

# ROMA CHILDREN IN SEGREGATED EDUCATION

## PARENTS AND CHILDREN TESTIMONIALS



Romani CRISS, in partnership with the FXB Center for Health and Human Rights at Harvard University, ANTIGONE, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), Life Together and Integro Association Bulgaria developed and implemented the DARE-Net project: Desegregation and Action for Roma in Education-Network.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Desegregation and Action for Roma in Education Network (DARE Net) aims to develop an international network of Roma civil society to exchange good practices and successful initiatives in education and school desegregation of Roma children and to encourage a strong commitment of institutions to integrating Roma children and pupils through desegregation and quality education.

The partners within the project are Integro Association (Bulgaria), Antigone Association (Greece), European Roma Rights Centre (Hungary and Croatia), Civic Association Life Together (Czech Republic), and FXB Centre for Health and Human Rights– Harvard University (United States of America).

School segregation as a phenomenon is widespread across Europe, in countries such as Bulgaria, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Hungary. School segregation is found in various forms, such as the separation of Roma and non-Roma students into different classes, different buildings, or even different schools, but it also includes the abusive diagnosis of Roma students as students with special educational needs or mild disabilities and the consequent placement of those students into special schools.

Beyond the physical separation, which is in itself a discriminatory act with negative effects on the self-esteem of Roma children, school segregation almost always involves also poor quality education. To have equal opportunities in education, an equal access to resources is needed, which does not apply to situations in which Roma pupils learn separately from non-Roma pupils.

The impact of school segregation is manifested not only on the child but also on the family, as we shall see in the following pages.

Czech Republic, Hungary, Croatia and Greece were convicted before the European Court of Human Rights for the breach of the Convention through school segregation of Roma children. Unfortunately, systemic changes regarding the existence of segregation fail to occur despite such decisions.

## ABOUT THIS PUBLICATION

This publication is elaborated as part of the DARE Net project, aiming to raise public awareness about school segregation of Roma children and on the importance of quality and equal education.

In the following pages, one will find several descriptions of school situations in Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Greece, Romania and Hungary, as well as statements from pupils, their parents or individuals experiencing segregation. Some of the cases described were brought to the attention of national and even regional courts.

The purpose of this publication is to demonstrate the extremely negative effects of school segregation by directly observing the experiences of those directly affected by the phenomenon. Roma students, former Roma students, and their parents who agreed to share their experiences describe how they perceived segregation at that time, how they perceive it now, how was and what the impact on their lives has been after being placed in a segregated environment.

In some cases, the interviewees describe how they went through the process of desegregation and level of acceptance of such a process, both among non-Roma teachers and parents, but also within the Roma community.

The partner organizations in the project would like to express their gratitude and acknowledgement to all people who agreed to openly discuss their experience of school segregation.

## GREECE

### A brief overview on school segregation

Greece guarantees through its legislative framework schooling for all children, native or foreign, from the age of 6 to the age of 15 (6-year elementary school and 3-year lower high school). Post-compulsory secondary education (lyceum), according to the 1997 educational reform, consists of the Unified Upper Secondary General Education Schools (“Eniaia Lykeia”) and of the Technical Vocational Educational Schools (“TEE”); students may transfer from one type of school to the other. As for the former type, studies last 3 years and after graduation a competitive national



examination takes place giving access to University or to Technological Educational Institutes. For the latter type, the duration of studies is either of two (A' level) or three years (B' level)<sup>1</sup>.

Education is applicable to all children regardless of the residence status (legal or irregular) of their parents. However, according to recent research by the EU Fundamental Rights Agency the levels of school segregation in mainstream schools attended by Roma in Greece is approximately 35%<sup>2</sup>.

Although segregation is forbidden, it actually persists in many schools. There have been several efforts to attract and maintain the Roma children into schools but with only limited success (for only the regions addressed by a special programme and for the period in which the programme was functioning)<sup>3</sup>. Numerous efforts at desegregation have had only limited (localized) success or have simply been ineffective.

The resistance of Greek majority parents and local authorities against desegregation has been registered in several places across Greece. Informal alliances of parents and teachers (sometimes in combination with local authorities) have coordinated their efforts in some cases to obstruct various efforts at desegregation (like bussing). Problems as to school segregation of

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1 I. Dimitrakopoulos, (2004), Analytical Report on Education in Greece (2003), National Contact Point for Greece – ANTIGONE, Information and Documentation Centre, Athens.

2 FRA, Education: The situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States. Roma Survey - Data in Focus (forthcoming in 2014).

3 A. Triandafyllidou and R. Gropas (2011), “Migrants and Political Life in Greece: Between Political Patronage and the Search for Inclusion”, South European Society and Politics, published on I-First on 23 September 2011.

Roma children in practice persist<sup>4</sup>. In the same regard, it needs to be noted that Greece has been convicted in a number of cases by the European Court of Human Rights for violating the right to education and non-discrimination of Roma children<sup>5</sup>.

### Testimonials of Roma parents and pupils about school segregation



Through a series of interviews conducted in several Roma communities all over Greece, Roma parents and students had the opportunity to freely express their opinion, based on their personal experiences, of the situation of Roma in the field of education.

A special focus has been given to victims of segregation, whether or not they are aware that segregation is a form of discrimination towards them and a violation of their rights. However, testimonials from integrated areas have also been included. Before each interview, it was not known if we had located those who had experienced segregation or not. It is also likely that discriminatory incidents may occur even in

integrated communities.

Furthermore, interviews focusing on cases of integration reveal the positive impacts of desegregation. They indicate that effective cross-policy interventions have the potential to substantially improve the educational standards of Roma, in contrast to the segregation model. This opinion is clearly expressed by Roma parents who realise the importance of non-segregation.

To respect the wishes of those interviewed and to protect their privacy, we use only the initial letters of their names. Only Mr. Sampanis, one of the applicants in the case “Sampanis and others v. Greece”, which ended with the condemnation of Greece by the European Court of Human Rights for the violation of Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights

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4 See “ANTIGONE” Annual Report 2011, 2012 and 2013; The Greek Ombudsman, Department of Children’s Rights, Parallel Report to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, (April 2012), available at: < <http://www.synigoros.gr/resources/parallel-report-un--3.pdf> >; Committee on the Rights of the Child, Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 44 of the Convention, Greece, (August 2012), available at: < [http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC\\_C\\_GRC\\_CO\\_2-3.pdf](http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/crc/docs/co/CRC_C_GRC_CO_2-3.pdf) >. See also from the Greek National Commission of Human Rights (GNCHR): GNCHR, “Comments on the draft Second periodic Report of Greek Republic on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights”, 2013, <[http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/ellinikes\\_ektheseis\\_en\\_ell\\_org/OHE/Parathrseis\\_EEDA\\_prosYPEKS\\_DSAPD.pdf](http://www.nchr.gr/images/pdf/apofaseis/ellinikes_ektheseis_en_ell_org/OHE/Parathrseis_EEDA_prosYPEKS_DSAPD.pdf)>; GNCHR, “Report and Proposals on the Roma rights”, Annual Report 2009, pp. 100 et seq.; GNCHR, “Proposals for the Protection of Roma in Greece”, Annual Report 2001, pp. 179 et seq.

5 The case of Sampanis and Others v. Greece (2008), the case of Sampani and Others v. Greece (2012), the case of Lavida and Others v. Greece (2013).

(prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education), agreed to publish his full name.

## **DENDROPOTAMOS - THESSALONIKI**

Dendropotamos is the biggest Roma neighbourhood of Thessaloniki. This peripheral and isolated area is located 5 km from the city centre. It is inhabited by 5000 people and more than two thirds of the population belong to one of the three different Roma communities in the area. The Roma children enrolled in the neighbourhood schools represent the vast majority of the pupils. In one of the three primary schools of Dendropotamos, their representation reaches 97%.

### **E. M.**

Mrs. E. M. has four children: two sixteen-year-old twin boys who are attending the 1<sup>st</sup> class of high school, one ten-year-old boy who is attending the 5<sup>th</sup> class of primary school, and one eight-year-old who is attending the 2<sup>nd</sup> class of primary school.

**All her children are attending schools of the neighbourhood that, considering the percentage of Roma, are effectively segregated schools.**

She says: "In regards to the primary schools of our neighbourhood, when the twins started the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, in the school year 2005/2006, about 400 pupils were enrolled and almost half of them were non-Roma.

**The biggest problem of the school was the terrible and completely dangerous condition of the building.**

Because of the awful state in which the building was going through, year after year

**Almost all the non-Roma parents managed to enrol their children in the schools of other neighbourhoods".**

"Many Roma parents also wanted to enrol their children in safer schools and, therefore, they tried to apply to a primary school in the closest neighbourhood, which was under another municipality where most of the non-Roma children of the neighbourhood were accepted.

Unfortunately, because of bureaucratic tricks, none of the Roma succeeded in enrolling in other schools. The principal of the school where they applied for transfer requested a paper certifying that they were officially registered in the municipality<sup>6</sup> of the school, knowing that this was impossible.

The only exception was if the children had relatives or close family friends who were living in the municipality and who could declare, through an official document, that they were permanently hosting the children in their houses. In that type of situation, the children could then attend the school there.

When my twins finished the primary school, seven of their non-Roma classmates were enrolled in the secondary school of the above mentioned municipality, despite not having presented any document to certify their address. Meanwhile, my nephew was asked

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<sup>6</sup> According to the Greek laws, children are assigned to the schools on a residential basis.

to present such a paper and thus he couldn't be enrolled in the same school”.

“In this light, it is easy to understand that, for the Roma, the only opportunity to be educated was to attend the school within their neighbourhood, which in a short time turned into a segregated school.

**Despite such segregation, none of the competent authorities nor someone from the municipality has intervened to support, for example, a bus service or other measures to permit our children to attend a school somewhere out of the neighbourhood.**

reached. When my twins were attending the primary school, which at that time was still attended by about 50% non-Roma pupils, I noted that they were putting, compared to my two smaller sons, much more effort into studying and in doing their homework, in order not to be considered less clever than the other children.

**The discrimination we experience goes beyond segregation. Our children are sometimes victims of the bad attitude of the teachers.**



While some teachers are deeply committed to increasing the motivation, participation, and thus level of education achieved by pupils, some others do not care at all.

On the contrary, it happened that the Roma children from another neighbourhood started to be bussed to our schools because none of the schools from those neighbourhoods close to them had accepted them.

Considering my personal experience, I can say that the opportunity to attend a non-segregated school is very important not only for the integration of our children, but even for the higher level of education that can be

**They foster the stereotype that the Roma are just poor and ignorant people, and they do not give them any incentive to attend the school and to consider education as a cornerstone in the life of each person.**

The aforementioned point and the lack of interest of some parents regarding the

education of their children foster an environment that encourages a very low level of education. These issues leave little hope for

the improvement of the living conditions and the integration of the Roma communities”.

## I. Z.

Mrs. I. Z. is mother of a thirteen-year-old girl and twelve-year-old twins. The twins were born before term, at only 22 weeks, and thus both have health problems. One has problems with mobility, the other with some organs; both are affected by brain damage.

The situation is compounded by the fact that her husband is in jail and so she has to provide for the family by herself.

About her daughter, Mrs. I. Z. says: “She finished primary school in the neighbourhood with many difficulties because the teacher she had during the last three years was not good at her job. In fact, all her class had problems and difficulties. Afterwards, when she started secondary school, she decided to quit almost immediately.

In order for her to go on with the school I recommended that she attend some more years of primary school to have the foundation for the next stage of her education. Unfortunately, at the moment, she also refuses this chance.

It is easy to understand that the problem concerning the education of our children is not only that they have to attend a segregated school, but, beyond this aspect, there is also the issue related to the quality of teaching that such schooling offers. While some of the teachers are very good at their job and at giving the children the necessary motivation to continue the school, some

others do not care at all for the specific needs of the pupils.

**When my daughter was about to start primary school, my husband and I would have liked to enrol her in a mixed school in another municipality where we have relatives with children of the same age and she could have started the school with them.**

**Unfortunately, this was not possible because, for the enrolment, the school required a certificate to attest that the child was officially registered in the municipality of the school.”**

Regarding the particular situation of the twins, Mrs. I. Z. says: “When they reached the age to start school, I tried to enrol them in a school for children with special needs<sup>7</sup> because of their disabilities but, because of the lack of transportation they could not even start school.

A few years later, when they were 9, thanks to the “Programme for the Education of Roma Children” and the huge support offered by the social worker in charge of the implementation of the programme, the twins were enrolled in the “normal” primary school of the neighbourhood. At the moment one of them is attending the 6th grade while the other the 4th grade.

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<sup>7</sup>According to the educational system of Greece, apart from the mainstream schools (primary, secondary, and high schools), there are also separate schools for the children with special needs that address students with disabilities.

According to the Programme, an assistant teacher is appointed to support children with physical or mental disabilities or those with learning difficulties but, since the Programme is going to finish in a few months and we do not know if an extension will be granted, I am not sure if my twins will continue to benefit from this substantial help.

**With the hope of integrating my children, I would like them to attend schools outside of our neighbourhood.**

This is one of the reasons why I hope that when my husband is released, we will have the opportunity to move into another area of the city in order for the children to attend better schools and for us to have more job opportunities and thus improve our living conditions.”

Mrs. D. T. is 45 years old and lives with her two children, the oldest one sixteen years old and the youngest one ten years old. Since she divorced she has had to take care of her family by herself.

She says: “My youngest son is now attending the 4th grade of the primary school of the neighbourhood. His classmates are all Roma but this characteristic of the school has never posed a problem. I think that the teachers have a crucial role in motivating the children in attending the school and in achieving good results. If they were able to make the children participate in class and capture their attention, fewer children would quit school.

**Regarding my child, he is very lucky because he has always had good teachers who take care of the pupils and are very helpful.**

In case some problems show up, they inform the parents immediately and so, in our case, the collaboration between the school and me is very satisfactory.

**In general, the quality of education offered in the schools of our neighbourhood is lower than it is in the other neighbourhoods. In my opinion, this is a problem with the entire educational system more than with the teachers who, in most cases try to do their best to give an education to our children.**



**D. T.**

The primary school attended by my son has an integration class for the teenagers who

have not finished it, but this, even if it is important, is not enough to solve the situation.

Starting from this scholar year, the primary school has been moved into a new building. Before the relocation, the school was in an old, uncomfortable and completely dangerous building. Even if this type of building had been considered inappropriate in 2003, only after ten years could we get a new and safe school for our children.

In my opinion, even though the school in the neighbourhood is effectively segregated, the proposal to close it and enrol the children in the schools of the nearby areas to include them in mixed classes can create more problems than benefits.

As a mother, for me it is very important to be close to the schools, first because in this way it is possible to have regular contact with the teachers, second because, in case of problems - for example, the child does not feel well - we can reach the schools in a few minutes. Furthermore, having the schools in the neighbourhood enables the parents' participation in the activities, like theatres, celebrations and others, that are organised by the school.

## A. T.

A. T. is a seventeen-year-old who lives with her family (her mother, her father, and two brothers), in Dendropotamos.

She talks about her experience: "I was enrolled in the primary school in my neighbourhood until the end of the 3rd grade. Once I finished the 3rd grade, my family and

I had to move to another neighbourhood because we were building our new house there. For this reason, before coming back to Dendropotamos, I attended the 4th and the 5th grade in the school of the neighbourhood where we were temporarily living.

The class in which I was enrolled in my neighbourhood during the first three years of primary school, and where I continued to study once we could move into the new house was attended both by Roma, who were the majority, and non-Roma pupils. Sometimes there were fights between Roma and non-Roma, who were mainly from Russia or Albania, but they have never turned into something bigger than normal children's skirmishes.

Unlike the primary school I attended in my neighbourhood until the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, where I attended the 4th and 5th grade, there were only four Roma children in the whole school, two of whom were me and my brother.

**Some of my classmates used to tease me because of my ethnicity while some others seemed to dislike me since, for them, to be Roma was somehow a very negative thing.**

Fortunately I am a very strong and patient person, so I always let the other children speak without reacting. These bad attitudes have never hurt or discouraged me. I have always been very proud to be Roma and these racist behaviours only increased my pride.

**Despite the prejudices that many non-Roma have against Roma, I have never been racist because I think that nobody should be racist without knowing the world, the culture and the**

**tradition of the others. I remember that I tried many times to explain to my friends that not all the Roma conform to the image of thieves and beggars that the television and the newspapers depict us as.**

During my school experience I have never had problems with the teachers. In general, the teachers are aware of the problems in the Roma communities and so, in most of the cases they tried to understand and help the children.

Sometimes, it is more likely that the students or the pupils have problems with the teachers. In fact, many youngsters go to school just to avoid staying at home the entire day, and not because they are interested in learning something important for their future.

Another issue is that many youngsters are influenced by their friends so if the friends quit the school, they follow the example.

Fortunately, my parents have always urged me to continue and at the moment I'm attending the last year of high school. Since I was a child my parents told me how important and how vital school is for the improvement of the living conditions of individuals, for having a better future and being more open-minded and integrated into society.

In regards to the empowerment of the Roma communities, I know that in the last few years the European Union has funded many projects for the improvement and the integration of the Roma but, as far as I know this money has never reached the people. They have been used by politicians and political parties for their own interests and this is one of the reasons why most of the people do not trust politics.

It is also true that some Roma are still deeply attached to some old traditions and customs and this, for me, is a sign of the fact that they do not really want to be integrated. I do not want to say that we have to forget our traditions and culture, but, at a point, we have to take a step forward.

**The issue of the integration of the Roma is not something that concerns only the non-Roma and their tendency not to mix with the Roma, but is rather a problem on both sides.**



Indeed many Roma prefer to continue their lives isolated and marginalised because they are scared of being rejected. Even if they are accepted by the 90% of the non-Roma, they will continue to be afraid of the other 10%.”

## ASPROPYRGOS - ATHENS

In the whole city of Aspropyrgos (near Athens) there are 5000 Roma, with 1500 of them (230 families) living in the particular area of Sofos (either in the Psari settlement or in small apartments within the surrounding area). This place is well known for its school segregation problem. Roma residents of the informal Psari Roma settlement in Aspropyrgos have been trying since 2004 to enrol their children in the local 10th and 11th primary schools, without success. The Greek government officials have been aware of the non-enrolment of children from the settlement in school from as far back as 2002. Representatives of the Ministry of Health visited the Roma settlement, where they noted that the Roma children did not have access to primary education and that nobody had taken any action in order to register those children in the local primary schools.

On December 11th 2012, in the case Sampanis and others v Greece, the European Court of Human Rights ruled for the second time that Article 14 of the European Convention on Human Rights (prohibition of discrimination) and Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education) were violated. The court noted that since its 2008 judgment also named “Sampanis and others v. Greece”, the situation of the Roma, who are discriminated against through their limited access to education has not changed in Greece. The Roma children are still victims of school segregation; they are put into special classes or schools with only Roma children and where the level of education is lower than in other schools of the country

## SPYROS SAMPANIS

Mr. Spyros Sampanis was one of the applicants in the proceedings before the Supreme Court. He has two children who still go to school: Paraskevoula, seventeen years old, is the girl, and Christos, fifteen years old, is the boy.

