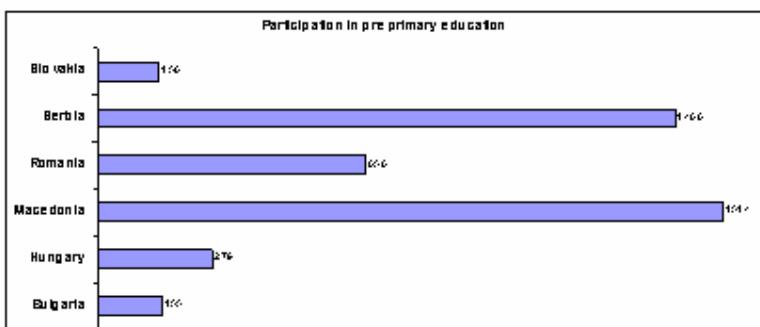
- Closing the education gap between Roma and Non-Roma
- Influence systematic change in education systems
- Foster Roma participation
- Support Roma education
- Document and disseminate best practices on both policy reforms and programmes

The presentation continued by detailing the work of the REF in terms of its projects and actions that the REF has been involved in since its inauguration in 2005. The REF has given many grants and reimbursable grants to be the catalyst to many innovative projects across the decade members. There have been 97 projects in 13 countries. The projects have lasted on average for 1.7 years and the average grant budes has been 145,000 Euro. It was also pointed out that the projects covered all levels of education and that they were implemented by either NGOs or governments or both in partnership. The REF has in addition been responsible for the initiation of pilots prior to ‘scaling-up’ and also in research and policy development. The REF’s work has had a strong emphasis on access to pre-school education and desegregation measures in education and the following graphs were presented to indicate the progress thus made.

Desegregation of Roma school/classes

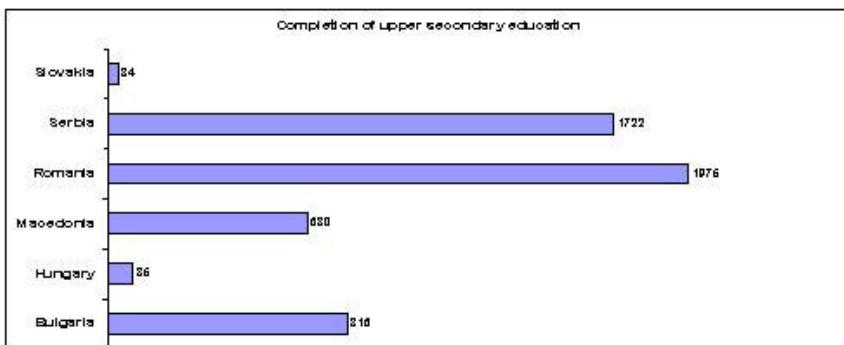


Participation in pre primary education



The REF is also focused on improving staying-on rates at secondary and upper-secondary school levels. Comparative data was also presented in graph form.

Scholarship for Completion of upper secondary education



In conclusion, the presentation detailed the strengths of the REF. The Fund's work has been rapid and it is adapting quickly to the needs and demands on its work and services. There has also been a policy of strong networking in countries and in-country facilitators have had very positive experiences. The REF is confident that its accountability mechanisms are solid. And finally, the REF talks both to governments and civil society players.

8. ERRC [European Roma Rights Centre] (Anita Danka), Reinforcing and Implementing Effective Education Policies¹

The European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) is an international public interest law organisation engaging in a range of activities aimed at combating anti-Romani racism and human rights abuse of Roma. The approach of the ERRC involves, in particular, strategic litigation, international advocacy, research ad policy development and training of Romani activists. The ERRC has been engaged in systemic monitoring and documentation of patterns of segregated education of Roma since 1996, leading to the publication of three comprehensive studies² and litigation of strategic cases addressing this issue.³

The ERRC believes that the condition for access to quality education is non-segregated setting. At the same time, segregation remains a prevalent problem of the educational systems in several countries of the Council of Europe, which has to be overcome in order to achieve equality of opportunity for Romani children in education.

Existing anti-discrimination legislation is not sufficient to reverse patterns of school segregation. It does not provide an obligation for public authorities/educational institutions to proactively engage in eliminating segregated education. It is enforced by complaints from the affected individuals/entity – if there is no complaint, unlawful discrimination and/or segregation remains unaddressed. It does not require authorities to assess, on the basis of statistical information, the impact of the adopted policies and practices on ethnic minorities.