Both children, despite their age difference attend the first grade of High School. This happens because Roma parents in this area tend to delay enrolling their children in school because they are discouraged by circumstances (conflicts with non-Roma parents, financial problems of the family etc.).

The children are enrolled in the segregated 12<sup>th</sup> school of Aspropyrgos (consisting of 40 Roma pupils). Mr. Sampanis reports: “I tried for many years to have them enrolled in the mixed 11<sup>th</sup> school of Aspropyrgos but the school authorities refused to do so.

**The process of enrolment had been somewhat adventurous: in October 2005, when finally NGOs had convinced the Ministry of Education to order the enrolment of Roma children in the mixed school, non-Romani parents barred Roma children from entering the school, insulting and pushing them and the NGOs activists.**

Moreover, the president of the non-Roma parents' association showed on camera the private medical files of the Roma children, pointing to alleged inadequate vaccination, which she had evidently acquired through questionable methods from the school authorities. However, as the Hellenic Data Protection Authority observed in its Decision 17/2003, such information constitutes "sensitive data" and should be kept strictly confidential by school doctors.

After this, NGOs called the Hellenic Police requesting that they send additional forces and proceed with arrests. About an hour later, additional police arrived on the scene and the Roma children entered the school while the lawyer of the pro-Roma NGO, Greek Helsinki Monitor, went to the police station to file charges against the non-Roma parents. Once in the police station, the lawyer was illegally detained until the president of the non-Roma parents' association was persuaded by the regional police chief to file counter-charges against him.

**Despite the interest and support of NGOs and activists, non-Roma parents managed to impose, in practice, the segregation system in Aspropyrgos.**

For this reason, together with other Roma parents, I decided to file the famous complaint to the European Court of Human Rights, with the assistance of the Greek Helsinki Monitor.

**The segregated school where my children are currently enrolled consists of containers where all the pupils attend their courses together. This creates an atmosphere of isolation because the place is in a small forest far away from urban activities.**

At the same time, the non-segregated 11<sup>th</sup> school has more than 600 children (all non-Roma except for two of them) and so the opportunities for interaction and exchange are obviously completely different. In addition, it can be pointed out that the distance between my house and both the 11<sup>th</sup> and the 12<sup>th</sup> school is more or less the same and so, in this case, the parameter of the proximity of the school to the house of the pupils should not be considered a barrier during the enrolment processes.

Of course I am not satisfied with the educational system of the 12<sup>th</sup> school. Indeed, in my opinion, segregation does not guarantee good conditions for learning.

**The absence of non-Roma children deprives students of healthy competition that would encourage Roma pupils to improve themselves. I think that this model of segregation will have a negative impact on the future educational life of my children, as they will not be able to adjust themselves to the Greek educational system or mainstream society.**

Apart from the problem of segregation, another issue related to this school is that sometimes only 10 pupils join the lessons in the containers, because the rest of them who live a few kilometres away depend on a specific bus service run by the Municipality. Unfortunately, this particular bus does not serve its purpose in a proper way and, when the weather conditions are bad, the driver does not wait for the children in order to pick them up. As a result the pupils are discouraged from going to school.

I believe that only pre-school education or supportive extra-curricular lessons, useful for preparing them for equal access to a mixed primary school should take place in containers inside the settlement or close to the houses of Roma children.

**Even if the teachers of the 12<sup>th</sup> school are well-intentioned, as both as professionals and as individuals, and they behave well towards Roma children their commitment is not enough to guarantee a satisfactory level of education and sometimes the general condition of the school prevents them from adequately fulfilling all their obligations as teachers.**

Another reason I think that non-segregated schools are better is that Roma children fight and insult each other when they are not being observed by someone who is non-Roma.

**This means that if there are non-Roma present in the same educational environment, the Roma pupils are likely to be more shy, polite, and careful to avoid conflicts.**

In our community, a cultural inter-mediator who is Roma himself works with us. According to me, his work is essential because he knows how to behave with the Roma children, he speaks their language, and he has the “authority” to encourage them to be disciplined in attending their lessons. This intermediation helps also the teachers perform their teaching duties more effectively.

When together with other Roma parents in this area I decided to make the complaint it was due to a proposal made on behalf of Greek Helsinki Monitor, which was deeply concerned about the placement of Romani pupils in segregated classes in Aspropyrgos and was looking for a pilot case.

Unfortunately, no changes took place in the educational life of the children after the complaint and, for the time being, the Court decisions have not changed anything for my family or for me. The teachers of the 11<sup>th</sup> and

12<sup>th</sup> school have not reacted in a specific way (positive or negative) following the complaint and they seem to believe that it depends on the government to provide a solution to the problem.

The only result of the complaint is that it negatively influenced my children: during the litigation process they felt a sense of insecurity because they did not know what would happen or be changed at the end, and now the perpetuation of segregation makes them feel excluded and unwanted by Greek society. Despite these feelings, their relations with the teachers remain fine because they do not blame them for the problems of segregation and exclusion.

**Even if for the moment there is no improvement I still hope that maybe something positive will happen in the future, since the government cannot so easily disregard the decisions of the European Court.**

## **AGIA VARVARA - ATHENS**

Agia Varvara, a suburb of Athens, is considered to be one of the few places in Greece with a high level of social inclusion of Roma.

The only census that had been carried out with cooperation between the government and the local Association of Greek Roma of Agia Varvara revealed the existence of 3134 Roma persons in this specific area.<sup>8</sup> The total population is 40000 citizens.

## **M. BA.**

Mrs. M. has an eleven-year old daughter who is attending the 6<sup>th</sup> grade at one of the

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[http://dspace.lib.ntua.gr/bitstream/123456789/5871/1/pratt\\_0sg\\_roma.pdf](http://dspace.lib.ntua.gr/bitstream/123456789/5871/1/pratt_0sg_roma.pdf)

primary schools of the neighbourhood. The school is the nearest to their house, even if there are others which are not far.

She says: "I am very satisfied with the school, and no problems occurred while registering the child in this particular school. The quality of education is very satisfactory, the teachers do their best in order to help the pupils, and there are no differences in the treatment of the children.

There is positive interaction between Roma and non-Roma pupils and there are good relations among all families and parents, without any kind of social discrimination.

**I believe that mixed schools constitute the best educational model for the elimination of any form of discrimination and exclusion.**

classroom because, in this way, all children would get used to the idea of diversity.

**On the contrary, if a child attends a segregated school he will develop psychological problems and have practical difficulties adjusting to the Greek educational system and, in the future, to Greek society.**

In any case, what should be guaranteed is a supportive service of extra teaching (outside the school curriculum) for all children who need it, either Roma or non-Roma.

However, this would be more important for Roma, since most Roma parents are not able to help them do their homework because they are uneducated."

**P. D.**

Mr. P. D. is the father of a fourteen-year-old boy who is attending the 1<sup>st</sup> grade of the neighbourhood high school.

In recounting his experience, he says: "I did not face any problems when I enrolled the child in the school, but my son fell behind because he missed one year of education because of my family's relocation from the island of Crete to Athens, which was unavoidable because my shop in Crete was hit by the economic crisis.

If possible, equal numbers of Roma and non-Roma pupils should be placed in each

**If there were support services for the reception of Roma children from other areas my son would have been able to**



**adjust more easily and he would not have missed a year of school and been obliged to repeat the same grade.**

In any case, the quality of education in this school is very satisfactory, and the teachers are willing to provide the same assistance to all pupils regardless of their ethnicity. In general, the relations between Roma and non-Roma pupils are good and racism from non-Roma parents has been rare. Nonetheless, they do not reflect the feelings of the overwhelming majority of non Roma parents.

**When it comes to segregation in education I think that such schools raise barriers between pupils and contribute to the creation of a divided society in the future.**

On the other hand, I know that there are classes or even schools in the area where the vast majority of pupils are Roma, but I am not sure if this fact poses a problem because it indirectly obliges the authorities to pay attention to the needs of Roma pupils as well.

In my opinion, the biggest problem is that since the educational level of many Roma parents is not high, most of the Roma pupils

are in extreme need of tutoring services. Despite this, two years ago the Greek government abolished the provision of extra teaching in all schools.

This abolition had negative consequences for all poor families who do not have the financial capacity to seek help from private tutors or institutions, but socially disadvantaged groups such as the Roma were hurt more than the average Greeks because, as I've said, the educational level of most Roma parents does not allow them to help their children by themselves."

## **SPATA - EAST ATTICA**

In Spata, a small town 20 Km east of Athens, there is a Roma settlement of 150 persons. Most of them are registered as citizens in the Municipality of Spata. The housing conditions of the settlement are terrible and there is a lack of water and electricity facilities.

In the settlement there are 55 children of school age, 35 are children who should be in primary school, while 15 are children who should attend pre-school education. Nevertheless, during the last year and a half, none of the children have been going to school because the



Director of the school where they are supposed to be enrolled refuses to accept them.

It is clear that the whole situation constitutes segregation, because the children in the settlement are totally excluded from the Greek educational system and isolated from the rest of pupils. At the moment, negotiations between the Municipality of Spata, the University of Athens and the Roma community are taking place in order to find a solution to the problem.

## V. K.

Mr. V. K. has an eleven-year-old son who had to abandon the 3<sup>rd</sup> school of Spata a year and a half ago. The 3<sup>rd</sup> school is 7 km away from the Roma settlement, and it is the closest one to the Roma settlement.

While the previous principal of the school of Spata had a positive attitude towards Roma children and would enrol all of them, the new principal, who has been in charge for the past year and a half, behaves in a discriminatory way and has never permitted the enrolment of Roma children.

Although he knew that there were Roma children who had completed studies in specific grades and ought to have moved on to the next grade he managed not to enrol them in the new grade.

Moreover, there used to be a bus, paid for by the District that would pick up pupils (Roma and non-Roma) from surrounding areas and bring them to the school, but this service stopped because of a lack of funding.

Describing the discrimination that Mr. V. K. and his son experienced, he says: "When my

son was attending the school the relations with the teachers were good and the school was mixed (with around 20 non Roma and 10 Roma per classroom). In general we were both satisfied with the level of education provided and the overall building conditions of the school.

The only problem was that there were tensions between Roma and non-Roma children and between Roma children and non-Roma parents who were very aggressive towards Roma pupils. Non-Roma parents would often visit the new Principal in order to object to the enrolment of Roma students because they believed that they were not vaccinated and that this would threaten the health of their children.

Actually, it has to be emphasized that the University of Athens had carried out a project with the goal of vaccinating Roma children. All the children within the Spata area have been vaccinated through this project. For this reason, the vaccination argument could not be used by the authorities as an excuse for refusing the enrolment of Roma children in the school. Although it is true that many Roma children are not very clean, this is not due to their reluctance in washing themselves but is due to the lack of water facilities in the settlement.

**To justify their refusal to accept Roma in the school, the Ministry of Education and the District claim that children cannot go to school anymore because there is no bus service, but even when, after the suspension of the bus service, some Roma parents and I offered to drive the children to school every day, using our cars, the new Principal denied the enrolment of**

### **Roma children. In my opinion, this is clearly a racist attitude.**

During last summer (2013), my son was happy because he could participate in the preparatory lessons that were taking place in a small house inside the settlement. These lessons were organized within the framework of summer courses using the official educational curriculum developed by activists working with the University of Athens' Roma project.

The small house used for the lessons was built by the Municipality as a space for supplemental lessons for Roma children, but finally the Ministry failed to provide staff and this supportive school has ceased to operate (apart from the summer courses run by the University). I think that such supplemental education would be very important, whether for the pupils or for the parents and older children who have never been to school and need lessons at a primary level.

In the settlement there is a Roma school mediator, but his role is limited because children are now totally excluded from attending school. Nevertheless, he helps with the efforts of other NGO activists to convince the authorities to solve the problem and enable our children to be educated.

### **KOMOTINI - THRACE**

Komotini is a city of the district of Thrace (north-eastern Greece), where the Muslim minority of Greece lives. The Muslim minority is composed of three ethnic groups: Turks, Roma, and Pomaks.

According to the Lausanne Treaty signed between Greece and Turkey in 1923, each of these countries is obliged to establish public minority schools for the purpose of educating its minorities in specific areas. Therefore, Greece has the responsibility to operate public Minority Schools for the Muslim minority in Thrace.

In these schools, only children from Muslim families can be enrolled, regardless of their specific ethnic origin. However, Muslim families have the right to choose between the public Minority School established under the Lausanne Treaty and the public school in the Greek educational system (where both children of Greek Orthodox Christian families and children of Muslim families are enrolled, regardless of their specific ethnic origin).

### **O. M.**

Mrs. O. M. has a ten-year-old daughter who attends the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at the Minority Primary school of Komotini. This means that she has already spent 2 years in primary education.

She says about her experience: "I am very satisfied with the school, which is considered to be the best school in the whole area of Thrace, and I did not notice any negative treatment from the teachers or other employees before, during, or after registering my child.

**In fact, the pupils of the minority schools are not classified by criteria based on ethnicity or social status, so children of Turkish, Pomak, and Roma origin attend mixed classes. However, they are all Muslims, as with all**

### minority schools established by the Treaty of Lausanne.

Unfortunately, I cannot express an opinion on the issue of the quality of education provided by this school because I did not receive any education myself and I do not really know if the educational level of the school is high or not.

What I do know is that there are no differences in the treatment of pupils by teachers, so Roma pupils are not treated in a different way.

During the previous school years there was a conflict between Roma and non-Roma pupils but, since the beginning of this school year (2013 -'14), the situation seems to have improved and the relations between Roma and non-Roma is getting better. This is due to the fact that, year after year, children grow up and develop greater reciprocal understanding and respect. As a consequence, my daughter now plays much more often with the non-Roma classmates.

### I think that mixed schools create the best educational setting for the elimination of any forms of discrimination and exclusion and for the inclusion of Roma children into the educational system (High School etc.)

However, in this school there are teachers who discriminate against Roma pupils and pay less attention to them compared to the other children, although it is obvious that Roma pupils need to be cared for more because they are more vulnerable. For instance, teachers seem to be unwilling to examine and solve special problems of educational adjustment of Roma children (e.g. by providing them extra help and explaining them the parts of lessons they do not understand).”

### LEFKADA - IONIAN SEA (WESTERN GREECE)

Lefkada is a Greek island of the Ionian Sea, in Western Greece, where a significant number of Roma people are settled.

There are no official statistical data on Roma of Lefkada. Their population is estimated to be in a few hundreds, but their number is never stable because Roma from surrounding areas regularly visit the island of Lefkada. With the help of activists from Amnesty International, Roma people in the area created a local association which, along with other goals, aims to promote access to education for Roma children. The housing conditions of Roma settlements in Lefkada are very bad.

The following incident does not



constitute a segregation case, but since the Roma of Lefkada have been victims of discrimination in various areas (such as housing) in the past, it was noteworthy to investigate through testimonies if there were also cases of educational segregation.

### **K. L. and G. L.**

Mr. K.L. and Mrs. G.L. are the parents of a boy who attends first grade in the public primary school of the city of Lefkada and of a girl who attends third grade the same school. This means that the boy is now spending his first year in primary education while the girl has already spent two years in primary education.

They say: "Each of the eleven children who live in our settlement regularly go to school and all are attending mixed classes. In fact, the pupils are not assigned to specific classes on the basis of their ethnicity or social class.

We can say that we, as well as the other Roma parents in this settlement, are satisfied by the quality of the teachers' work, but we also believe that the situation could be even better. In any case, the teachers treat our children as they do the non-Roma.

The interaction between Roma and non-Roma children is generally quite neutral, but sometimes it can grow into friendships and, according to our personal experience, we have never faced racist attitudes from non-Roma parents or non-Roma pupils towards our children.

**With regards to the best educational model for the elimination of any form of discrimination and exclusion, we both think that it provided by mixed**

**schools since, to us, the existence of non-segregated schools is a crucial factor for the social inclusion of our children and for their future professional career in every field.**

### **CHRYSOPIGI - HERAKLION (CRETE ISLAND)**

Chrysopigi is a suburb of the city of Heraklion, on Crete Island, where there are several neighbourhoods that have a Roma population. The biggest Roma settlement in Crete is near Chrysopigi, in New Alikarnassos.

There are no official statistics on the Roma population of Heraklion. However, civil society organisations estimate that it numbers more than one thousand and that they are very mobile, meaning that the families will move around to various places in Greece for professional reasons. Most of the Roma live in the administrative borders of New Alikarnassos, a small municipality adjoining the larger municipality of Heraklion.

The settlement is situated between the highway and the industrial zone, about 500 meters away from the last house of the municipality. The settlement, containing at least six hundred people according to the local press, has existed for twenty years and has successfully challenged attempts at forced eviction and resisted years of systemic racism.

### **N. M.**

Mr. N.M. is the father of a ten-year-old girl who attends fourth grade in the public primary school of Chrysopigi.

He explains: "The school where my child is enrolled is just 200 meters away from our house and is the nearest one even though, not far from it there are also other schools attended by many Roma pupils.

The percentage of Roma pupils in my girl's school amounts to 5% of the overall population; in the schools where the children who - unlike our family - enrol are usually those who live in settlements, the percentage is much higher, around 40% or even 50%. Anyway, the pupils are not classified on the basis of their ethnicity.

I am dissatisfied with the school because the general condition of the Greek educational system becomes worse every year. This affects not only the Roma children, but all pupils regardless of their ethnic origin.

Due to the overcrowded classrooms the quality of education is not satisfactory, although most of the teachers do their best in order to help the pupils.

In my opinion the real problem is another one. I am aware of several complaints from Roma parents about the behaviour of non-Roma parents towards Roma children during the school's time. My daughter has also had such an experience: a non Roma mother slapped her face last year in order to punish her because she had a verbal fight with my child. I am pretty sure that if my daughter was not a Roma girl, this mother would not have acted in this way.

There are also teachers who discriminate against Roma pupils by being much stricter about their behaviour, for example if they act improperly, while not being as aggressive if non-Roma pupils are involved in various similar troubles.

I think that such discrimination is the result of a racial prejudice on behalf of some teachers and this reflects the widespread belief among Roma society that Roma pupils are not treated in the same way.

**Very often, the teachers do not pay attention to Roma children and they do not care about their educational problems, even though it is obvious that Roma children need more attention and dedicated effort in order to keep them at the same level as the other pupils. I think that teachers should spend more time with Roma pupils to help them effectively but, apart of isolated cases, it seems that there is no such will.**

Moreover, in this school - as in every other school in Greece - there is no



supportive service for pupils anymore, both Roma and non-Roma but, of course this situation tends to be more negative for Roma pupils since they cannot be helped by their uneducated parents.

**Regarding the best educational model for the elimination of any form of discrimination and exclusion, I am totally in favour of non-segregated schools because I believe that mixed schools and mixed classes create the best opportunity to defeat prejudices and to overcome social isolation that Roma experience.**

## BULGARIA

### A brief overview on school segregation

Segregation is banned by the anti-discrimination framework in Bulgaria and it reads as “Racial segregation shall mean issuing an act, performing an action or omission to act, which leads to compulsory separation, differentiation or dissociation of persons based on their race, ethnicity or skin colour”. However the Bulgarian definition is in contravention to European standards, as it explicitly requires the separation to be “compulsory”, i.e. forced. Nevertheless, the Protection against Discrimination Act explicitly states that segregation constitutes a prohibited form of discrimination.



In Bulgaria, the main forms of school segregation are: the existence of the so called “Gypsy” or “all-Romani schools”, where the majority or even all of the students are from Roma origin; the establishment of all-Romani classes within mainstream schools and the systematic placement of Roma students into special schools for mentally disabled students.

The Bulgarian educational system has a decade of attempts of civil society organizations to develop and implement desegregation

programs aimed at enrolment of Roma children in the mainstream schools. These programs however were not sufficiently supported by the educational institutions and local administrations, neither with the administratively or financially. Where the local administrations usually participate in the programs, often propose mainstream schools, located in distant settlements and suffer from lack of students. These are however not attractive for the Roma families, especially when small children are concerned.

The head teachers of the mainstream schools, which are closer to the Roma settlements on the other side are not supportive and avoid by all means the enrolment of Roma children. One of the reasons for this is that in case of enrolment of Roma children, the parents of the Bulgarian children start to oppose and frequently even withdraw their children and move them to other schools. The practices show that as soon as the proportion of Roma students reaches a certain level (more than 4-5 per class), Bulgarian parents do not tolerate them anymore and decide to move their children out of the school. At the end of this process, the few non-Roma, who remain in the school are usually multiply disadvantaged, just like the majority of the Roma students. Such *white flight* resulted in factual establishment of more schools where predominantly Roma children are enrolled, instead of securing integrative environment.

To avoid this situation some of the head teachers in the mainstream schools turn to other form of segregation – they gather the Roma children enrolled in separate classes, thus segregating them again. This “secondary level segregation” is in some cases obvious and opened; where in other cases there are attempts to cover it by establishment of “foreign languages classes” or “advanced computer literacy classes”, where additional taxes may apply with the aim to prevent Roma children in fact (who are traditionally from financially disadvantaged families) from applying to enrol in these classes.

### **Testimonials and consequences of sub-standard education**

In practice there are a number of negative effects aside school segregation. Usually the educational level and subsequently the educational achievements in the segregated all-Romani classes are significantly lower compared to the other classes in the same school. It often results from the negligence of the teachers and their lower expectations for the children. The lower results however are used to defend the position, that the sole presence of the Roma children in the mainstream schools ruins the level of education and lead to lower educational achievements among the Bulgarians students also.

Mainstream schools are seen as problematic by some of the Roma parents also. Many Roma are afraid to allow their children to attend mainstream education schools, aware of prejudices against Roma, and fearing that children will be subject to discrimination and harassment in the schools. These parents prefer the more secured capsulated environment in the Roma settlements with the thinking that their children are too young to meet discrimination and unequal treatment. It is a subsequence of discriminatory attitude, which one can confront in the mixed schools.

Cases of discrimination and harassment against Roma children have been documented in many of the mainstream schools. These are cases of children discriminated by teachers or fellow-students of Bulgarian origin. There are also cases of discrimination against Roma students by parents of Bulgarian students at the same school. In some of these cases the appointment of an assistant-teacher helps to avoid such situations. However, the school headmasters and the teachers are generally not familiar with the requirements of the Protection against Discrimination Act, and allow discrimination in the educational facilities.

### **KIRIL AND METODIJ SCHOOL, SENOVO (RUSE DISTRICT)**

The primary school Kiril and Metodij is located in the town of Senovo. This is a small town within the Ruse District, with a population of 1400 people. The school is located downtown, which is not so far from the Roma neighbourhood - fewer than 1000 meters. Ten years ago, the number of the students was about 160, of which 40% Roma, 20% Turks and 40% Bulgarian students. But after a couple of years the economic crisis made people to leave the town and to migrate to big cities and abroad, where they can find easier job, but most of these people were Bulgarian and Turks. Now the number of students in the Kiril and Metodij primary school is 96, of which 90% are Roma, barely 5% are Turks, and 5% are Bulgarian. Despite the large number of Roma students in this school, there are no Roma teachers. The only Roma who works at school is the wiper.

The classrooms are in good condition and the students have ensured textbooks, but nevertheless the quality of education is not at the same level as it was ten years ago. Some ex-students

shared with us that even 10 years ago, when the quality had been better, they had problems with the Bulgarian children every day. They have been insulted not only by the Bulgarian children but also by the teachers. Some of them had dropped-out from school at the beginning for this reason. Most of the students who have finished eighth grade in this school do not have the necessary knowledge of reading or proper writing.

## **S. R. S.**

S. R. S. is a 22-year-old Roma. He lives in the little town of Senovo, of the Ruse region. He shares the troubles he faced when he was in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. His story begins with his challenges in the primary school in Senovo, Kiril and Metodiy:

“When I was a child, there were many children from the Roma neighbourhood studying in this school. I could even say that 50% of the students were Roma. It was strange that among us (the Roma children) we never had students with good and excellent grades. Just the opposite: all the students with weaker grades were Roma. But... anyway... I’ll return to this topic a bit later.

My mother enrolled me in the local kindergarten a bit later: only one year prior to first grade. I was a very shy child. During my kindergarten year, I did not feel that I knew as much as the rest of the children knew because they had kindergarten from an earlier age. For example, I spoke Bulgarian but not in the way Bulgarian kids did. When I started first grade, I was very happy that there were Roma children from my neighbourhood.

I might even dare say that the number of Roma children was bigger compared to Bulgarian and Turkish children.

**Nevertheless, from the very first day the teachers put us, the Roma**

**children, to sit in the back desks, while the rest were in front.**

I was not the only Roma child with insufficient skills in Bulgarian language and it was hard for us to study and learn new skills like reading, writing, and calculating. I don’t know if the reason was that I was a Roma child, but my teacher never paid me the needed attention: when I used to tell her that it was hard for me to understand a lesson or a task, she would always yell at me saying that I never understand and that she is sick of me. I was a child and in those situations I kept silent.

After the end of the school year, the teachers left us for summer lessons and tests. For a few days we used to go to school for one hour per day, and the teachers gave us all the tasks and tests without taking the time to teach us and help us understand the lessons; after that, they let us pass on to the next grade. Personally, I was thinking that the teachers were so good that they would do our tests and homework for us. Years rolled on and we would easily pass on to the next grades. I didn’t even bother to study because I knew that my teachers were “good” and they would let me pass on.

My parents were busy searching for jobs and providing a living for the family, so they did not notice what the quality of my education was. When I was in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade my father went to work abroad and there he stayed for a long time.

**At certain times I was realizing that my level of knowledge was insufficient: I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade, I could not read well, and I did not know the multiplication table. My Bulgarian classmates mocked me and they were wondering who let me reach 6<sup>th</sup> grade.**

I was really ashamed, but I thought that if I continue studying I might improve, and I really wanted to finish high school. Two more years rolled on and I was already in 8<sup>th</sup> grade. I did it! I finished primary school! ... Unfortunately, with no real knowledge.

My mother decided to enrol me in a secondary/high school in a neighbouring village - Vetovo: V. Levski School. Now I had a different environment and different teachers. We had some special subjects at school and it was so hard for me to understand them. The new teachers had a different attitude compared to the ones in the primary school in Senovo. They had high expectations for all the students.

**I did not have the needed foundation, so I experienced challenges in my learning process. I stayed behind my classmates in the first year of 9<sup>th</sup> grade, but still I decided to not give up and to try to continue.**

I did continue, but I still had the same challenges with the school material. Some of the teachers even tried to help me and other students like me, so they stayed after class to work with us more and explain the lessons to us. Despite all these efforts, I did not make it because I did not have the needed foundation to build on.

So, after trying a couple of times and failing at the exams, I gave up studying and was not able to finish high school.

Now I am so sorry that I did pass from one grade to the next without the needed knowledge when I was a younger pupil, but there is no way to correct this.

**I hope that the Roma children who are students now will realize that it is not good for them to pass on with no real knowledge, so they don't have my fate later!"**

**K. I.**

K. I. is a 21-year-old. He lives in Senovo, one of those small towns in the Ruse region that have become empty. K. I. says that he never attended kindergarten or a preparatory class. When he was of school age, his parents enrolled him in the local school: "When I started first grade, I did not speak Bulgarian at all. I was one of three children in the family, and my parents say that two unemployed parents could not afford to send their children to kindergarten."

K. I. shares that when he started first grade in the local school, Kiril and Metodiy he was diligent and put a lot of effort into catching up with his ethnic Bulgarian classmates. He did not realize this at first, but he soon started noticing that the teachers neglected him in the same way they neglected his Roma peers who were studying in the same school.

K. I. continued sharing his memories, saying that the Roma children were all given seats in the very back rows and that they did not receive the needed attention and support from the teachers. None of the teachers



class and they played soccer in the playground of the school. At first I just watched how they played, but then I got some courage and asked the sports teacher if I could play with them.

**He did not let me play, and when he turned his back on me one of the older students taunted me with these words: "Hey, dirty, black Gypsy! Go away from our ground!"**

First I was spurned by my Math teacher, then by the sports teacher, and now this student had humiliated me so rudely... I got mad and couldn't bare it anymore. I ran towards this student and hit him. He was so weak that he fell on the ground and hit his head. I got so scared that I ran to my home. Deep within myself, I was sure that everyone would blame me again. I told my parents everything, and they went to the school to talk to my teacher and the school principal. Nevertheless, they all said that I am guilty and the school must punish me for my deed. Even my parents believed that I was guilty. After this moment, I got absolutely demotivated and didn't want to go to school anymore.

Moreover, there was no sense in studying because, even if the Roma children finish this school, they know nothing and they are not able to even write a CV or a request.

**Now I am 21 years old and I am so sorry that I didn't have the chance to at least finish primary school.**

**BRATYA MILADINOVİ SCHOOL,  
"NADEZHDA" NEIGHBOURHOOD,**

## SLIVEN

Sliven is a Bulgarian city where one of the biggest Roma ghettos is located. The ghetto is called the "Nadezhda" meaning "Hope". About 20,000 Roma of different subgroups live there. Some of them try to live like normal people, but a large group of them are living in extreme poverty. Furthermore, how normal could life in a ghetto be? This is another question.

Ever since the time of communism, there had been a primary school close to Nadezhda, where Roma children studied. It is an absolutely segregated school, and now there are more than 1,300 Roma pupils. The school is called Primary School "Bratya Miladinovi".

The motivation for Roma parents to send their children to this school is that it is close to the Roma neighbourhood. Another reason is that if the parents do not send their children to school every day, they will not receive a note for their absence.

This is important because regular attendance at school is necessary for receiving social benefits. Another reality is that the school functions according to the number of students enrolled in it, because the educational system in Bulgaria is dysfunctional and depends on the number of students in attendance at the school in order to provide money for salaries, maintenance, and as the continued existence of the school.

At first glance, it looks like a normal school. However, that is just its exterior in building form, which has been renovated thanks to the European funds. The renovation has done nothing to change the building as an educational institution.

99% of these students are completing their basic education (from first to eighth grade) without developing any basic knowledge about reading, writing, or calculating (math). Every school year, between 200 and 250 students complete their basic education and receive a diploma, but this actually is the last stop for them.

These students are just a small portion of a large number of Roma youth who will stay illiterate and remain uncompetitive on the job market. Even they will not have a driving license, which is really important for Roma youths - not only as a motivation to go school, but also a way to learn something that is really important.

Every year, this school produce hundreds of passive citizens - Roma citizens of Bulgaria who will become the face of Roma in Europe, who will be "The Hope". "Hope", but just like the name of the ghetto where they live. The government continues to do nothing about this issue, though it should!

## S. D.

S. D. is 28 years old. He is from Sliven and he lives in the Nadezhda quarter, or in the Roma ghetto. S. D. is married and is a father of two children. He told us his story starting from the time when he was a pupil in the Bratya Miladinovi segregated school.

The story started with his first impressions about the way the school looked: "When I was a pupil in this school it looked really nice, the classrooms were clean and tidy, but there were no other children than Roma."

He studied in this school for 8 years, but he never managed to finish his primary education and get a diploma for 8<sup>th</sup> grade, as he had studied in 6<sup>th</sup> grade for two academic years (he had repeated the class): „My parents enrolled me in this school because it was the closest one to the quarter and because all the children from the neighbourhood were there - all of them Roma.

**I was a very diligent student, compared to the rest of my peers. I was really motivated and I studied a lot, but at some point I noticed that other children who did not study and who did not even come to school had the same grades, and they would pass to the next grade without studying at all. Some of these children did not even attend classes, and despite this the teachers gave them good grades.**

Up to fourth grade I kept being a diligent student, but later my motivation perished and I stopped caring for my lessons. None of the teachers even noticed this change. The important thing for them was that I was there, and whether I understand the lessons or not was not a matter of interest for them. In this period of time the first game clubs with electronic games emerged, and as a young boy I was so much interested and eager to play.

I was so much hooked by these games that I hung out in the game clubs all day and did not attend classes. Despite this, my teachers let me pass to the next grades and I reached 6<sup>th</sup> grade without attending classes and without my parents being informed about this. I was too young to realize what exactly I was doing to myself, to my future. The teachers had passive attitudes and would

ignore me, and in this way they did me wrong and this is why I was not able to get a diploma for primary education.

In 6<sup>th</sup> grade there were many tests to check the knowledge of the students. I failed at the tests, together with many other children. I still did not realize what was going on. However, none of the teachers did anything to help me with the lessons and provide me with support to catch up. The end of the school year came soon and suddenly my teachers decided that I should repeat 6<sup>th</sup> grade.

I was surprised and didn't know why they decided so, because by that point they had always given me good grades even when I knew nothing and even when I did not attend classes. I lost my motivation even more. In the next school year I was in 6<sup>th</sup> grade again. I continued to skip classes and hang out in game clubs. At the end of the year, the teachers decided that I should repeat 6<sup>th</sup> grade once again and this is how I gave up studying. In fact, I did not even cover the material for 4<sup>th</sup> grade. I was not the only student in this situation.

Right now, the situation in the school is even worse. The kids who finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade cannot read and write.

**I am dreaming now about getting a driving license, but it is impossible because I don't have a diploma for primary education. Now that I am 28 years old, I finally realize what I did.**

Nevertheless, we should not ignore the irresponsibility of the teachers, because they do not teach the children but only let them pass to the next grades without even making sure that the students can read and write and do simple calculations.

In order to go to a driving course and get a driving license, people need to read and write well and also have a diploma for a finished primary education (8<sup>th</sup> grade).

**This is why I am planning to enrol in an evening school so I finish my primary education. I can't describe how poorly I did in school.**

Moreover, the apathy of my teachers and my parents was also a huge draw back for me. Maybe if I have had the chance to study in a normal school together with Bulgarian students, I would have succeeded? That the school is so close by made me enrol my older son there, as well. In fact, I could not afford to enrol him in another school.

Unfortunately, he repeats my story. Right now he is 14 years old and he is supposed to be in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, but he is in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. I enrolled my younger son in the primary school Youriy Gagarin, which is also close to us, but unfortunately we found out that the situation is the same like the other school - again all the children are Roma, and again the quality of education is very low.

**I think it is too late for my older son, but I will enrol my younger son in a mixed school so that he does not repeat my fate and so that he has a better chance".**

**B. I.**

B. I. is Roma. She is 50 years old and she lives in the town of Sliven, in the local Roma ghetto Nadezhda. Boyanka is a mother of 4 daughters, three of whom are already

married, while the fourth one – Bozhanka - is only six years old. The mother shares her story with us and also the stories of her children from the time when they were enrolled in Bratya Miladinovi - a totally segregated school.

“When I was a child I was also enrolled in this school... but I didn’t reach too far. I dropped out when I was only in third grade. Ever since that time, there have only been Roma students in that school. When my mother enrolled me there, I was not able to read or write at all. Moreover, my Bulgarian language skills were poor because we only spoke Romanes in our family and I had never attended kindergarten. When I started first grade, the teachers started teaching us how to read and write, but I still faced challenges in understanding and speaking Bulgarian.

I reached third grade without being able to read and write and I was happy that, despite this fact, my teachers did not let me repeat a grade. In third grade, the material was difficult and impossible for me to learn. This is why I stopped attending school, and this is how I remained illiterate. We are to blame for this, but on the other hand, the teachers were also responsible: they did not encourage us and did not put in enough effort to teach us what we need.

After that, I grew up quickly and I married young. I gave birth to three daughters. When they reached school age, we enrolled them to the same school - Bratya Miladinovi - because it is close to the neighbourhood. My daughters used to go to school every day, and when they came back, they would leave their school bags and would go play outside.

**I often asked them why they were not doing their homework, and they**

**responded that they did not have homework or that they would do it “in a while”. It was amazing that they passed on to the next grades.**

My oldest daughter, Stela, reached fifth grade and then gave up and stopped going to school. She told me that she could not read and write and that she was unable to continue. Two years later, she got married. My two younger daughters had the same story: they reached third and fourth grade, and then stopped going to school for the same reason.

**The teachers had never organized meetings with parents to talk about their children. They preferred to let them pass on to the next grade without bothering to care about what the students actually know. They were interested in keeping their jobs and salaries, and nothing else mattered.**

Now my three daughters are married and unemployed. Moreover, they are illiterate - they can’t read and write, and they can’t find jobs. There are no jobs anyway, but the situation would be better if they were at least literate. There are many other children like my children in this school: even those who finish eighth grade are still illiterate, although they finish primary school.

Now my fourth daughter is 6 years old. I enrolled her in kindergarten (preparatory class) in the same school. She says that she likes her school and that the teachers teach her how to write and read, although she is still not fluent in Bulgarian. I know that I am not able to do anything about this because we are both poor and illiterate.

**The majority of the parents from the neighbourhood send their children to this school because it is closer, and also because the teachers do not register absenteeism and do not hold them responsible for missing classes when the children are absent from school.**

Otherwise, if the students have more than 5 missed classes registered, the children's monthly social benefit would be stopped. Thus the parents keep receiving social benefits of 35 BGN per child and the teachers continue to receive salaries."

After this conversation, we found out that this is not an isolated case. Rather, it is a serious community problem that had started during the times of communism and has persisted into the present day. The Primary School Bratya Miladinovi still exists in contemporary Bulgaria, in the town of Sliven, and it continues to produce illiterate citizens. This is not only a Roma problem. It is rather a problem for the entire state, as it concerns the quality of the most important resource in the country - the human resource. It is the Roma community that is generally considered responsible for this problem. Still, a question must be asked: what are the responsibilities of the government about this?

## **S. Y.**

S. Y. is a 25-year-old Roma. He lives in the Nadezhda neighbourhood, in the town of Sliven. He is married and a father of three children: 8-year-old Misho, studying in second grade, 6-year-old Biser - in preparatory class, and 2-year-old Kremena,

who is not going into a nursery or kindergarten yet. Misho and Biser are studying in the primary school Bratya Miladinovi, which is a segregated school with 100% Roma students.

**We asked why they enrolled their children there, and Sasho responded that "this school is closer to the mahala, and most of their friends and peers from the neighbourhood are studying there". He added that this school is the one with the biggest number of students in town - about 1,400 enrolled and all of them are Roma.**

On the question of the quality of education, S. Y. says that, in fact, the quality of education in the entire country is critically low and he gives the "Average" 3 grade to the quality in the segregated school within the 6-point grading system, which is pretty low. According to him, there is a large number of children and youth who finished their primary education in this school and who find it extremely challenging to continue their education further.