Current policy efforts of some governments are welcome but not rigorous enough to conduct to a lasting change. There is minimal or no action to target directly the illegal separation of Roma from non-Roma and they are not applied systematically. Desegregation is an option, not an obligation, there are no sanctions for schools which

¹ The presentation is based on ERRC's report, "The Impact of Legislation and Policies on School Segregation of Romani Children", published in February 2007 with the financial support of the European Commission. Available at: <http://www.errc.org/cikk.php?cikk=2743>

² "Special Remedy: Roma and Schools for the Mentally Handicapped in the Czech Republic" (1999), "Stigmata: Segregated Schooling of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe" (2004) and "The Impact of Legislation and Policies on School Segregation of Romani Children" (2007).

³ D.H. and Others v. The Czech Republic (Application no. 57325/00)

maintain segregation. There is no comprehensive approach to desegregation: while segregation in one form is reduced, other forms of segregation are multiplied. Funding of schools is not necessarily conditioned on the integration of Roma/disadvantaged children. There is no effective control mechanism to detect and sanction misuse of special education provisions leading to segregation. Culturally biased diagnostic methods for placement in special education which were proven to produce ethnically disproportionate results are still in use.

Therefore ERRC recommends the following:

- Enact in the national legislation an enforceable statutory duty to desegregate education
- Require educational authorities/school maintainers to implement long-term plans for school desegregation with specific targets and measurable indicators of the outcomes
- The fulfilment of this duty should be accompanied by appropriate incentives, the lack of fulfilment should lead to sanctions
- There should be an inspection on a regular basis by a central-level public authority
- The statutory duty should be complemented by targeted educational measures to achieve educational integration as a part of mainstream educational policies

9. EUMAP [EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme] (Christina McDonald)

Introduction

Christina McDonald said that “Monitoring and evaluation” had been mentioned numerous times by various speakers already at the conference. For example, Mihaela Zatreanu mentioned in her presentation that “statistics exist.” This points to the awareness and importance of monitoring.

The EUMAP program of the Open Society Institute’s monitoring report *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma* is a multi-country project covering the nine countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. The nine countries taking part in the Decade are Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. The

monitoring was carried out by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Programme (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), in cooperation with OSI's Education Support Program (ESP) and Roma Participation Program (RPP). Local partner NGOs and experts conducted the research in each country. The full text of the reports in English and in translation is available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on OSI is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

Governments made a commitment to education

Governments participating in the joint OSI and World Bank conference, Roma in an Expanding Europe, in 2003 identified education as a priority, and set up the Roma Education Fund to make an impact in education delivery. These national governments committed themselves to developing new strategies and action plans for improving educational opportunities for Roma children. Daunting challenges remain, even in the most committed countries, to achieving the desired goals in education.

Governments have the responsibility to provide education for all minorities; when it comes to Roma, they have performed particularly poorly. Caveat: DATA

It's not a necessity that they should have performed poorly.

Why are the EUMAP monitoring reports serious?

These reports are serious because they were made in a participatory way, involving Roma and non-Roma researchers and local reporters; they used a common methodology to allow for comparability; they drew upon the most recent and relevant literature and reporting, having access to information in the national languages; and they also included local level research in the form of case studies to make up for missing data on the national level. The research was extensive, and detailed. It provides a snapshot, and a baseline, for the state of education for Roma at the beginning of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Only by establishing a baseline of where we stand in delivering education to all of the members of a society can we know whether we are making progress in the future.

Finally, these reports are the most comprehensive reports ever produced on the situation of Roma in education in the countries reported on.

Why did OSI and EUMAP decide to monitor?

The Open Society Institute has a commitment to try and improve education for Roma children. Being an external actor, it can provide a different focus and point of view than others.

Monitoring is important and aims to:

- Capture a view of policy and practice at a certain moment in time
- Provide a reflection back to Governments on progress they make in achieving their goals (i.e. Decade Action Plan)
- Give a critical and objective analysis on Governments' performance and commitment to providing equal access to quality education for Roma.
- Trace the impact of decisions made in Brussels, in national capitals, and regional centres on individual communities, schools, and families.
- Respond to the deplorable situation in education for Roma, and in the interests of promoting education justice for Roma.

The **Quality of Education**— what have we found?

The EUMAP reports show that the quality of education is extremely important in achieving equal access to education for Roma. Currently, the majority of Roma receive a much lower quality of education than majority students, or that exists in the mainstream system of education:

- by the design of lower curricular standards (often in segregated schools and classrooms)
- by the poor human and material resources allocated, and
- the low expectations of teachers

Improvements in the quality of schools, and schooling, offer exceptional rewards to society, as opposed to investments made only in the quantity of schooling.⁴ The serious consequences of not ensuring that all sections of a population participate fully in society results in a threat to social cohesion, and may result in high social costs for governments.⁵

⁴ Hanushek, E., “Economic Outcomes and School Quality”, Paris: I.I.E.P, UNESCO, 2005

⁵ Wolfe, B. and Zunekas, *Non-Market Outcomes of Schooling*, Madison Wisconsin:

“the achievement of universal participation in education will be fundamentally dependent upon the quality of education available.”
UNESCO

Segregation

The report’s findings show that segregated education is very much entrenched in the education systems of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Consider these statistics:

- *Bulgaria*: 44-70% of Roma pupils learn in segregated schools; 51% of pupils in special education are Roma
- *Hungary*: up to 25% of Roma in segregated primary schools; in catch up /remedial classes, over 70% are Roma; in special education, 40% pupils are Roma
- *Romania*: 13-45% Roma pupils learn in segregated schools
- *Serbia*: extent segregation is under-researched

These statistics are not acceptable, and monitoring reports should be useful tools to governments to learn where they stand, and to help improve and implement policies that will make a difference.

Why read the EUMAP reports?

In our reports readers will find answers to the questions as to how they can better perform as providers of education and services. Readers will find an analysis that they will not find in any other publication in regards to education. There are very concrete policy recommendations that can be helpful.

How to move forward?

There are serious gaps in the available data on Roma which stands in the way of policy development that is tailored to the needs of the community. Governments should improve data collection to be disaggregated by ethnicity; monitor regularly. The EUMAP program would like to see more monitoring, not only by governments, but by independent agents as well. Governments need to check with their commitments. These reports are there for their benefit. The Open Society Institute is trying to make a contribution by sharing this information.

AVAILABLE ONLINE:

http://www.eumap.org/topics/minority/reports/roma_education/

Institute for Research on Poverty, May, 1997; Bush, K.D. & Sartorelli, K. (eds.), *The two faces of education in ethnic conflict*, Florence: UNICEF, Innocenti Insights, 2000.

Response Plenary Session

The Plenary Session with unrecorded open discussion on the international presentations was conducted within the focus of the following three questions. This part of the conference discussions dealt with concerns at the policy level.

- (1) What kind of education services/programmes do Roma families want for their children (e.g. segregated or integrated; formal or non-formal programme; language of instruction; programme content/curriculum)?
- (2) What education and training requirements and systems should be in place for teachers/educators, and what employment and career considerations should be given to developing such requirements and systems?
- (3) What “government - civil society - international organisation” partnership mechanisms can encourage the participation of Roma children in schools? Should governments be involved in non-formal programmes delivered by the civil society and private sector, and if so, how?

Summary Observations

- International organisations and NGOs need to be the catalyst to placing coordinated political pressure on national governments to take the situation of Roma seriously
- The Council of Europe has set the standards both legally and professionally and its various innovative, creative and training actions are clearly signalling the prescription for urgent and constructive actions by Member States
- The Council of Europe provides an exemplar of strategic approaches through cooperation and collaboration with other key international agencies and organisations

- The situation of Roma across Europe is seen as a threat to societal cohesion and the respecting of Human Rights and the rights of National Minorities
 - The European Union is acutely aware of the extreme nature of the situation of Roma across all Member States and through a range of actions and financial incentives is encouraging appropriate and proportional actions by Member States
 - The Fundamental Rights Agency calls for all Member States to monitor the situation and to implement structures of provision which result in clear and standardised ethnically disaggregated data so that equalities issues can be measured on a comparative basis and discrimination identified
 - Segregation in education and corrupt assessment procedures which place Roma children disproportionately in special schools and or classes is unacceptable
 - Member State governments need to take full responsibility for the education of Roma communities and not rely on un-scaled-up projects, NGO actions alone and external funding strands
 - International funding programmes linked to the Roma Education Fund partnerships with Decade countries are proving effective in securing sustainable actions by governments and working towards desegregation in education
 - The importance attached to international organisations to provide an internationally public audit of actions by governments through publication with objective data, needs to be maintained
-

Working Group Conclusions

There were two working group sessions within the conference programme and on each occasion participants were divided into three groups which had been constructed to accommodate the diversity of language needs. All the groups in the first session focused on Theme 1 (Shaping the socio-educational environments for children and youth.