They do not have the needed educational base as a foundation for further learning, which they were supposed to have received in the earlier stages of their education. This is why they tend to give up. Sasho's children are also studying in this school, but he still thinks that their children are in a better situation - not due to a better attitude on the part of the teachers, but rather due to the additional work at home and the help they receive from their parents.

"I meet with the teachers of my children every week and ask about their lessons and performance at school. I encourage the

teachers to give them tasks for homework, so that my wife and I can help them at home”.

S. Y. says that his children have excellent grades (6). He thinks that these grades are realistic and that they respond to his children’s real knowledge and skills, as they study a lot at home and he always makes sure to provide the needed books to his children. Sasho is underlining the fact that their school performance would not be so good if they did not get the support from their parents, as the quality of education in the school is poor.

He thinks that this is due to the fact that 100% of the students in the school are Roma, so the teachers are not as motivated to work with them. He also adds that there is a serious lack of teachers and educators with a Roma background. He wants to find a better school and enrol his children in a place where the children are mixed and the quality of education is better. However, it depends on whether he could afford it. Furthermore, the Bratya Miladinovi School is conveniently close to them. Despite this, he would do his best to help his children succeed and receive a good education.

He is planning to enrol his children in another school when they finish third or fourth grade. He answered the question about how the educational activities in this school are organized:

“The teachers say that the classes and lessons are going smoothly and normally, in general. However, my elder son said that during the classes there are always children playing outside in the school yard instead of being in class. I think that the problem is twofold - both teachers and parents should take responsibility for this. The majority of

Roma parents enrol their children in this school because they know that they will finish eighth grade, even if they do not attend classes regularly, and that their monthly social benefit will not be suspended. On the other hand, the teachers do not really care about the children and they do not register their absenteeism. They care about having jobs and receiving their salaries.

**So, keeping in mind that the schools are funded per number of students, the teachers are not interested in having drop-outs or students with too many unexcused absences. This is why they keep all the students in their records as if they are attending classes regularly.**

So, if I did not communicate with my children’s teachers and did not ask them to work with my children, they would not care much. Unfortunately, there are not many interested and motivated parents like us. According to what my children share at home, the teachers want mostly to have quiet classrooms and to not be bothered by the children. This means to me that they do not do their job in the way they are supposed to do it and also that the quality of education is too low.”

**S. B.**

S. B. is 30 years old, from the town of Sliven. She lives in the Nadezhda quarter, which is considered to be one of the biggest Roma ghettos in the country. She is a mother of three children. All her children study in the segregated school Bratya Mlladinovi. Approximately 1,400 children study in this

school, all of them from Nadezhda. S.B. shared with us the story about her youngest son, M.

**In 2006, I enrolled my son M. in the first grade, in the same segregated school where my two older sons were also studying. Before this, M. had not attended kindergarten or preparatory class. The reasons for sending my children to this school were that it is very close to home and that all the children manage to finish it whether they attend classes or not.**

For about four years, M. and his elder brothers have studied in this school. M. became a 4<sup>th</sup> grader and had to go through an external state test (these mandatory state tests are introduced in the last 7-8 years, and all the 4<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup>-graders are tested for their quality and level of knowledge by external educational experts and testers). M. managed to pass the tests and was admitted to the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. I decided to transfer him from the segregated school to another school - a better, mixed one (in this period of time there was a process of desegregation of segregated Roma schools). Moreover, the tests results that M. achieved allowed him to study in another school.

In 2011 M. was enrolled in a mixed school in the centre of the town. He was admitted by the school based on his good results from the external assessment. Meanwhile, the schools are trying to attract new students because of the delegated budget system, i.e. the schools are funded by the state per student.

We did not realize what our son was facing in the new school until M. started to complain. We discovered that M. was not

prepared for this school at all, as his level and quality of knowledge was far below average for 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Moreover, he did not speak Bulgarian correctly. Although his results from the external testing were good, they were not realistic and were probably fake.

**Unfortunately, there was not a teacher in his new school whose job it was to work with students who fall behind. The sad part is that M. has reached 4<sup>th</sup> grade in the segregated school with no relevant knowledge corresponding to the standard requirements. The bottom line was evident, that the segregated school produced illiterate children.**

Thus, M. returned to the segregated school because this was the only school where he was able to continue his education, although he did not receive the relevant knowledge and skills there. The school facility is old and not well maintained. The children do not attend classes regularly. Instead, they go whenever they want. Even if the children are at school, most of them play in the school yard during class and some of them even smoke. The majority of the school's graduates are not able to find jobs. Often, the students are interested in finishing 8<sup>th</sup> grade only so that they can take driving courses and obtain driving licenses, although many of them fail on the driving theory exams”.

#### **IVAN SERGEEVICH TURGENEV SCHOOL, RAZGRAD**

Primary School Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev is one of six Primary schools in Razgrad. It is located in the residential complex Orel,

which is in the east part (on the outskirts) of the city. Razgrad is a regional city. The population is about 34,000, and more than 50% of the population comes from ethnic minorities - 40% Turks and a little over 10% Roma. The rest of the population (about 40%) are ethnic Bulgarian.

The Roma population is concentrated in this part of the city, where Primary school Ivan Sergeevich Turgenev is located (or just "Turgenev" as most of people call it). This is one of the reasons most of the Roma children go to school there. The total number of students in "Turgenev" is about 300, of which 30% are Roma, 50% are Turks and 20% are Bulgarian.

During the time of communism, the students from ethnic minorities had been under pressure from teachers - especially Roma students.

Now Turgenev is renovated and offers better conditions, but most Roma children still prefer to hide their ethnic identity because their parents, who studied in this school, remember the days when they were students. But this is the closest school for them and they hope that this post-communism time is already left behind.

## Y. G. Y.

Y. G. Y. is a 35-year-old Roma woman from the town of Razgrad. Her father used to work as a welder and her mother was a janitor. She has never hidden her identity. She studied first and second grade in the Secondary school Hristo Botev, but when a new school was built and opened near her house, her parents enrolled her there, in the

primary school I.Turgenev. Her parents did this because they wanted to feel better about their daughter's safety, as the school was very close to their home and now she did not need to cross several busy and dangerous streets. They were both at work at that time and Yulka used to go to school by herself. She was enrolled in the new school in 1988 – 1989.

Y. G. Y. shared us her story:

My first impressions that I had about my new school were that it was new and nice looking. Back then, I was in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade.

**The new school was not segregated. It was modern and corresponded to all standards and requirements. The majority of students had ethnic Bulgarian and Turkish backgrounds.**

Nevertheless, I managed to study in this school for only 3 school years - from 3<sup>rd</sup> through 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The 5<sup>th</sup> grade left me with such a negative experience and emotions that I compares it with a real nightmare.

When I was only in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, I understood what it was like to be an object of discrimination and ethnic hatred. Despite the normal standards of education in my new school, there were some among the teachers who openly showed their racist attitude.

**The most negative attitude that I experienced was from my teacher in history, who openly derogated and humiliated me in front of mine classmates. This experience made me give up school in 5<sup>th</sup> grade, while the reason for this teacher to humiliate me at such a young and vulnerable age was simply that I am a Roma.**

The seats and desks of the students in this school were organized in accordance to the ethnic background of the students/pupils: the ethnic Bulgarian children used to sit in the front rows, the Turkish children in the next rows, and the Roma in the back rows. I sat in the very last desk in the classroom.

Roma and Turkish students were treated in a way that made them feel like second-class children. During the history classes, the teacher used to come to mine desks and humiliate me with notes and words like: **“...you are a Gypsy child! You are not able to understand anything! You are not able to explain one lesson to me!”**

These humiliations in front of the entire class happened often to me. Despite this, I never complained to the school principal or even to her parents, as I was very young, I didn't know what to do, and also I was afraid to “cause problems”

The humiliating behaviour of the history teacher went on and on: “...Look at yourself! How ugly you are dressed up! You, the Gypsies are not human! You are not able to do anything! You are the lower class of humankind!”

This real nightmare for the young Y. G. Y. went on until the end of the school year, when she was up to finish 5<sup>th</sup> grade. The same racist teacher assessed her knowledge in history with a grade of “weak,” a 2 (this is the failure point in the 6 point assessment system).

Passing the exam in history after three attempts proved to be impossible for Y. G. Y., basically because of the humiliating attitude of the teacher. Even during the summer exams the teacher went on to

antagonize the young child with the words: “You are a Gypsy child that will never achieve success in life!” This time Y. G. Y. told her parents about what had happened, but they were still not able to do anything and they did not take any measures against this teacher. This dead-end for her made her very depressed and led her to give up school at a so young age. Unfortunately, Y. G. Y. was not the only Roma child giving up school for such reasons like discrimination and humiliation.

These negative feelings and experiences at school had a negative influence on Y. G. Y. and on her future. She needs at least a high school diploma in order to start a job. She never went back to school, and therefore she did not finish even her primary level of education.

#### YURI GAGARIN SCHOOL, SLIVEN

The primary school "Yuri Gagarin" is one of the segregated schools in Bulgaria. It is located in Sliven and is the second segregated school there, where Nadezhda neighbourhood is also located. It is really close to primary school Bratya Miladinovi.

At the beginning, when it was created, this was a normal mixed school with Bulgarian, Turkish and Roma students. But over time, something has changed.

Some parents from the Roma neighbourhood who were sending their children to the segregated school realized that, in the segregated school, the quality of education was too low, so they decided to transfer their children into mixed - regular, non-segregated - schools. This was primary school "Yuri Gagarin".

These Roma parents were followed by other Roma parents from "Nadezhda". All of a sudden, the number of Roma students in the mixed school was increased. Before, the percent of Roma in Yuri Gagarin was about 15%, but once the Roma realized that it was better to send their children to normal school and they did so, the percent of Roma raised to 40%.

**Bulgarian parents started to fear for their children's education, that is, the quality of schooling they were receiving, and were also worried about the safety of their children if they moved their kids to another school.**

But the "Roma invasion" wouldn't stop. They kept enrolling their kids in primary school Yuri Gagarin with the hope that education there is better, of higher quality, and would help them become better people – with education, normal jobs, and useful roles in society. The percent of Roma students during the period of four years increased from 40% to 90% (from 2009 to 2013).

This is a process we refer to as secondary segregation. It has happened because of the concerns of non-Roma parents.

Some of Roma parents whose children have enrolled in Yuri Gagarin shared with us that before, when the school wasn't segregated, the quality of education has been better than it is now.

Now, most of Roma students complete their education in Yuri Gagarin without developing the necessary knowledge. The total number of students in this school is now 500, and all of them are Roma. This has already become a totally segregated school.

## **K. S. H.**

K. S. H. is 30 years old and the father of two children: Tsvetelina, 12 years old, and Francheska, 8 years old. Kalin is of Roma origin, and he lives in the Nadezhda neighbourhood of the town of Sliven. He is one of the few Roma parents in the neighbourhood who have graduated from secondary school. He decided to enrol his children to a "normal" school, where both Bulgarian and Roma children study together – referred to as a mixed school - as he was hoping that the quality of education in such a school would be much better.

"I enrolled my older daughter in the Primary School of Yuri Gagarin, which was about a kilometre away from the neighbourhood and close to Bratya Miladinovi, the segregated school. When I enrolled my daughter in the mixed school, the Roma children comprised about 40-50% of all the students.

**In other words, the number of the Bulgarian and Roma children was almost equivalent. That means that I was not the only parent who preferred the mixed school and its superior quality of education.**

Many other Roma parents like me had enrolled their children in the mixed one. In the beginning, the impressions of the school were fairly positive – a good quality of education, nice-looking classrooms, and clean facilities. Over the next two years, the number of Roma students increased, growing from 40% to 60%.

**The Bulgarian parents became worried, and they stopped enrolling**

**their children in the school because they did not want their children to study together with Roma children.**

Now, Tsvetelina is 12 years old and she studies in fifth grade. The school is now totally segregated, with 100% Roma students. This is an example of so-called “secondary segregation”. The quality of education came to resemble the first segregated school – Bratya Miladinovi. Quality of education was declining when I enrolled my younger daughter, Francheska, in first grade. She is in second grade now.”

“I notice that the teachers are doing nothing with the children now, and they do not teach them effectively. The majority of the teachers do not really care. They are only interested in receiving their salary. Two years ago, when there were still Bulgarian children, my older daughter always had homework and tasks to prepare for the next day.

Now, both the older and the younger ones have no homework at all. I often talk to the teachers, asking them about their education and what we can do at home, so I can help them in a way. This worries me a lot and I think that it is a serious sign that the quality of education has dropped a lot compared to two years ago.”

K. S. H. also disclosed that a majority of the students currently study in this school, can't read, write, or do simple calculations.

“As a responsible parent, I can say that my younger daughter will not be able to cope with more serious educational materials in the near future because it is quite obvious that she had not been well-prepared in first and second grade. This is not only the case with my Francheska. This is a widespread problem.

I am not worried about my older daughter. I am sure she will be able to catch up because she has a good foundation that she received in the period when there were still Bulgarian students, the school was not segregated, and the quality of teaching was good.

Unfortunately, I cannot say the same thing for my younger daughter.” K. S. H. works in the schoolyard of the same school, where his children study. He often sees students who play in the yard instead of being in class. His daughters have told him that the teachers sometimes ask the students to go out to the yard during class, without putting it in the records as an absence.

For the new school year (2014-2015), he is planning to enrol his children in another school where they can receive a higher-quality education. But the rest of the children

who will continue studying in this school will have the same destiny as the others who had finished their education—illiterate and uncompetitive, struggling to integrate, and thus always remaining in the background in society”.







## CZECH REPUBLIC

### A brief overview on school segregation

It has been 6 years since the European Court of Human Rights decided in the case of 18 Romani children from Ostrava. The court confirmed that these children were discriminated against in their access to education, as they were placed in special schools because of their Roma ethnicity. Despite receiving international criticism, little has changed for the better in the Czech Republic.

The only visible change has been in the names of the schools. Former special schools are now called practical schools. Even in segregated primary schools, Romani children are educated according to a school educational programme and an "LMP" educational programme. The percentage of Romani pupils attending practical schools, according to the statistics of the Czech Ombudsman, remains relatively the same. Romani children are still being placed in practical schools only because of their social handicap.

As far as financing such schools is concerned, the schools for pupils with "LMP" can be provided with 50% more money per pupil than the ordinary school. There is also a lack of quality education from teaching staff who work with Romani pupils but often lack an understanding of Romani culture. As a result of this disconnect, teachers are often unable to foster a non-conflict environment with peaceful coexistence between Roma pupils and the majority.

A positive social change can be seen in the fact that there are more and more parents nowadays who recognize the importance of education for their children. These parents are also becoming aware of the fact that segregation is illegal and that, furthermore, they have rights and resources to address it.

There are more types of primary schools in the Czech Republic than discussed here, but the stories presented here will focus on three specific types of schools:

**Primary schools** – School educational programme (Czech abbreviation ŠVP) for ordinary primary schools, in accordance with general legal regulations. Educational programme (ŠVP) is in accordance with and based on the Framework educational plan for primary education (Czech abbreviation RVP ZV).

**Primary practical schools** – educational plan for mildly mentally disabled pupils (RVP ZV-LMP) or moderately mentally disabled pupils.

**Special schools** (SpŠ) – educational plan for severely mentally disabled pupils (RVP ZŠS). According to the law, this school is for children with special educational needs (SVP) – children with severe mental disabilities or other disorders, children with autism, or socially disadvantaged children – those from a family environment of low cultural and social status or those endangered by socially pathological phenomena.

According to existing research there are still about 40% of Romani pupils living in Ostrava who attend special schools and about 33 % Romani pupils attending special schools nationally. The official number of Romani pupils in special/practical schools has decreased since the D.H. court decision, but in reality many of the Romani children, who are not officially in special schools any more, attend segregated schools with ordinary or mixed teaching plans (ordinary one and LMP plan).

Thus, they do not appear in those statistics any more. These children may be in primary segregated schools in Ostrava, which have more than 90% Roma pupils or in segregated ("Roma" and "non-Roma" classes) classes in mixed schools, where there are often more types of educational plans within one school (e.g. educational plan for primary school and an "LMP" educational plan). The variation among and within schools is very confusing, and not only for the parents.

The so-called preparatory classes are part of the segregated schools (attended by about 97% of Romani children). They are rarely seen in ordinary primary schools. The children who are usually in these pre-school classes struggle to be accepted into kindergarten or do not succeed at enrolling in school. Consequently, these children usually continue their compulsory school attendance (9 classes) at the same segregated school.

### **The story testimonies and the related schools**

#### **PŘEMYSLA PITTRA PRIMARY AND NURSERY CHURCH SCHOOL**

The school is located in Ostrava – Přívoz. The founder of the school is from 2007 Ostrava-Opava diocese. The school was founded in 1993. The total number of pupils aged 6 to 15 is around 270, with an estimated 99% of them Romani children. Part of the school is also a kindergarten and a preparatory class for pre-school children.

The aim of the school is to help children in need, those from socially and culturally disadvantaged environments. The educational concept of the school is based on an individualized approach to teaching children, which is implemented through smaller groups than those found at standard primary schools and with the help of teaching assistants. The aim is to achieve a level of education and development of children's behaviour comparable to mainstream elementary schools, but through multicultural education. The school provides primary education within the ordinary educational programme and the LMP educational programme (LMP is a Czech abbreviation for light mental disability).

The school council consists of its representatives, the founder (municipal district Moravská Ostrava a Přívoz, part of the City of Ostrava), and parents. There is one Roma parent on the council and the school employs two Roma assistants.

The level of education is at a very low level. Leisure time activities including manual work, like cooking or other tasks, prevail. Those children who end up trying another school tend to fail to manage the schoolwork. A result of this poor quality of education is that children who complete 9<sup>th</sup> class have very limited options when it comes to secondary education. Students can only choose among a few specializations for future manual vocations, with their secondary schooling options consisting primarily of apprentice schools (most Romani pupils attend apprentice schools).

## **PRIMARY SCHOOL NA VIZINĚ**

The practical school is located in the Silesian part of Ostrava. There are 330 pupils; about 95% are Romani pupils. The school provides pre-school children with a preparatory class, school children with primary ordinary school (1<sup>st</sup> – 5<sup>th</sup> class), primary practical school, and primary special school. The founder of the school establishment is the Moravian-Silesian regional authority.

There are classes with 3 different curricula: a) *School educational programme for ordinary primary schools* (ŠVP based on RVP ZV). This is provided for pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> class. b) *Primary education within the ordinary educational programme* (ŠVP based on RVP ZV) and LMP educational programme. This is provided for pupils from 1<sup>st</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> class. c) *Primary education – educational plan for special schools* for pupils with moderate learning disabilities (higher level of mental disability than the light one).