The roles and hierarchy of responsibilities of the Ministries of Education and other key players. Integrated policies, the rights to education and human rights.) following the formal presentations and similarly following the presentations for Theme 2 (Key issues and models of effective practice which are compatible with anti-discrimination and human rights). Rapporteurs and Group Moderators were asked to list the key outcomes of the discussions and to forward to the General Rapporteur at least three key points and or conclusions.

1. This group came up with three imperatives:

- (i) National governments need to make a clear political commitment towards the elimination of segregation and the creation of appropriate frameworks at national and local level including the monitoring and assessment systems.
- (ii) The need to create appropriate conditions necessary for Roma to reach their full individual potential and high qualifications through establishing a flexible education system with lifelong learning opportunities so that all Roma may reach the labour market with equality of opportunity.
- (iii) The need to ensure the active participation of the family and community in the educational decision making process.

2. The findings and recommendations of this second group included the following:

- (i) There are tensions sometimes between the culture of the school and that of the Roma community. The culture of some Roma groups can be a causal factor in early school dropout as in the case of early marriage. In these situations there are real challenges for Roma leaders and mediators in having to address these issues with the communities.
- (ii) There is a need to stimulate and support local initiatives based on accurate local needs assessments. There is also a need for support to extra curricular activities and local centres which provide additional activities and support for young mothers and families. This concerns the active participation of parents; partnerships with local employers; the provision of

‘whole-day’ education especially for poor families; and the cooperation with special schools and primary schools to overcome the segregation of Roma into special schools by the development of joint classes and bringing the two institutions closer together.

(iii) In considering the quality of education for Roma, there is a need for the training of teachers to be increased and improved to include training for critical thinking; awareness and perception of Roma communities. Also for the employment of assistants/mediators to include the provision of appropriate legal and financial conditions. The need for an institutional database on Roma education, including best practice, to be available to schools through the Roma Education Server.

3. The group came with three imperatives :

- (i) The need to recognise Roma people as a cultural minority and part of the European cultural heritage
- (ii) The need to encourage governments to finance sustainable and long term projects as well as to motivate them to fight against all form of discrimination related to Roma
- (iii) The need to put forward and to give visibility to good practice and successful finalized projects in order to share budgetary and intellectual resources ; find adapted solutions for gathering data and harmonise the actions.

4. This working group made a number of recommendations including:

- (i) The need to create comprehensive support systems for the education of Roma children and young people within an integrated school system.
- (ii) The elimination of segregation including the establishment of accessible pre-school educational opportunities; the acceleration of school success; after-school activities; home based education; and family literacy programmes.

(iii) To implement the Roma language and culture to the mainstream school curriculum at each level of the school system.

(iv) To create a database on an EU level of all professional publications in the Romani language and to manage their distribution.

5. This working group wished to make six comments and recommendations.

This was accepted by the General Rapporteur. Each country tries to solve the issues of Roma education, but due to differences between countries it is difficult to apply the same procedures. However, there are some common directions:

(i) compulsory pre-school education

(ii) more flexible systems and programmes required (curricular/school systems etc.)

(iii) to support language teaching (official state as well as Romani)

(iv) within schools a need for education to respond to each child and their individual needs

(v) an holistic approach and interdisciplinary programmes

(vi) and, compliance with best professional practice and national legislation

General conclusions to the conference

In drawing the conference to a close the General Rapporteur reminded the participants of the themes of the conference and the notable challenges that had been set by the organisers. These were:

- Shaping the socio-educational environment for Roma children and youth – identifying the role and responsibilities of the main actors
- Key issues and models of effective practice which are compatible with anti-discrimination and human rights
- And, reinforcing and implementing educational policies – The contribution of the international governmental and non-governmental organisations.

The Rapporteur continued by reporting on the processes used at the conference to secure the outcome objectives. He commended the high participation and active and responsible interest in the vital and urgent issue of Roma education. It had been a privilege to witness the willing sharing of expertise and experience. The conference had focused on reporting what works; on new information and research; on innovation and creativity; on informed analysis; on new ideas and propositions; and within the time, for digestion and reflection. He also said that the process of the conference had been characterised by a wonderful generosity of spirit, friendship and solidarity.