## **VRCHLICKÉHO 5 PRIMARY SCHOOL, OSTRAVA – RIDDANCE (WITH A DETACHED SCHOOL IN OSTRAVA – BARTOVICE, 1<sup>ST</sup> – 5<sup>TH</sup> CLASS)**

Vrchlického primary school has 287 pupils (1<sup>st</sup> – 9<sup>th</sup> class). The school provides pre-school children with a preparatory class. There are about 40% Romani children. There is the school educational programme (ŠVP) for ordinary primary schools in accordance with general legal regulations and the school cooperates with the so called PPP from Ostrava – Poruba. School council consists of the representatives of the founder of the school, the school staff, and one parent. There is no Roma representation on the council. The school used to employ a Roma assistant, but two years ago he was replaced by an assistant who is not Roma

A few children who were assessed at PPP were recommended to participate in an individual educational plan (describes ways how to teach a child, how to adjust the tuition of such child to this plan). This plan, should be obligatory for the school but it has not always been implemented by the teachers. In the past the classes were divided into class A and class B, with Romani children separated into one class because of the fear of loss of children from the majority. This is

no longer the case, however. When the classes were separated, Roma parents came to the school to complain about the division of children. Because of these complaints, meetings were held to address the issue, with the principal of Vrchlického primary school, the mayor of Ostrava-Radvanice, and Life together in attendance. As a result of the parents' efforts and the meetings, the school has changed the system and the classes are now mixed.

This school is located near a residential area inhabited by people from the majority. Approximately 1 km from the school is a socially excluded area called Lipina, inhabited by Roma people. This area has deteriorated in recent years; people have been moving away, the houses are in a bad state, the owner of the houses gradually pulls the houses down.

### **PĚŠÍ PRIMARY SCHOOL, OSTRAVA – MUGLÍNOV**

The school with an ordinary educational plan has about 350 pupils (including estimated 20 – 25% of Romani pupils). There are various opinions on this school from the perspective of Roma parents, both positive and negative. The school recently accepted 5 Romani children and refused to accept 9 Romani children (out of 11 in total who were rejected) during the enrolment process in January 2014. There were 41 applicants and the school accepted 30. As the reason for refusing 11 students, the school claimed to have an insufficient capacity to accommodate all of the applicants. However, this cannot be; according to Ministry of Education, Youth and Sport, insufficient capacity cannot be cited as the reason for refusing students when those refused children live in a nearby area. The founder of the school (the municipal district – Silesian Ostrava) is responsible for knowledge of the statistical data on the local population, including the number of school-age children, in advance. Prior to the yearly enrolments this knowledge is supposed to be used to help the founder of the school prepare for an estimated number of pre-school children according to what the statistics indicate the incoming class size will be.

### **CHRUSTOVA PRIMARY SCHOOL, SILESIA OSTRAVA**

The school with an ordinary educational plan has about 200 pupils (including approximately 5 – 10% of Romani children). It focuses on a more individualized approach to teaching, which includes building mutual relationships with students and fostering positive coexistence between minority and majority students from the children's early years. The founder is the municipal district – Silesian Ostrava.

### **GEBAUEROVA (AND IBSENOVA) PRIMARY SCHOOL, OSTRAVA – PŘÍVOZ**

The school has 2 types of educational plans for an ordinary school (Gebauerova, approximately 450 pupils) and the Ibsenova practical school (approximately 170, mostly Romani, pupils in the

LMP educational plan). The founder of the school establishment is the Moravian-Silesian regional authority.

**Kamenec primary school** – a school for 700 pupils. The founder is the municipal district Moravian Ostrava and Přívoz. The school uses both the ordinary educational plan and the LPM plan.

## **E. R.**

E. is a mother to 2 sons, F. aged 14 and P. aged 16. She lives in Ostrava – Radvanice (Silesian Ostrava). This story is about them and about the school where both boys used to go. They did well; there were no particular problems with their behaviour or grades.

Everything changed with the arrival of the new head teacher. She made most of the previous school staff members redundant and new employees, mostly her relatives and friends, began to work there instead. The mother of the 2 boys was frequently invited to school, where the teachers and the head teacher often complained about her sons. Once, the head teacher asked F. to draw a tree.

As the tree did not have any roots, the head teacher concluded the child has some psychical problem. When the mother refused to take F. to PPP (Pedagogical – Psychological Advisory Centre), the head teacher threatened to report the family to a social worker.

**No matter where we complained (to the school, to the town authority, to Czech school inspection), nothing happened, as the head teacher was an influential member of one political party. So the only solution was to**

**place the children in another school, which she did with some other parents.**

Sometime later she found out that the head teacher had been dismissed and was prosecuted for money fraud.

I am unemployed. I completed only primary school. To talk about my children: both P. and F. were normal kids, like the others. They were healthy, they were quite obedient. I had no problems with them. Both of them went to school at the age of 6. They attended Trnkovecká primary school, because we lived nearby.

It was a good school; I used to attend the same one. The teachers knew us, the head teacher was great. The boys liked to go to school and they had good marks. P. had very good school results. He dreamt of being a policeman one day. Little F. did not know at that time what he would like to become in the future, as he liked everything.

The problems began when a new head teacher came to school. The old one, whom we liked and trusted, retired and he was replaced by a new head teacher. We did not think it could pose any problems. My children behaved well, so I did not expect any difficulties. It was actually the other way around.

I had hoped that with the new head teacher something new and nice would come. We were in shock when we found out that the head teacher had dismissed the most important school staff. Those teachers who worked there for a long time knew our children better than anyone else.

They also knew us and they had taught our children well. New teachers replaced the old ones and only 2 were spared the dismissal. These new teachers do not have any relation to our children. They did not know how to talk to them, how to calm them down during breaks, they did not know anything about them – where and how they grew up etc.

The head teacher of course read the records of all children, and she asked older teachers about the children's families. One day, P. came home from school and he had a record in his record book claiming that he destroyed a padlock. P. told me he did not do it. He was crying.

My children had never lied to me so the next day I went to school. At first I asked the children if they know what happened or if anybody saw P. destroying it. They told me it was not him, so I went to see his class teacher. She did not know anything about the record or the lock. She told me the lock was not broken and she did not know that the head teacher wrote this record.

So I took my boyfriend, who raises my children with me and has done so since they were babies, and we went to visit the head teacher. She began to shout at us that she wanted us to pay 700 CZK for the broken lock. My boyfriend took courage and told her that nobody knew anything about the damage. She shouted at him that he

has nothing to do with the school because he is not the father of my children, and so she will not talk to him about it. There was no other discussion possible with her, so we went home. We just told her we would not pay anything because P. was not blamed for the damage. That is why we disagreed with the record, too.

The next day P. came home from school crying. The head teacher came to his class and she began to shout at P. in front of all other children. She told him not to bring any strangers (meaning my boyfriend) to school anymore; she asked if his biological father pays any child maintenance, and she threatened to report his family to social services.

I was afraid of going to school on my own, so I asked my friend from the association Life Together if she could accompany me there. Two of them came to support me and we went together to see the head teacher. She knew why we were coming. She did not talk to me at all; she talked only to the field assistants. The head teacher opened the record of my younger son F. There was a picture of a tree there, which F. had drawn during an art lesson.

**The head teacher said that something was wrong in his family because F. drew a tree without its roots. She also said that F. has some psychological problem. She forced me to take my children to the psychologist, which I refused.**

I told her that my children do not have any problems at home and I would not put them under stress by taking them to the psychologists. The head teacher told me that if I did not go to PPP she would report

me to social services and would also send the files of my children there. I refused.

Later I found out that I was not the only parent who had problems with her. One teacher at that school, who was a step-son of the head teacher, ran a boxing group at school. He was also a pedagogical advisor. He used to come to school and walk around in combat boots. He also used to bring his fighting dogs to school. When some child did something wrong, the head teacher automatically sent him to the boxing group. Additionally, children without our consent had to clean school premises during their craft lessons, or they shot from the airgun with that teacher outside, which was his hobby.

We did not want to leave it like that, so I and other parents formed a group, with the support and advice of Life Together. We began to meet regularly. We wanted to sort this problem out with the head teacher. A few times we asked her to come to our meetings or we asked if we could come to her office, but she refused. She spoke to Kumar, the leader of Life Together, and she told him we were like puppies. When raising puppies, it is essential to use a strict attitude as a method of training them. She took her anger out on our children. She used to laugh at them, saying that their parents could attend parent meetings but she would always win.

To get some more help, we turned to the mayor of Ostrava-Radvanice, and asked her to call the head teacher off. Radvanice said she did not have any evidence for that, arguing that evidence from children and parents could not be considered as evidence.

So we turned to the Czech school inspection, but the inspection did not find anything wrong and instead found that the administration was alright. We turned to local government. The head teacher had a powerful position within ČSSD political party and she had friends everywhere. Our only choice was to place our children in another school, which we did, although we were not happy about it. Our children liked that school.

There were 12 parents who decided to transfer their children to other school. Both we and our children got relieved. We were not under constant stress any more. We later learned that about 6 months ago the head teacher of Trnkovecká elementary school was dismissed by the founder of the school because she was prosecuted for money frauds.

## E. Č.

E. is a Roma mother to 3 children. She is 43 years old and lives in Ostrava – Hrušov (an area inhabited mostly by Roma people). Her 15 year old daughter attends Přemysla Pittra primary school, which E. does not like. Her older daughter had difficulties continuing studies at any secondary or vocational school because as soon as they found out she had attended Přemysla Pittra School, she was told she would not be able to manage further studies.

E. wanted to enrol her youngest daughter, E., in Kamenec primary school, where there are mostly pupils from the majority. Little E. was rejected there, so she currently attends Gebauerova primary school (a school that the mother is dissatisfied with, as there are about 80% of Roma pupils there).

Both Gebauerova and Přemysla Pittra schools have some classes with teaching plans for pupils with light mental disabilities (in Czech LMP). E. is convinced her daughter is talented and clever, because she has good grades at school. Her mother would like to place E. in another school, a superior one, so that she may provide little E. with a better future.

**I wanted my children to go to Kamenec elementary school. When I wanted to enrol E., my youngest daughter, the head teacher refused to accept her.**

As the reason for refusal I was told by the principle that he did not have any capacity to accept new pupils.

**He told me they did not accept Roma children there. And he also told me that my daughter would not be able to do well there.**

My daughter is so talented and clever. I have no doubts my daughter would do well at that school.

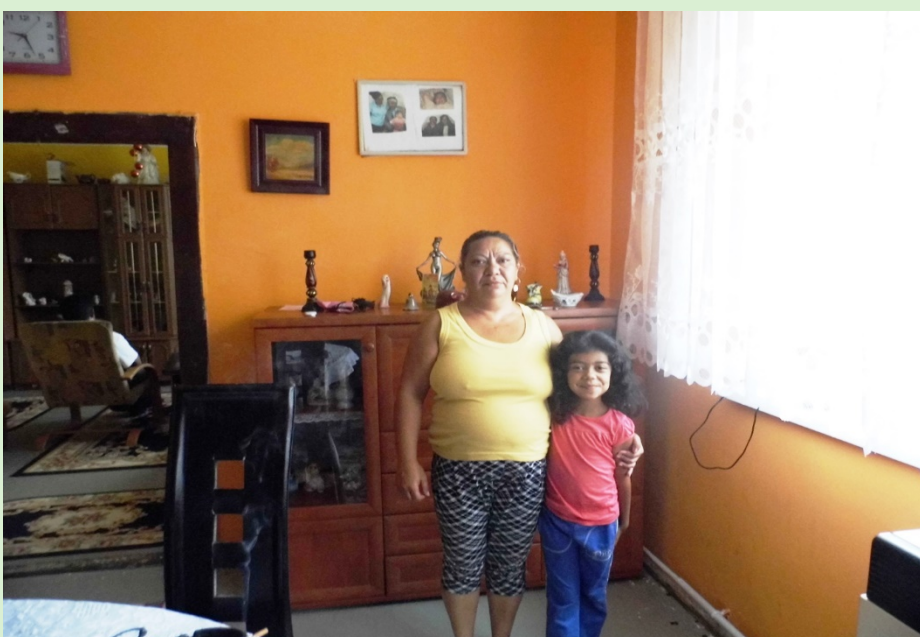
The principle offered me two other schools – Přemysla Pittra elementary school and Gebauerova elementary school. One of my daughters is 15 years old and she attends Přemysla Pittra elementary school. I am not very happy with this school.

**There are about 90% of pupils of Roma origin there and the children are poorly taught. The quality of education is low. I think so because when she was giving the admission exams to one of the secondary schools, they told her that if she attended Přemysla Pittra elementary school she would not be able to succeed at the secondary school.**

I didn't like this at all, because the children are supposed to be taught there in the same way as at other elementary schools.

As a result, my daughter did not have much choice. I had to send her to another town nearby, Hlučín, where she learns to be a baker. It is a vocational school, just for 2 years, and she will not have a school graduation certificate, just an apprenticeship certificate. I do not believe this will give her much chance to get a good job in the future.

My youngest daughter E. attends Gebauerova elementary school, and I do not think this one is good, either,



because there are about 80% of Roma pupils there and no Czech pupils from the majority.

**Our children should be allowed to attend the same schools as children from the majority do. Exclusively Roma schools are not good.**

My daughter E. is doing very well at school. She had all the best grades. I would like her to transfer to a different school for her second year, because I want her to achieve something in her life in the future. I want her to have more choice when she chooses secondary school one day. The main disadvantage of her current school is the way children are taught there – they are taught from the same school books as children at special schools. She lacks knowledge in mathematics and other subjects; the curriculum is different from those in Kamenec and other schools, where Czech pupils are taught.

In the future, my daughter would like to be a nurse. I would need help so that my younger daughter E. will not end up the same way as my older daughter, M., did. This school is paced very slowly and in comparison with other schools, children here are so much behind.

Eva does not have homework every day, just twice a week, which I think is not enough. She should be given homework every day, I believe. To sum up, I am not satisfied with this school and I want my children to have the same chances and opportunities as Czech pupils have.

**K. L.**

K. lives in Ostrava in a small flat; she is a mother to 2 daughters (aged 6 and 3). Her daughter N. was rejected at Chrustova primary school, in spite of the fact that her assessment from Pedagogical – psychological advisory centre indicated no problems. She was told that the school has no more capacity to accept more pupils. Then N. was not accepted to another primary school. K. was recommended to place her daughter in the Ibsenova primary school, which is a school with a special curriculum. The mother refused because there was no obvious reason for placing her daughter in a special school.

In the area where I live, I have a good reputation. I pay my rent consistently. As far as my education is concerned, I do not have secondary or vocational schooling myself, but my partner has an apprentice certificate and he is employed. I value education, and I do my best to raise my children so that they may do well at school and may be, in some way, beneficial to this society one day, for the majority.

When I wanted to enrol N., my older daughter, in elementary school, I went with her to PPP; I was told that my daughter is capable of doing well at any primary school. Nevertheless, as soon as we came to Chrustova primary school (which is closest to my place and is a school I wanted my daughter to attend) for the first time to enrol, I was told that they did not have the capacity to accept any more pupils.

**I felt that they looked at me and treated me in such a way because I am Roma and because they already had a lot of Roma children there. I did not like this attitude at all, so I had an argument with them. I felt their**

## refusal was because of my darker skin.

Then I went to another school, Gebauerova primary school, where my daughter was refused immediately. The reason was the same; they told me they did not have any free capacity for new pupils. The head teacher recommended I go to Ibsenova primary school, which I refused because it is a special school. So I argued with her. I did not see any reason why my daughter should enter a special school instead of a common one.

Even the recommendation from PPP was very positive for my daughter; there was no obvious reason for placing her in a special school. I asked the head teacher to give me a written statement that they have no free capacity, which she stated as the reason for my daughter's refusal. She refused to give it to me. My daughter is going to be 6 and in September she should be enrolled in some primary school.

I personally think that this school does not want to accept any more Roma pupils. There are already about 80% Roma pupils, and I think they do not want it to become an exclusively Roma school in the end. I think they want to decrease the number of Roma pupils there. I do not know where my daughter will go to school in September, so I am still looking. I am thinking about complaining to the municipality of Ostrava, the founder of local schools.

## E. T.

E. is a Roma mother of 3 children who also fosters her niece, S. E. is 48 years old, lives

in Ostrava – Hrušov (area inhabited mostly by Roma people). Her story is about her niece S., whom she has been looking after since her birth. S. attends Přemysla Pittra primary church school (with 99% of Roma pupils).

This school is an example of residential segregation. It is located in Ostrava – Přívoz, area with a majority of Roma residents. Although the name of the school does not include the word practical or the word special, it has a mixed curricula, which is confusing.

**The principle said that this school is a segregated Roma school providing exceptional supporting services. E. knows from her former experience with this school that it is not able to prepare its pupils for the general school-leaving exam, which is necessary for any further studies (her son F. attended the same school and, although he had good grades there, he did not manage to complete a vocational secondary school education afterwards).**

Some parents appreciate the attitude of the school – for example, if a mother tells the teachers she has no money for buying shoes for her child, the child may be allowed to stay at home.

However, this school also has its flaws. The principle has admitted that they have had only two girls at school who were accepted to the secondary school and who completed with a school-leaving certificate. Children have little homework or at all, and learning materials are left at school rather than being taken home by the students for

review. Parents also pay no or less money for lunches, school aids etc.

E. is not satisfied with the level of education at this school, and she is worried that there are no pupils from the majority population represented in the school. S. experienced unequal treatment and prejudice during her examination at the Pedagogical-psychological advisory centre (where Roma children are frequently sent to assess whether they are able to attend ordinary primary school or not).

There S. was, according to her mother, humiliated. The mother could not be present at the assessment to be able to see it. E. thus believes that the ordinary schools do not wish to have Roma children at their schools. E. hopes for a better future for S.; she wants her to receive an education that cannot, in her opinion, be achieved at Přemysla Pittra primary school.

I would like to begin with my experience when I was looking for a school for my niece. Wherever I went to, they asked me right away where I live and if I and my husband work. All my 3 children attend Přemysla Pittra elementary school, located in Ostrava-Přivoz.

I am not satisfied with this school. I am not satisfied either with their curriculum or with the way the children are taught there. They use school books from special schools; I do not like the whole system in place there. My sons, despite the fact that they attend school regularly, know nothing. They do not even know how to count.

**As I am interested in their education, I attend parent's meetings at school as often as I can, but I do not learn anything there. I only hear**

**complaints about my son's behaviour, and they ask me why my kids do not come to school. When they are ill, they cannot come to school.**

I do not think that this school can provide my children with an appropriate and good education. I think it is insufficient there. I can see that they use similar practises there as I experienced myself when I was once at school. Since the time I was a pupil myself, nothing is changing for the better here. I think it is even worse.

My niece, whom I have been looking after since she was a baby and whom I got the right to foster in court, also attends Přemysla Pittra elementary school. I was with her when she was examined at PPP and they placed her straight to this school.

**I stubbornly argued but I had no chance at all to place her in another school. They said that the schools want Roma children to be placed in special schools and that they can do nothing about it.**

The staff did not treat S. well there, so I am not satisfied with this school at all. My sons go there, too, and I do not like that there are 100% pupils of Roma origin there. There are no children from the majority, so our children have no chance to make friends with Czech children and grow up with them. I do not like that the teachers there teach children from school books designated for special schools. Children at this school are rude, they have no respect from the teachers at all, and they do not obey any rules at all.

I am also worried about their safety, as children are beaten there and there is a lot of bullying. My niece does not know basic things that she should have learned already. I do not think that this school, even though it is a Christian one, is good. It is not good for our children; they have no good future there. They have no chance, when they want, to have some good job in the future. This is why I have decided to speak about this and I would be grateful if you or anybody could do something about it or anything could be done about it.

## I. K.

I. is a Roma mother to 3 children. Her older son and daughter attend quality primary school in Ostrava – Vítkovice, where she is satisfied with the tuition. Her story is about her daughter S., who is about to go to primary school. I. wanted to place S. in one of the quality schools Pěší or Kamenec, but was refused, and she has doubts about the school that was recommended for her daughter.

I. experienced educational segregation. She is afraid that at this school her daughter will receive a lesser education and that her chances for further studies in the future will be limited. That school is mostly attended by Roma pupils and she does not praise the teachers at that school, either.

I am not very well educated myself. My mother died very young, when she was 37. I had to help my father. I have three

brothers and sisters who were disabled, so they needed constant care.

I have three children; all of them go to school. Two of them go to primary school in Ostrava-Vítkovice. I am very satisfied with that school. I previously lived in Vítkovice and I used to have a nice, two-roomed flat with a kitchen there. The house I lived in was privatized and the new owner increased the rent, so I had to move away. I also look after my brother, who is disabled and needs my constant care. After I had moved away from the flat I went to stay in one place which was not very nice.

Then I found a flat in Pláničkova Street in Ostrava-Hrušov. It is a one-roomed flat, spacious, but small. I would like to provide my children with a better place to live but there is little interest from the municipalities to provide Roma people with appropriate living and rents in private flats are too expensive, if you wish to have a larger flat. Back to their education. D. and M. attend school in Vítkovice and I am glad they go there because I know that they will each have a better chance to choose a secondary school one day. The teachers devote their time to them; my children are taught as they are supposed to be, and the teachers use curricula intended for normal, not special, schools.

**I am afraid for my younger daughter S.; she is supposed to go to school in September 2014. In spite of the fact that the examination in PPP went well (there was no reason for placing her in a special school or postponing her school attendance), the nearby schools (ZŠ Pěší and ZŠ Kamenec) refused to enrol her.**

I do not want her to go to this school in Vítkovice, as it is far. It was ok when I used to live there. But not now, what for? I do not see any reason why my daughter should commute every day from Ostrava-Hrušov to Ostrava-Vítkovice to school. There are five elementary schools around.

As a reason for not accepting S. to these schools, they stated that they do not accept Roma children and they are at full capacity, which I did not like, as a mother.

**They offered to me two other schools instead, Gebauerova primary school and Přemysla Pittra primary school. There are 80% and 100% Roma pupils there.**

I have heard nothing but bad things about those schools - that there is a lot of bullying and that the children are not taught properly. That is why I am afraid for my daughter's future. I do not believe those two schools are the right ones for her.

**I think S. was rejected at those schools because they saw that I am Roma and they do not want Roma children at their schools.**

That is why teachers/head teachers make excuses that they do not have any places free. I do not want my daughter to commute to school where my two other kids go; it is too far and I do not see any reason why she should go so far. My daughter attends the community centre for children and youth in Ostrava-Hrušov, where she has tutoring and also can play there, dance, do any leisure activity she wants. I do not see any reason why S. should not do well at school. Even employees of Life Together,

from Hrušov community centre, say that she is very good and that she likes tutoring.

To describe a process when a child is recommended to be examined at PPP: all children are sent there before they are about to go to school. They examine the child if there are some disorders, for example, in speech, pronouncing, writing, behaviour, concentration, etc.

The schools where the child will go require this PPP assessment. Staff of those schools where S. was not accepted (Pěší and Kamenec primary schools) does not deal with any real problems. They say that Roma children will not stay at that school for a long time, anyway. And that those children lie and spread gossips about the school, which is not true.

I realize I do not have any education myself. My parents did not motivate me or support me to get one, which is why I want my children to get educated. It is a problem for me to get a job. Not only because I am not educated, but also because I constantly look after my brother, who is disabled and needs me.

**I think that the educational system in the Czech Republic is very bad. The attitude towards the Roma children is bad. Neither the majority nor the schools want Roma children to attend the same schools as children from the majority. This is segregation. I want my children to have a better education, better future; I wish for them not to depend on social benefits as I do.**

I would like them to get the chance to get away from the community, to get a good

job, a good place to live. I wish them to have the same chances as Czech children have, so that they may not beg for the dole. I wish the majority would accept them.

As I cannot properly help my children with school subjects, tutoring, and homework, for this purpose they attend the centre for children and youths in Hrušov. There are people who help my daughter to be prepared for the first year at school so that she will not be behind. She is about to go to school this September.

If the group of people and volunteers had been established with the goal to fight for the equal rights in education for their children, raising awareness about the on-going practice of school segregation, I would have joined such group.

I would like to defend children's rights. This is why I decided to take part in this and talk, as I believe things may change, and the schools will one day accept Roma children without any excuses. No matter if they are white or black, they are still our children and have the same rights as white children have.

My daughter went to secondary school in Hlučín (nearby town), and she experienced such harassment and racism there. She was called bad names. She had to end her studies there because I was so afraid for her safety. So I do not want my other children to experience the same. I am glad you are here and I can talk to you about this. I hope it may help change something for the better. I want to stop this practice, as a mother.

**D. Č.**

D. is a 47 – year – old Roma woman, who was born in Ostrava and grew up in a children's home. She describes how she experienced racism at primary school with a majority of pupils who were not Roma. Now she has 3 children who are now adults and she raises 2 grandchildren. She talks about how important it is to have good teachers and head teachers in schools. In spite of the fact that both her and her children experienced harassment and educational segregation at school, she would never agree on placing her children to a special school.

I am Roma. I was raised by my parents, but when I was 6 years old I was placed in a children's home in Opava, together with my brothers and sisters. I attended primary school there. The paediatrician examined me, concluding that I am able to attend primary school and that my intellect is fine. There were other children from the children's home where I was who attended special (nowadays called practical) school. My siblings were placed in another children's home and they attended special school, too.

I had never experienced any form of harassment there, no racism or bullying, neither at the children's home nor in primary school. I went back home when I was 12 years old. I came back to Ostrava, to my parents. I thus changed primary schools because Opava is 30 km from Ostrava, where I moved back. I began to attend primary school Kamenec, in the Silesian part of Ostrava.

**Here I experienced racism for the first time. Both children and teachers expressed that I was not welcome there at that school and they**

**obviously thought that I did not belong with the group of white kids. So as a child I learned how other**



**children can be cruel.**

The teachers, for example, openly expressed their hostility towards me, my schoolmates called me black, pointed at me with their fingers and refused to talk to me. It was very hard for me. It was so stressful and I began to come to school with disgust. I was also afraid that something can happen to me. Despite such attitude I managed to finish the school.

To describe my family: I am married now, I have three children who are now adults, and I also raise two grandchildren. My children attended Chrustova primary school in Ostrava. At that time the school was managed by a good head teacher who treated all children equally without distinguishing among them. Then, when my two older boys finished that school, a new head teacher replaced the existing one.

I had troubles with the new head teacher, Mr M. At that time my daughter attended

this school and the head teacher was very hostile towards her. It was obvious that he would be happy if he could get rid of her.

He simply did not like her, so he used to do things to her on purpose. My daughter was often ill. She suffered from kidney problems, so she also had to learn at home. I often went to school to collect her homework so that she could do it at home and not fall behind. I always wrote a note for the teacher to explain why my daughter was absent from school. The head teacher did his best to place my daughter in special school, which I disapproved of as a mother. I care a lot about my daughter's education and that is why I disagreed

with it.

**I would like to tell all Roma mothers not to give up; it is essential to fight for quality education of their children.**

At this primary school I was talking about, Roma pupils are not welcomed because the head teacher is convinced that Roma children belong to special school. This is what he said himself and I strongly disagree.

I know that there are a lot of Roma children who are clever, who can manage the schoolwork and the curriculum at primary school easily. My two grandchildren I raise and care about attended nursery school Repinova for 3 years. Based on the assessment of both teachers and doctors, both of them have been placed in primary school Nádražní. They had the best grades in their first school year. I would never ever let any of my children attend special school.

**Just because they are of Roma origin, it does not mean anything wrong. They are intelligent.**

I of course understand that there are children who, for some reason, can hardly manage primary school, and in those cases it is not wise to keep them in primary school. In such cases a special school can be more suitable for them, no matter if we talk about white or Roma children.

Teaching staff are trained to be able to work with school children, so they should have the patience to work with them. They should not be racist, absolutely not.

**In such a big town as Ostrava racism can be experienced on a daily basis. It can happen at a bus stop or in a shopping centre. Worse is the fact that some parents of children from the majority teach their children racism from their early childhood.**

I am grateful that there are also some people among us who help Roma people, who for example run leisure and educational centres for children and youths. Our children can have assistance with their schoolwork, like with subjects they are weaker at. Thanks to such centres our children can also go on some trips outside dirty Ostrava and can experience summer children's camps. In general, they help us to overcome racism here.

**M. G.**

M. is a Roma mother to two children (V. aged 13 and K. aged 6). She was born in 1972 and she spent her childhood (0 – 6 years of age) in SOS Children's Village, without parents, which was very tough for her. M. tells her story about how she experienced harassment and unequal treatment, educational segregation at primary and secondary school, and how later, at the university, it changed for the better.

M. has been working with Roma children for 10 years now (as a teaching assistant, tutor, and class teacher for a special class), where she takes advantage of her experience and knowledge. She studied in the teaching faculty, specializing in the field of special education. M. also talks about the segregation practices her daughter had to go through.

I do not remember much from my childhood. I have just a few blurred memories. I grew up in an infantile institution, in the SOS Children's Village in Chvalčov. Finally, when I was seven years old, I was adopted by my mother – carer parent M. N. She has always done as much as she could to protect me from any kind of discrimination in this world. She did not want me to experience it when I was still a child.

**Of course, she could not be with me all the time, so I had to face the fact that I am different, I am Roma. In SOS Village, children laughed at me. But at that time I already had my foster mum, so it did not hurt me so much. I trusted her, I could tell her anything.**

As far as my education is concerned, until the age of 7 I was told by specialists that I

was a child who was not able to be educated. I was told that I would manage to finish a special school with difficulties. Yes, I did not have any knowledge developed at that age, because nobody paid attention to me and I did not have any basic knowledge or skills – nobody read to me, talked to me, we just were outside all day long.

So only when I was 7 did I begin to live my life to the fullest – my mum used to read with me, she explained and taught me a lot of words, and she talked to us. I used to help her in the kitchen, so we had a lot of time together and I always asked her a lot of questions, so in this way I learned basic skills, common for other three year old children.

I do not think I was placed in a special school due to my ethnicity. I think I was socially immature, kind of neglected, and mainly I had a complete lack of information and knowledge and skills (I didn't had any vocabulary, I did not understood a simple sentence and I did not recognize colours and so on).

As for the treatment and attitude at school, I experienced humiliation at the primary school; the teacher for example lifted and emphasized two examples of homework – the best one and the worst one. I did the worst one and I was ashamed of it. I have never had good grades in spite of the fact that I learned a lot every day and I tried to do my best.

I do not know, could it be because I am Roma? I think that in the past the school system was not good. Even if the child did his/her best, he/she could easily be and stay among the worst pupils in class. I did not like to go to school. I was worried, what

is going to happen. I tried to do a lot to prove that I was making an effort to do better at school, but nobody noticed it, nobody ever praised me. Still, I did not give up. I kept on learning.

When I'd completed primary school I went to the vocational school in Krnov. I learned to be a nurse. I was an average student; I was not among the weakest students any more. I was very good at practicing in hospitals. There I also experienced hostility from the patients.

**They used to say: Roma will not touch me. It did not discourage me and I decided to continue my studies and complete the school with a school-leaving certificate. My mother has always supported me, helped me, and was very patient.**

At both primary and secondary school I had to prove something to someone all along. When I had a job, I decided to study at the university. There, it was the first time I actually felt supported. My tutors encouraged me and had faith in me. It was the first time I experienced the so-called positive discrimination. It encouraged me and gave me more confidence.

During my state exam, the tutor – specialist for speech therapy – praised me and my speech in front of the others. I am grateful for that; it has encouraged me a lot. I successfully completed my studies (special pedagogy) at the Ostrava University.

In the field of work, I have been working at school with Roma children for ten years. I like this work a lot. It fulfils me and I am glad that I can pass on knowledge and my

experience to the children. They can see that if someone really wants to achieve something, it is possible. Effort and having someone as a positive model are important. I teach them that education is very important in everyone's life. An educated person has so many more choices and opportunities than the one who is not educated.

I myself have two daughters, V. aged 13 and K. aged 6. I consider education important; I also care about my daughter's education. I am interested in the schools they want to choose, as well as in the teachers who will teach them. I do my best to choose the best schools for them.

I wanted my younger daughter to attend a



preparatory, pre-school class this year. I chose a school where I used to work as a teaching assistant and I knew who would teach her – my former colleague, whom I knew very well, whose methods of work I knew. I was refused to place my daughter there; my daughter was transferred to another school, known in Ostrava as special school in the past.

I did not mind this, but when I asked the staff who would be the teachers for the pre-school year and what kind of teaching methods would be used, the management of the school was not able to give me an answer, and they did not answer one single question. I was taken aback by this; it meant for me that I should not place my daughter in such a school, where I cannot be sure about these things. So I registered my daughter in another nearby school, Ibsenova primary school, and she was warmly accepted by the head teacher.

It hurt me when my daughter was not accepted to Gebauerova primary school because I care a lot for my daughter, not only me, but all my family. The management of that school does not, maybe because she is not their child. K. is, I think, very skilful and clever. It hurt me because nobody considered the fact that I worked at that school for two years as teaching assistant. I myself have worked in a school environment with Roma children for ten years.

I have worked in many positions – teaching assistant, tutor, and class teacher in a special class. I think that a parent has the right to know about teachers and teaching methods at schools, if they wish to.

**My experience with education of Roma children shows that many times I meet parents who want a better life for their children than what they had themselves. They realize that education is essential.**

Still, I think that there are not many parents who think this way. I hear more often: why should my child go to school, he/she will

not complete it, anyway, he/she will not stay there and will not find a job. Nobody will employ us Roma, anyway. I think that that is true, to a great extent. But it is up to us, teachers and tutors, to show them that education is needed.

Unfortunately, I often notice that some teachers often give up on Roma children's education even before they try. Many times I heard it claimed that Roma children will not come to school anyway, and they will end up registered at the job centre.

**I think that the present educational system in the Czech Republic has deteriorated. The teachers do not require from children what they did in the past; some of them treat their work just as a duty. They forget that they do not work with some objects but with little human beings.**

I believe this can be improved and kids can again look forward to school, enjoy it, and realize that their future education is important. From my experience as a teacher, I accept children as they are. I care about them and I can handle feedback from both children and parents. When I meet them on the street they greet me and children call me mama, like mother. I give those children part of myself – my experience, skills, knowledge, my time, interest. I have a bond with them. Our children need friendly environments, a teacher who likes them yet who is able to set certain limits. At the same time he/she is warm, kind, and perceptive, but also strict. If children have such a teacher, they are willing to do anything for them.

To give an example from my practice, this year I substituted my colleague at 3rd class. Children were given a mathematical task with numbers. One pupil could hardly do the task. So I spoke to her and gave her just part of the task to practise at home. Next day she came to school with her mother who told me that she was surprised her daughter was voluntarily doing homework instead of watching TV. I was very pleased with her progress, and so was S. and her mother. I rewarded her with two grades – B from the task and A for her effort. S. was so delighted and I felt satisfaction that my job has meaning.

I often hear that our work does not bring any visible results and outcomes, but I am convinced that it does. It's just that the results cannot be seen immediately. It is a very demanding job, but I find it meaningful and great.





## ROMANIA

### **A brief overview on school segregation**

The discussion about the school segregation phenomenon of Roma children in Romania has been launched in early 2000s, when Roma organizations identified such cases, documented and reported their existence to educational institutions such as the Ministry of Education and equality bodies such as the National Council for Combating Discrimination.

The first case of school segregation had been identified by on the local monitors of Romani CRISS, a representative of the Equal Opportunities Association (Asociația Șanse Egale) in Zalău. Both organisations monitored the case and initiated the first administrative complaint in Romania related to school segregation before the National Council for Combating Discrimination (NCCD). The Romanian equality body admitted the complaint and found a violation of the anti-discrimination law as to the segregation of Roma children into a separate annex from the main school in Cehei locality, Șimleul Silvaniei. The school was sanctioned with a warning.

Roma civil society has continued to document and publicly condemn the practice of school segregation, which led to the adoption of a Ministry of Education Notification prohibiting school segregation. As the Notification did not had any binding powers, it produced no effect in practice and schools in Romania continued to exert Roma segregation practices.

In the coming years, Romani CRISS continued to document cases of segregation and to litigate against this practice before the NCCD and national courts. The main objective was to convince the public and particularly the relevant institutions and authorities that segregation in Romania is not a mare isolated case but a common practice.

On the basis of the legal standing provided by the anti-discrimination framework Romani CRISS filed complaints on its own behalf but complaining about situations affecting more than individual children's. This was an opportunity provided by the law as Roma parents whose children study in segregated schools or classes often fear repercussions and do not file claims on their behalf.

In many cases, they agree to talk to the organization anonymously but do not file complaints against schools. Bringing segregation cases before the NCCD or courts on behalf of the organizations furthers the objective of exposing the practice of school segregation. However, to ensure victims' access to justice and provide effective remedies, it is necessary to directly involve them in the litigation.

In addition to strategic litigation, Romani CRISS has been involved in advocacy actions such as pressing the Ministry of Education to tackle school segregation trough policy measures and programs. In 2007, the 1540 Order was issued by the Ministry of Education. Unfortunately, this binding order failed as well to effectively combat the school segregation phenomenon.

In sum, the existence of a legal document in Romania, unlike in other European countries, that explicitly prohibits segregation certainly represents an advantage. However, legislation alone does not have the envisaged effect, eradication of the phenomenon. Civil society's efforts must continue, and the Ministry of Education must demonstrate an effective commitment to ensure the enforcement of its own policy and programmatic measures.

### **Testimonials of Roma parents and pupils about school segregation**

As stated above, there are not enough cases brought directly by the victims of school segregation before the NCCD or the courts or more precisely, their parents. Their willingness to share their experiences with representatives from civil society organizations was considered essential to expose the school segregation problem from the perspective of those directly affected by the phenomenon.

Certainly much is known about the effects of school segregation, with specialized studies providing more information on it. The statements of those affected by school segregation come to show what studies say: segregation has an extremely negative impact on Roma children, on their future, and on their families as well.

Considering that in Romania the "voice of victims" was not sufficiently heard by the courts through litigation actions, for reasons mentioned above, it is particularly important to identify alternatives and to facilitate a process whereby the experiences of Roma children affected by segregation or unequal access to education are shared.

Some of the statements are given by the Roma parents or former Roma students who learned in segregated classes but have also passed through the experience of desegregation.

## IONIȚĂ ASAN NATIONAL COLLEGE, CARACAL (OLT COUNTY)

The situation of segregation within the Ionita Asan National College was drawn to the attention of Romani CRISS in November 2011. Initially, the Olt County Prefecture conducted a check on the implementation of 1540/19.07.07 Order, concluding that at the first class level within Ionita Asan National College, the Roma pupils are separated from the non-Roma pupils.