Mr Ivatts made a point to expressing the conference's thanks and appreciation to the Slovakian authorities for organising the magical celebration in the evening of World Roma day on the 8th of April at the National Theatre.

The key messages stemming from the high quality conference deliberations were then listed:

- Governments increasingly recognise their responsibilities and the problems and want to invest funds and take actions, but to avoid the negative hindrance of ‘discounting’
- Blaming the victims is now recognised as totally unacceptable
- Recognition that education is central to solving the ‘problems’ (exclusion/poverty/labour market discrimination/poor housing/poor health/and damaged life chances).
- High priority needs to be given to pre-school access and quality provision
- Recognise the importance of the Romani language to happy and successful learning
- But not education alone – coordinated efforts across all the Lisbon inclusion agenda – through integrated services
- Ethnic disaggregated data essential to monitor and measure equalities of outcome
- Clear prescriptions for informed actions based on the fortification of international law and conventions/directives
- International organisations to put on the pressure – evidence of their encouraging actions but now a need to polish and use their teeth
- Roma participation at every level, including political, is crucial for rapid and successful progress

- Need to put all efforts to closing the gap between the legal prescriptions and the negation of them in day-to-day operational affairs
- The gap between the actions and laudable intentions of central governments and the disappointing implementation at local government level needs to be monitored and addressed
- Segregation and wrongful educational assessment still remain the enemy of race equality in the education of Roma communities
- The issue of the situation of Roma is first and foremost an issue of human rights

The General Rapporteur asked for a conference mandate to reaffirm the conference's welcome, endorsement and respect for the recent judgement by the European Court of Human Rights in relation to the placement of Roma children in special schools and classes in the Czech Republic. The conference expressed its mandate with spontaneous applause.

In making his concluding remarks, Mr Ivatts thanked his Rapporteur colleagues, his colleagues on the planning team, to the people who worked so hard in the working groups, to the translators and finally, to all the conference participants for being such an attentive, informed and alert conference audience.

Closing Remarks

The closing remarks of the conference were made for the Slovakian authorities by Ms Anina Botosova and for the Council of Europe by Mr Gabriele Mazza.

ANNEX



DGIV/EDU/ROM(2008)1
1st April 2008

European Conference on Roma Education

*« Education and training of Roma children and Youth:
the way forward »*

Bratislava, 8-9 April 2008
8 April : International Roma Day

AGENDA

Chair of the opening session	Emil Kuchár, Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Slovak Republic to the Council of Europe, Chairman of the Ministers Deputies of the Council of Europe
General Rapporteur and Chair of the plenary sessions	Arthur Ivatts, Senior Policy Adviser, United Kingdom

Tuesday 8 April, International Roma Day

8.30 am - 9.00 am	Registration of participants
9.00 am - 10.30 am Plenary session	<p>Chair of the opening session: Emil Kuchár, <i>Ambassador, Permanent Representative of Slovak Republic to the Council of Europe, Chairman of the Ministers Deputies of the Council of Europe</i></p> <p><u>Official opening</u></p> <p>Dušan Čaplovič, <i>Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Knowledge-Based Society, European Affairs, Human Rights and Minorities</i></p> <p>Ján Kubiš, <i>Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic, Chairman of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe</i></p> <p>Ján Mikolaj, <i>Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic and Minister of Education of the Slovak Republic represented by Ms Bibiana Obrimcakova, State Secretary of the Minister of Education</i></p> <p>Milan Zver, <i>Minister of Education of the Republic of Slovenia (Slovenian Presidency of the EU)</i></p> <p>Pekka Haavisto, <i>Member of the Finnish Parliament, President of the Advisory Board on Romani Affairs, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland (Finnish OSCE Chairmanship)</i></p> <p>Gabriele Mazza, <i>Director, Directorate of School, Out-of-School, Higher Education and Languages, Council of Europe</i></p> <p>Keynote speakers</p> <p>Anina Botošová, <i>Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities</i></p> <p>Thomas Hammarberg, <i>Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights</i></p> <p>Miranda Vuolasranta, <i>Vice-president, European Roma and Travellers Forum</i></p>

SESSION 1

Theme 1 : Shaping the socio-educational environment for children and youth
The role and hierarchy of responsibilities of the main actors (Ministries, municipalities, schools, professional interest groups, teachers, mediators, family, community, etc.)

10.50 am – 11.30 am Plenary session	<p>Chair of the session : Arthur Ivatts, <i>Senior Policy Adviser, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Presentation of the general theme of the Conference: the role and responsibilities of the Ministries of Education and other players. Integrated policies, the right to education, children rights, etc.</p> <p>Presentation of the session 1 theme by Hristo Kyuchukov, Researcher, University of Veliko Tarnovo, Bulgaria and Calin Rus, Director of the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara, Romania</p> <p>The role and responsibilities of providers and beneficiaries. Policy, provision and practice.</p>
11.40 am – 1.00 pm Three parallel working groups	<p>Key focus:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role of policy makers (national and local level) • Role of the practitioners (teachers, psychologists, child support agencies, educational personnel) • Role of the school mediator/assistant • Role of the parents and the extended family • Role of the community <p>What would be the key elements for consideration by policy makers at all levels in relation to the pace of change (the demands of the identified needs and the timing of action), accountability, and proportionality? What are the roles of the mediators, parents, communities and others in enhancing access to quality education? Who can support these roles, and how can these roles be supported effectively? What kind of support do parents, communities and mediators need in order to strengthen their involvement and partnership with schools?</p>

1.00 pm – 2.30 pm	<i>Lunch buffet</i>
<i>SESSION 2</i>	
Theme 2 : Key issues and models of effective practice which are compatible with anti-discrimination and human rights	
2.30 pm – 3.00 pm Plenary session	<p>Chair of the session : Arthur Ivatts, <i>Senior Policy Adviser, United Kingdom</i></p> <p>Presentation of the session 2 theme by Alida Matkovic, <i>member of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for Education, Croatia</i> and Mihaela Zatreanu, <i>Director of the Roma National Cultural Center, Romania</i></p>
3.10 pm – 4.45 pm Three parallel working groups	<p>Discussions on:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access : equality in access to education • Assessment (compatible with achievement and inclusion) • Attendance, completion (prevention of premature drop-out) • Transition (between education phases) • Mutual understanding : changing public opinion, control of the media, raising awareness on Roma history and culture, changing attitudes, training of teachers • Democratic and neutral participation and empowerment • Respect for ethnic identity and linguistic diversity (Romani language as mother tongue)
4.45 pm – 6.00 pm	<i>Meeting of the working group rapporteurs + general rapporteur</i>
<i>Reception and cultural event</i>	
Wednesday 9 April	

SESSION 3

Theme 3 : Reinforcing and implementing education policies The contribution of the international governmental and non-governmental organisations

9.30 am – 10.30 am Plenary session	Chair of the session and presentation of the session 3 theme : Arthur Ivatts, Senior Policy Adviser, United Kingdom Contributions : Council of Europe - DG4, Aurora Ailinca and DG3, Henry Scicluna OSCE/ODIHR – Andrzej Mirga European Commission - Natalia Dianiskova FRA - Ioannis Dimitrakopoulos Roma Education Fund - Julius Varallyay, Beata Olahova ERRC- Anita Danka Open Society Institute - Gabor Daroczi EUMAP - Christina McDonald FERYP - Alexandra Raykova
10.30 am – 12.00 am	Discussions will address such questions as: (1) What “government - civil society - international organisations” partnership mechanisms can help the school to adapt so that they can facilitate the participation of Roma children in education? (2) Should governments be involved in non-formal programmes delivered by the civil society and private sector, and if so, how? (3) What education and training requirements and systems should be in place for teachers/educators, and what employment and career considerations should be given to developing such requirements and systems?
12.00 – 12.30 am	<i>Coffee break</i>
12.30 am – 12.45 am	Summing up of the discussions by Arthur Ivatts, General Rapporteur
12.45 am – 1.00 pm	<u>Official closing</u> <i>Slovak representative</i> <i>Council of Europe representative</i>
1.00 pm	End of the CONFERENCE

The European Conference "Education and training of Roma children and Youth: the way forward" was held from 8 to 9 April 2008 in Bratislava, Slovak Republic.

The Conference was organised by the Slovak authorities in co-operation with the Council of Europe. Held under the auspices of Mr Dušan Čaplovič, Deputy Prime Minister of the Government of the Slovak Republic and within the framework of the Slovak Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the event was coordinated by the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Government for Roma Communities Ms Anina Botošová.

The conference has focused on concrete measures taken by member states in order to implement the Council of Europe's Recommendation (2000)4 on the "education of Roma children in Europe", as well as the national strategies/ action plans. The objective was to provide pointers for future guidelines and actions that will contribute to eliminating the marked educational outcome gaps that exist between Roma and non-Roma populations.