Romani CRISS has conducted research and confirmed the conclusions of the Prefect's Institution report. Two Roma parents of some pupils who were learning in the segregated class agreed to submit, along with Romani CRISS, a complaint before the National Council for Combating Discrimination, as well as a civil proceeding before the Court of Caracal, regarding the school segregation on ethnic criteria and the social category of Roma children in the 1<sup>st</sup> B grade and on the restriction of equal access to quality education for Roma children in the classes of the 1<sup>st</sup> B grade, compared with other children in the *step-by-step* 1<sup>st</sup> A grade and the traditional 1<sup>st</sup> A grade.

The NCCD found that the case was in violation with the anti-discrimination law and sanctioned with a fine of 2,000 RON (approx. 450 EUR) both the school unit and the Olt County School Inspectorate. The case before the civil court is still pending.

### S.S.

S.S.'s son is currently studying at Ionita Asan National College. He recounts the experience of school segregation.

My name is S.S. and my son S.R.G. is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade at "Ionita Asan" National College. On the first day of school, at the beginning of the school year, we went to the college and we were invited to stay in a classroom. The former headmaster of the school also came and we were told that we would be in the third class of the first grade.

**They said they didn't have a classroom for us because the children for other classes had already been selected.**

The representatives of the school told us they had accepted lots of submitted applications, about 72 or 73. They

increased the number of accepted applications because they were not sure all the children would come to school. Due to the fact that all the children came eventually, they decided to create another class with the children who remained after the others had been selected for classes. These were our children, 12 children.

**Therefore, on the first day of school we didn't know anything, we didn't know if we would have a teacher. Other teachers took their pupils and went to their classrooms and we were left there. We looked at each other... What about us? Where do we go?**

They explained that we would come on the second day of school as if it were the first day of school, unlike the other children. We were told we would have a teacher and a classroom. Of course, this would be the case if we still wanted to keep our children

in this school because, if we did not agree with this situation, nobody was forcing us to stay. We were told that we could take them to another educational institution. Of course, we didn't agree with that suggestion because the school year had started, it was already September 15, 2011, and it was too late to take our child to another school.

The school headmaster then told us that if we decided to keep our children in this school, we should wait 30 min until the "reserve teacher" would come. This is what we did because we wanted to celebrate the first day of school just as other children and parents did. We prepared our children for this day, they were dressed accordingly, and we bought flowers for the teacher. The biggest excitement is on the first school day.

**On the second day they showed us the classroom where our children would study, which was damaged because the flooring was removed, the plaster had fallen, and it was not possible to close the entrance door. Also, the tables were full of dust, the floor was not wiped, and the windows didn't have curtains. The other classrooms had everything prepared and they were clean. Our classroom was a disaster compared to them.**

In that year there were 3 classes of 1<sup>st</sup> grade, including ours. In the other two classes there were 32 pupils in one class and 27 in the other. In our son's class there were 12 pupils, out of whom two were non-Roma and the rest were Roma. When we realized the fact that 32 children were in another class, we asked them why they did not bring children from that class in order to

somehow balance the number of students. They asked us why we would want this, because our teacher is able to teach better with fewer children, unlike Mrs. C, the teacher of the other class, who had more experience and could handle a bigger number of pupils.

Our school is at a distance of 500 meters and the next school is 1 km away. There is no public transportation for the schools in Caracal.

Before the first day of school, we had submitted R.'s application in spring; it was sometime in March or April. At the secretariat they told me there was no problem with the documents, and I also left my phone number. After a month or two they called us for a meeting with the parents of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade pupils.

The school representatives told us to fill out a form with our personal data and our ethnicity as well. I myself declared I am of Roma ethnicity, but I am not sure if the other Roma parents did the same thing. I also had to write my profession, my income...

They told us they had formed the classes in this way, because we had submitted the documents later, but we still could not understand why there were 27, 32 and 12 pupils in the classes? Why didn't they balance the numbers? After that we understood what was happening. Well, the class of Mrs. C., the teacher of the other class with 32 pupils, was formed by children whose parents are teachers, doctors, engineers, accountants...

**They have selected the children according to their parent's occupations. You cannot compare a**

## **baker with an insurance manager, right?**

Later on, when the School Inspectorate made the inspection and asked for certain documents, including those forms, they had just disappeared.

Regarding school performance, R. is at a medium level compared to other peers. Of course, in general his class is at a lower educational level than the other ones. For example, a child from the other class, which is not even the best, would be much better at his studies than R. or the entire class. This is because their teachers are going through the courses with a different pace.

It is a rule that everybody has to do well in school, whereas in R.'s class, the teacher has a different mentality, which means they think that our children will learn less because they can do less and they are not capable of more. At the level of his class R. is doing well, but if he was included in a regular class, maybe he would have studied more. He has a good potential. We think it would have been better if the classes were mixed.

We are also bothered by the fact that there are only 12 children in the classroom as one day seven children would come, another day five. Therefore certain activities are not carried out, such as an awards ceremony for pupils, because there were just two or three children.

When we realized this situation of segregation, back in September, 2011, in the beginning we did nothing because we had no support. There was no one to tell us what to do or there were no other parents to ally with. We were the only parents who tried to do something, to solve this problem

with discrimination. They should not have created this division. They are all children. It doesn't matter whether they are Roma or non-Roma.

We finally decided to file a complaint against the school after someone from Romani CRISS contacted us. We discussed what we could do to defend our child's rights. Of course, we agreed to move on further with the process in order to prevent such problems for future generations as well. As far as I knew, there were no longer such cases. Probably they were deterred by the legal process.

Fortunately, after we had lodged the complaint, there was no criticism coming from teachers. On the contrary, teachers behaved very carefully with us and despite the complaint R. continued studying at this school. I also asked R. about the behaviour of the teachers and he said everything was fine. He also didn't feel a different attitude from other pupils. There are just children and I don't think they understood what was happening.

**We believe we have done well by lodging this complaint. Since then we haven't heard about any cases of segregation. One good thing was that after the complaint, the material conditions of the classroom have improved. We don't know if something will change for R., but at least we know we have set a good example for other parents.**

Regarding the accomplishments of this case we know that they have received a fine of 2000 lei. We think that the legal process is going very slowly. It's already the third year and a decision has not yet been

made. We look forward to the process being over. However, sooner or later ... it no longer depends on us. We did everything we could.

Currently R. is ranked as level 3 or 4 in his class, but we think other classes are at a

higher level. With the new school director I didn't have any discussion although I know he is aware of the fact that I am the parent involved in the segregation legal process.

## THE LUCIAN BLAGA GENERAL SCHOOL, JIBOU (SĂLAJ COUNTY)

The Equal Opportunities Association (Asociația Șanse Egale) from Zalău implemented a project on desegregation at the Lucian Blaga General School in Jibou. The parents and former Roma students describe the situation before and after desegregation.

### D.V.

D. V. currently has two children in school. He declares himself satisfied with the quality of education that his children receive, but he remembers the extremely different situation a few years ago, when he had another school age child. D. V. recounts the experience of school segregation and the changes that took place after a desegregation process initiated by a local organization<sup>9</sup>.

I am 42 years old and I live in Jibou town, in the Roma community. I have three children aged 9, 12 and 19. The eldest was a student at the Lucian Blaga General School in Jibou, the youngest is presently a pupil in the 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and my 12 year- old child is in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade. Currently I am not employed and do odd jobs every day.

Regarding my studies, I have finalized de vocational school in 1990. We do not come too much into contact with the Romanians, because we live in the Roma community.

We don't have drinking water, sewage, and those from the Town Hall do not even take the garbage. The whole community takes water from a single well. A few years ago, Romanians burned the houses of Roma in Cuceu. Cuceu is a settlement belonging to Jibou town. The mayor has beaten Roma and we don't really get along with him. The Mayor does not receive us in the audience, said he doesn't want to see Gypsies in the Town Hall.

**(At school, Ed.) Now it's ok, Gypsy children are in classes with Romanian children. Teachers work with children, classes are clean, new desks, clean and painted classrooms. Children have homework and know how to read and write, have better grades.**

You cannot compare how it was 7-8 years ago, when children were studying in school with classes that looked worse than a stable. Back then, children didn't do well in school, they had no idea how to write and read well, although they were in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. Roma children were kept in

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<sup>9</sup>Equal Opportunities Association

inhumane conditions. Classes with Roma pupils looked awful, not to mention that they were finishing the 8th grade being illiterate, without knowing how to write or to read.

**We cannot talk about results at school. There were only Roma children in that class, there were about 23 Roma children. They hardly knew how to write and read in the 6<sup>th</sup> grade. We cannot even speak about other study subjects.**

**separately in a classroom in the basement of the school, next to another room with a door that had “risk of explosion” written on it.**

Teachers behaved very badly with the children. There was not a single day when he would not tell me that the teacher hit them, or spoke badly.

I really didn't know if something can be done for our Roma children to be in classes with other Romanian children. We didn't know whom to turn to, who could help, because everywhere we went, to the Town Hall, hospital, or school, nobody was receiving us. For example, if I needed a certificate from the school or the Town Hall, I had to knock on doors for two or three weeks to receive my certificate. We didn't even know what rights we had, who would defend our rights if we had no idea of them. We found out later, after 2-3 years, about our rights, when you and those from your association came to inform us about the rights we have. You know that we were very afraid to make a complaint, because everything turned against us and the children. I keep wondering, why we have to suffer just because we are Roma?

[...] When you came to help us with the kids at school, we wondered if it was good for them to be with other Romanian children, because our children barely knew how to read and write. But still, they should not have stayed in those conditions, with that filthy furniture, dirty classroom, teachers not being in classes, no one taking care of the children.

How can a child have a future if he doesn't learn at school? He will get like us, waiting

The child was always saying that school teachers do not stay with them during classes and were just telling them to copy from the blackboard. In our time, when I was in school, there weren't separate classes of Roma and Romanians. Nowadays Roma children are placed separately, in dirty classrooms, and nobody educates the child. I have a Romanian classmate I still talk to, we have learned in classes with Romanians.

**My son said that starting 5<sup>th</sup> grade, Roma children were placed**



for social support because no one will hire him. You think that we don't have jobs, we can't give our children notebooks and beautiful clothes to go to school, and I was then thinking that Roma children would be bullied by other children, because ours don't have good notebooks and clothes like others.

It was very difficult to manage to keep Roma children with Romanian children in the same class. You remember how many meetings you had with us, with teachers and parents of Romanian children, and how many arguments there have been. But what was nice was that you have taken our children, together with Romanian children and teachers, in the summer camp [...] I never thought Roma children would eat at one table and would sleep together with Romanians. What we were happy about, we, Roma parents, was the centre you have made. There, the children learned, ate, you gave them notebooks and clothing. That helped us a lot.

This way, our children went to school with their homework done, dressed in clean clothing and after they have eaten enough. Now my son finished high school. [...] How can those children who have finished school get employment if they did not know to make an application for employment? Now it is okay, as the children learned a lot in school because they are in classes with the Romanians. There's no difference, nobody beats them, and nobody speaks badly. It's good!

**At first, the Romanians did not want Roma children to be in classes with Romanian children. [...] There were many arguments in school. They were calling us, the parents of Roma**

**children, separately into separate meetings, not with the Romanian parents.**

The teachers were trying to convince us that it is better for the Roma children to be separated, because they are not required to learn that much. But our children were illiterate and it was not good for their future. [...] Romanian parents and teachers were scared when you told them they have two options, either put children together and you would help them with the centre, camps, notebooks, and with doing their homework, or you could bring the school to court and they would do everything alone without your help. [...] The centre changed a lot: children had notebooks, they were doing their homework, and they were clean and dressed. This has changed the way of thinking of the Romanian parents and teachers. If we had jobs, we would have done this ourselves, dress our children in clean clothes, buy notebooks...but this poverty [...]

**The teachers have changed their behaviour towards Roma children. They do not longer beat them, do not speak badly, and do not offend them.**

I am proud that my son is graduating from high school this year. There are few Roma children in our community in Jibou who finish high school. If my boy would have also learned while separated from the other children, he would no longer be in school now, he would hardly have finished 8 grades, and he would have been a child without an education. Now he has more chances in life. Such a project should be in every school where Roma children are placed separately and teachers mock Roma children.

**L.R.**

L.R. has a daughter who currently goes to school. He recalls the past, when his daughter was learning in a segregated environment.

My daughter finished school at Lucian Blaga and now is in high school. Teachers behave well; they do not differentiate between Roma and non-Roma children anymore.

**Roma children take classes with non-Roma children; there is not a difference as there was 7-8 years ago, when Roma students learned while segregated in dirty classrooms with very old furniture from the 70s-80s. Segregation of children in school was a very bad thing.**

It was tragic, maybe you think I exaggerate, but it was tragic, my daughter barely knew how to read and write in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade. For me it was and is a great effort to keep my children in school. I work just to give them a better life and education is the way to better living. Do you realize how hard it was to see that the child was illiterate? My daughter was at the level of a child in 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. I think that the professors were passing the Roma children from 7<sup>th</sup> D grade just to get rid of them. During communism, there were not segregated classes in such conditions. At that time, all the children were learning in the same conditions.

**It's very hard to do something when you have another ethnicity, especially to be Roma. It was hard. It was a lot of work with the non-Roma parents' mentality, but it was more difficult with the teachers and the school headmaster. Anyway, in the end we succeeded ... and ... this is what matters.**

It was very difficult, even with our Roma community. I spoke several times with the parents of Roma children in Lucian Blaga School, saying we should do something, but they had no confidence in our success and kept telling me: we will do things in vain, we will not solve anything, nobody cares about us, we do more harm to ourselves, but we especially harm our children.

Nine years ago it was very hard without help. I know I turned to all the institutions, to the school, Town Hall, Prefecture, but nobody paid attention to me. I admit that at one point I was disappointed when I saw that no one cares about us. But I was not comfortable with the idea that my daughter would finish school and be illiterate, that teachers would mock her and offend her. My daughter gave me strength to continue.

In the first place, the image of Roma pupils has changed. They were no longer the Gypsy class! The class where Roma children studied was abolished, the teachers had a different behaviour. Children began to be respected by other children and teachers.

**L.T.**

L.T. is 19 years old and learned in a segregated environment, within the Lucian Blaga School. He finished elementary school, and went to high school, but did not complete it. L.T. talks about the experience of school segregation.

After the revolution, the teachers slowly began placing Roma children in separate classes because they were saying that if Roma are all in one class, they can handle us better. At that time, we were not interested in who we were in the classroom with or how we were treated. Children in the 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> classes were only Roma.

Our parents did not do anything to stop us from being segregated. They agreed, but what else could they say, as nobody asked the parents whether or not one agrees to be separated into classes from the Romanians.

We were silent because we were poor and our clothes were shabbier, as we could not really afford notebooks and books. In class with the Romanians, they also ask for money to furnish the room, to make all sorts of trips and we could not afford.

**At one point I wanted to be in a class with Romanians. I did not want to be in the class with Roma. I was in kindergarten and I did very well. It's not fair to ask me to do drawings and say that I am more stupid and that I must be in class with Roma.**

My father met with the school principal to tell him that I did not want to stay in the class with Roma students, and the principal said to my father: but what do you want, to create problems with the Romanian parents? You should stay in your class

because your children are not at the Romanians' level.

My father wanted me to move to another school, but they said there were no more places available. I know that my father was at several meetings with teachers and parents of Romanian children and that he left the meetings angry, saying it's not possible to be treated so badly just because you are another colour.

I was in the camp, and while there I slept in rooms with Romanian children ate at the table with Romanian children. In the camp we had sports competitions and won both award certificates and medals. It was beautiful there;

I managed to make Romanian friends. I went to the centre where we would do our homework, eat, and play... I know that people at the Equal Opportunities organization wanted to bring a legal action against the school, and so they agreed to stop separating Roma in classes.

Teachers were no longer rude to us, they no longer argued with us, they did not hit us anymore, and in the beginning of the school year we were placed in classes with Romanians. In the beginning it was very hard. I did not face the lessons, but slowly I managed to cope, but it was very hard.

**L.C.**

L.C. had a child in Lucian Blaga School in the segregated classes. Here, she describes the experience her child had and explains the process of desegregation as initiated by the local association.

Although we are a needier family, I tried to put all our children through school so they could have a future in life. My husband and I have not completed many grades in school, and it is very difficult to find a good job now.

**We knew that the Roma children are placed separately from Romanians at the Lucian Blaga School in Jibou, but we thought it was normal.**

All of the children in the neighbourhood were going into separate classes, and as we were poorer, we could not afford to place our children with the Romanians. My older boy was saying that teachers were treating the students poorly. The older boy never had homework.

I went one day to talk to the teacher to allow the child to miss a few days because we had to leave for a relative's funeral in Satu Mare. The classroom was somewhere in a basement, very small and dark, and the children were huddled in some old desks, there were dirty walls - it was horrible.

**When I saw the classrooms for Romanians, I realized that our children were discriminated against in that school. I asked the teacher why there were these differences,**

**and she said nothing, shrugged, and pointed upwards, that is, to say the school board is to blame.**

I went to talk to the director, and I told him that it's not normal for kids to learn in such conditions, and the director replied briefly: So are you gypsies. You do not pay the class fund, you do not pay the school fund, but you want five star conditions. If you do not agree, bring money from home and make the class beautiful!

About a month later, my husband managed to go to Zalău and contact Mr. Robert (representative of the Equal Opportunities Association, Ed.). Mr. Robert told us that he had already handled some similar cases and would be sure to find a solution.

He asked us to give a written statement, but my husband was afraid to do so, in case other children would suffer. Even if they were not studying at the same school, we thought that if it [our complaint] got to the inspectorate, the children would be expelled or something bad could happen. Back then, we didn't know what our rights were. We were scared!

(The child, Ed.) Couldn't read and write well, didn't know math - outside of what he learned at home, he knew almost nothing. We tried to do something at home with him, but it's not the same thing as what they learn at school. When we asked the child what he did at school, he told us that he copied from the blackboard. In fact, no one takes care of them; they were left to their own devices all day. How can they learn?



At first we did not really want to put the children in the same classes as the Romanians because we were afraid that Romanian children would laugh at our children, especially that they were weaker in school, but representatives from the organization told us that even if learning conditions [in the segregated classes] improved, they would still be weak in school because they don't see good examples from children.

**In the beginning, what bothered us most were the conditions in which they were learning and the fact that they were not learning properly. But then I realized that as long as the Roma are separated, there will always be discrimination. We agreed with the mixing, but we were afraid that children would suffer even more.**

I remember my older boy was very happy when coming from the centre. He would have stayed there all day. They did their homework there; they were tutored in reading, writing, and mathematics, but they also had fun activities. After going to the Centre School for a few months after school, we could see great results.

I realize that if it were not for desegregation, my child might have been illiterate or have dropped out of school by now.

## **V.L.M.**

V.L.M. also had a child in segregated classes at the Lucian Blaga School. She relates her experience of segregation.

He was in a class with only Roma pupils, and all day they were left on their own. Nobody was taking care of them. When we

looked for them, they were either playing football or beating each other in the classroom.

**Because no one was taking care of them, the classroom was a disaster when we entered it. Noise, broken desks, broken walls, a musty smell. The conditions were indescribable.**

The boy was in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade and was illiterate. You would get bored waiting for him to read a sentence. They [the administration] were passing students onto the next grade en masse, without the students being at that level. Teachers were changing every year because none of them wanted to teach in a Roma class. It was normal for us because we got used to the Roma being separated.

In the beginning, we did not bother to do something [about the students being segregated] because we knew that we were not at the Romanians' level, that they had higher requirements. For example, we did not have access to school supplies and clothes, and we were thinking that if they go to class with Romanians, they will laugh at our children ... You know how kids are! It's enough to laugh once or twice, and after that he would not have wanted to go to school at all.

It was hard at the beginning for the boy. He was behind on learning, and was not used to doing homework or to being listened to in class. He was used to being left on his own. But those from the centre were taking care of them every day.

The most important was that they could do their homework, and often if they did not understand the class requirements, they were explained better. Slowly, I saw that

the boy was progressing and that he loved to go to school. At the centre they were doing a Gypsy ensemble, and he likes dancing very much. They did a show at

### **SCHOOL NO. 3, BABADAG**

Constantin Brancoveanu School (School no. 3) is located in the Turkish Roma community in the Bendea neighbourhood. Veterani School is the former School No. 2, which has passed under the School no. 3 through the process of consolidation. Veterani School is located on the outskirts of Babadag, and is at a distance of 5 km from School No.3.

There is a tendency for Roma students beyond the school age of a specific grade level to be sent to Veterani School, regardless of the distance from their homes. There is also a tendency for Roma children who did not pass to the next grade to be sent there as well. Another group of pupils who go to Veterani School are the Roma pupils who were enrolled in school later. The rationale provided by the school principal was that there are no places in School No. 3, although there is enough space for all children. Romanian children living near the school also go there. The Roma from Bendea are unhappy because of the distance that their children have to travel on foot to reach Veterani.

### **S.A. and S.F. (A.A.B.'s parents)**

S. A. and S.F. wanted to enrol their child, A.A.B, 6 years of age, in 0 grade, preparatory, within School No. 3 in Babadag. They were told that there were no places for their child, and were advised to go to another school. The parents were dissatisfied with the situation, and didn't enrol their child at the suggested school because it was at a distance of 6 km from their home.

Therefore, the child missed the preparatory year and will be enrolled directly into the 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The parents have two children at School No. 3, and are satisfied with the treatment received by the two, stating that Roma and non-Roma learn in the same classes there.

The little one had to be there (in Veterani School, Ed.), but I didn't want him to be

school and he felt very proud because he was appreciated by all for such dance.

there, because it's far. And why take him to Veterani if he was registered at the School No. 3? And then they told me that there were no places for him at School No. 3. He had one day at School No. 3 and they sent him home. I gave them all the documents, we have prepared the child for school, and then they said there are no places, you must take him to Veterani. But I didn't want to take him there. It is far. It is a 6 km round trip. Who would take him and bring him back. Here, from the School No.3, his brother could have brought him.

It does not seem fair to place him there. It's far. If we are away from home, who would take him to Veterani? If he gets hit by a car?

The headmaster said there were no places at the School No.3, that there were places in Veterani. I did not take him, if he would have been sent to Veterani... [...] I went to the headmaster, I spoke nicely, "if I say no, no, we don't have places". I got him a bag, I got notebooks, we prepared the child, he

went one day, and they sent him back. He went one day and afterwards sent him home. When I went there, she said "we don't have places." And I told her: "for this one you don't have places [...]"

[...]It's a pity that if he would have started earlier, he would have been ready for the first grade. The headmaster is to blame for sending him home. She should have said first "I will not accept you," rather than letting the child go to school and sending him home. "

Parents made no complaint about their dissatisfaction. We know how to write, but do we know where to go?

The next year she will not refuse him, because the headmaster said she registered him there. I told her "don't do the same thing as you did the last year," and she said "no, because now he will go directly to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade". It will be hard for him now, directly to the 1<sup>st</sup> grade [...]. He didn't go (kindergarten, Ed.), so this was his kindergarten, at 6 years.

There are children of 8 years and a half in the preparatory class. Another child is 9 years old and is in the preparatory class, while this one who is 6 years old doesn't have a place. And I asked her (the teacher, Ed.) "Why did you accept the 9 years old one, and doesn't have a place? This one is big and beats the children, he should be in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade already. I don't know, she says, the headmaster accepted him there, it's not our fault".

**[...] Both Roma and Romanians together, it's better like that. So if there are only our Roma, they argue, beat up each other. (Romanians learn better, are more disciplined.**

## **S.D., A.A.B.'s brother**

### **School No. 3, Babadag**

A.A., A.B.I.'s mother, wanted to enrol her child at School No. 3, in Babadag, but was also told that there were no places and she should enrol her child at the school in Veterani, located 4-5 km from her home. The child presently goes to the school in Veterani.

## **A.A., A.B.I.'s mother**

I enrolled him at School No. 3, but they did not have places now, there were just places in Veterani, away in that school. I enrolled him at the normal time, at 7 years old. (They told me that, Ed.) "If you want to enrol him there, enrol him, but we have no places here, we don't accept him". And I went and made a request. He goes (every day, Ed.), but look, yesterday he didn't go. He went and came back, [...] saying, "They are stealing from my bag, beating me, children along my way," because he went twice and they took his notebooks and bag.

I agreed (to let him go there, Ed.), because he wants go to school, to learn. I still wanted him to be here, but there are no places. I wanted to tell them to provide transportation for taking children, because there are more children here. The distance is about 5 km, there are 4-5 km. I went two or three times, until he learned the road, and now he goes alone and comes back. But still I'm scared of cars.

I went there (to the school, Ed.) and I have not written anything, I just asked, "I want to move the boy here in the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. We

don't have places, you can do what you can, and we don't have places" she says. I want to move him, but if they don't have places I will leave him there, what else is there to do. (The child, Ed.) does not agree that he goes too early when I send him at 6, until he gets there ... what can I do, I will let him until he grows up, 12 grades, 13 grades, to learn, to know.

### **School No. 3, Babadag**

C. S. has two children enrolled at the school in Veterani. The two children went to School No. 3, but they were transferred to the school in Veterani when they didn't pass to the next grade. The distance between the school they go to today and their home is 8 km.

### **C.S.**

I have two children at school, and in the morning if they get up too late and arrive at 9.30-10 a.m., the teacher sends them back and they come back. And that's my problem, they are about 8 km away from us to Veterani, almost out of town, and there is a lot of traffic, passing trucks, cars, and we do not have transportation for taking our children to school. One child is in the fourth grade and the other child is in the second grade. Other children have to get up at 7 o'clock or 7:30 at latest to get to school for 8 o'clock, but for them to get to Veterani they take an hour and a half or two.

These children didn't pass to the next grade and were excluded from this school (School No. 3, Ed.) and transferred to Veterani. If someone wants to send them to Veterani

they send them, and if not, they have nothing to do with you.

I said, if my child remained in the same grade, change the class to remain in the 1<sup>st</sup> or the 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, in the grade he remained. Well, no, they have to transfer my child to Veterani. The teachers here, in Babadag, when they saw that the children didn't pass onto the next grade, they transferred them to Veterani. And here you are; my kids have not arrived yet since this morning. I woke them up at 6.30 and they arrive now, at 13.30-14.00. 'll make a request to bring them back to this school.

### **A.A., grandmother**

A. A. has many grandchildren who were not enrolled in school at age 7. Today they want to go to school, but they have been rejected because of their age and no alternative has been proposed by the representatives of the school.

The 11 year old does not go to school, they are not accepted. They don't want to accept them. I went to the principal but she doesn't want. She doesn't accept them because they are older, we should have enrolled them when they were small. They don't accept this child, nor the other. The children are rather big already, they want to go to school, but they are not accepted.

I have spoken with the principal and she told me "why didn't I enrol them when they were small, when they were 7 years old?" They had their problems, the one from 2003 could not really speak, and they didn't speak Romanian. But he was not accepted

and now she found a reason, that I didn't enrol him at 7 years.

[...] At least up to 14-15 years, they were finishing 3-4 grades, they knew something. The one (born, Ed.) in 2001 was in a class and then was not accepted anymore. Within a week or two he could write his name, my name... smart kid. They kept him a week or two and that's all. They put another in his place, of theirs, a Romanian. I do not remember when this was, the old woman has many grandchildren, 14 grandchildren.

### **A.K., B.I., B.B., A.I.**

A Roma student was enrolled in primary school at the School No. 1. In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade was transferred to the School No. 3, where he is not satisfied with the treatment received.

I like to be with the Romanians in the classroom, also. Mrs. F. had 4-5 Romanians in class, the rest were just us.

**I was unhappy when I was in class only with ours. It's better when there are Romanians also, as you get along better with them and learn from each**

### **other.**

I want to do 12 grades. It's better at the School No. 1, as they take care of you and bring you to the blackboard.

**At School No.3 they do not pay attention to us, they say we are gypsies. The Romanian language teacher, P.M., says "I will never pass you to the next grade"**

And me, the English one (English teacher, Ed.) always tells me to go out.

We sit and write, copying from the book, and tell her "you don't call us to the blackboard, you call only on the Romanians" and she says "why do you want to go to the blackboard just like this? Wait your turn."

I want to receive a grade, too, not only Romanians. They teach only them. When I was in the 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> grade, the teacher was calling me to the blackboard. In the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, I got my diploma. I want to the School No. 1, I'll transfer there.

If she said she would never pass me the grade... and then she says, do you want to go to Veterani? If you fail to pass into the next grade I will take you to Veterani, as she says. But why doesn't she send the Romanians to Veterani?

She says I fight with others, but it is not true. And she does not want to pass me on to the next grade, but not just me, everyone in the class she says. S

**She says that we are Gypsies. She says "I do not want you to**



**be in this school anymore, move out.”**

And my cousin had problems with her, too; she didn't pass him on the next grade and he doesn't go to school anymore.

## HUNGARY

### **A brief overview on school segregation**

Roma children in Hungary are at risk of being segregated in schools. Segregation on the class-level and on the school level is widespread; it is estimated that one third of Hungarian Roma children are taught in a segregated setting. On the other hand, Roma children are more likely to be placed in special schools compared to their non-Roma peers. There is no official data on the overall number of Roma students in public education; however researchers estimate that 15% of students belong to the Roma minority.

Currently, integration policies are targeting children with multiply disadvantaged status. 2/3 of Roma students are estimated to have multiply disadvantaged status. Roma children however, even in case they qualify for multiply disadvantaged status, are under-registered and remain invisible for officials. In 2013 a new definition for multiply disadvantaged status has been adopted, while the new legislation left the procedure intact where children could be registered (Art, 67/§. of the Act XXXI of 1997). There is no development in the registration procedure of the multiply disadvantaged children, the new provisions left intact the procedural aspect which maintains invisibility of Roma.

Public schools have been nationalized as of 1 January, 2013. A new centralized body, the Klebelsberg School Maintainer Centre is the sole maintainer of all primary and secondary schools handed over by municipalities. When taking over the school, the Centre had the historic opportunity to inspect all schools and take steps against unlawful practices, such as segregation of Roma children. The Centre however left segregated schools intact and failed to map the situation of Roma children in the nationalized schools.

A research conducted by the Educational Authority in 2010 showed that Roma children are 4 times more likely to have private student status compared to non Roma students. The proportion of children with private student status is 0.4 % in the whole student's body, while 1.54 % of Roma students have private student's status. The Educational Authority found that only 29% of the students with private student status complete their studies in time, the rest of the students are over aged. 30% of private students in 8th grade were 18 years old by the time the research was conducted.

The State secretary for public education openly criticized the findings of the Educational Authority by stressing, that there is no official data on the number of Roma children in public education, therefore, the findings are not adequate. The Centre-similar to the municipalities- refuses to use the proxies and the methodology elaborated by the Ombudsman in 2009. The equality body, the Ombudsman and some Courts however rely on this methodology in order to establish the perceived number of Roma children.

Long term plans on public education fail to address segregation and desegregation. In May 2013 Governmental Agencies responsible for education prepared and published educational development plans for each county in which they assessed the current situation of public education and set forth development trends and desirable measures. (Art. 21. of Government Decree 229/2012. (VIII.28.) Unfortunately the development plans do not include information about the estimated proportion of Roma children in schools and as a consequence do not tackle racial segregation in schools. In Hungary the Chance for Children Foundation has been litigating school segregation for a decade in a strategic manner and has successfully secured landmark judgements in the Supreme Court of Hungary on school-level and class-level segregation.

### **MISDIAGNOSIS OF ROMA CHILDREN IN NYÍREGYHÁZA: ISTVÁN HORVÁTH PLAINTIFF IN THE HORVATH AND KISS V. HUNGARY CASE<sup>10</sup>**

István Horváth and András Kiss were living in a Roma settlement in Nyíregyháza, close to the eastern border of Hungary. Both of them were placed in a special school based on the opinion of an Expert Committee that assessed their mental ability. Due to their placement in a special school, they could not enrol in mainstream secondary schools. Consequently, Istvan was unable to follow in his father's footsteps and become a dance teacher; instead, he received special vocational training to become a baker-assistant. Andras was unable to pursue his ambition to become a car mechanic. The plaintiffs claimed that the Expert Committee discriminated against them and misdiagnosed them as being "mildly mentally disabled" on the basis of their ethnicity, social and economic background, and had subsequently ordered them to be educated in a special school, although they had normal abilities. They asserted that the Expert Committee was free to choose the tests they applied, and that it was well-known among experts that some tests were culturally biased and tended to the misdiagnosis of disadvantaged children, especially Roma ones. This occurs because a systemic error originating in the flawed diagnostic system itself did not take into account the social or cultural background of Roma children who took the test.

Having exhausted the domestic remedies<sup>11</sup>, the plaintiffs represented by the lawyer of the Chance for Children Foundation (CCFCF) and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights (hereinafter ECtHR) in 2011. On 29 January 2013 the ECtHR delivered a judgment in the *Horváth and Kiss v. Hungary* case, unanimously holding that there had been a violation of Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 (right to education) of the European Convention on Human Rights read in conjunction with Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the Convention. The Court noted that Roma children had been overrepresented among the pupils at the special primary and vocational school attended by the applicants and that Roma children had overall been overrepresented in the past in special schools in Hungary due to the systematic misdiagnosis of mental disability. The underlying

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<sup>10</sup> Horvath and Kiss v. Hungary Application no. 11146/11, Second section (2013)

<sup>11</sup> The case was first submitted to the first instance court in 2006. With the Supreme Court decision in 2010, all domestic remedies had been exhausted.

figures were uncontested by the Hungarian Government. The Court found a prima facie<sup>12</sup> case of indirect discrimination in 2014. Currently, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe is examining the implementation of the judgment. The Committee in its decision of 4 March 2014 called the Hungarian Government to provide information about the impact of the existing diagnostic protocols on Roma children and their corresponding overrepresentation in special education. Earlier, partly as a result of the case, the ministry responsible for education had launched a new project to assess the existing diagnostic protocols. Currently, CFCF is in negotiation with the ministry to elaborate a culturally independent diagnostic procedure in order to overcome the misdiagnosis of Romani children.

## ISTVÁN HORVÁTH<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Prima facie means "at first appearance." In anti-discrimination law, prima facie discrimination is a case where there is sufficient evidence available (there is a clear presumption) to shift the burden of proof to the respondent. See [http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/lawrev4\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/justice/discrimination/files/lawrev4_en.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Istvan Horvath is one of the plaintiffs in the segregation case before the ECHR.

While I was at kindergarten in the Guszev settlement, a psychologist used to come and test me, though at that time I had no idea what the tests were about. She diagnosed me as mentally disabled. But then I didn't know anything about this at all. I didn't understand why I had to go to a special school. I had the impression even as a child that I didn't belong there.

They told me that I had to go there because I had a hard time understanding what was being said to me. It hurt me so much when the psychologist told me this. I wanted an explanation as to why she would tell me this but she just grabbed her bag and left. My parents had to accept this decision because this was the only way I could get an education at all.

**But I didn't know what special education meant. It was only later when I realised that it was a school that helped those children who struggle with learning. Honestly, I would admit they were right if they had helped me, but I cannot say this because they did not.**

In a normal primary school the subjects are more difficult. My brothers all attended normal education, and I should have, too. Everything was taught differently in the Göllesz Viktor Special School. In that school we were repeating everything over and over again, while in a normal school, students move forward with their studies.

**There are a lot of Roma children in the Göllesz School, many**

**of them in the same situation as me. They are normal and could attend a normal school. I had an autistic classmate as well. I wondered why one half of the class was normal, while the other half was ill.**

There were children with mental and physical disabilities. Disabled children were Hungarians, while children who seemed normal to me were all Roma. When I was 11 years old, an independent expert assessed my abilities in a camp organised by a human rights NGO. She concluded that I was not disabled, as I was able to pass all the tests with excellent results. Moreover, she said that I was clever and smart. After this I went through court hearings for six years. It was very inconvenient for me to go to school while there was a court case going on. A case about me not being at the right school there. The court heard my teachers and the principal as witnesses, too.

In regards to discrimination at this school, in the seventh grade the school bursar accused me of stealing. The head of our class humiliated me in front of the whole class, calling me a thief. My father complained and the issue was resolved.

**Most importantly I always wanted the**



**Court to finally establish that I was not**

**disabled. Now I know why I was declared to be disabled: because I am Roma.**

Right now I am travelling to Nyíregyháza from Budapest to get my school certificate from the Göllesz School. I want to work and I need to present my school certificate to the employers to certify how long I attended school and how I finished. I studied to be a baker but I could never complete my studies. This is why I ended up in Budapest.

I moved to the capital because I thought it would be easier for me to find a job and I could earn more here. I found a job cleaning in a big market hall, but when there was a change in my employer, I lost my job. It was a very good job because they paid me enough to support myself. Ever since I lost my job I have been looking for a job but everywhere they ask for my school certificate, so I need to go back to Nyíregyháza to get it. Now they want a primary school degree at every place.

I submitted five job applications, handing in my CV too, but never got any reply. My parents are concerned about me not having a job. My dad told me that I should move back home soon if I don't find a job, as maybe I could find something in Nyíregyháza.

He also said that I should act as a man. "You are 18 now, live your own life." To be honest, I would like to work as a baker but, unfortunately, I couldn't get the qualification. I failed in grade eleven so I had to quit school. I had to move to Budapest because there was no job in Nyíregyháza. It has been several months



now since I started looking for a job. I keep trying but no success.

**I think the reason why I can't find a job is because I'm a Roma. I wish Roma could get jobs the same way other people do. If I had finished secondary education, then they would talk and relate to me differently. Then I think I could get a job. Since I have no qualifications or a secondary school final exam, it's very hard to find a job.**

I was planning to finish my studies but I already turned 18 and I had also lost motivation. I spent one month on compulsory practice. I only missed one day because I was very sick. The next day I presented the doctor's note. They didn't say a word and because of this one day they didn't let me continue.

I was only notified about not being allowed to go to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade and having to repeat the 11<sup>th</sup> grade at the beginning of the academic year. I asked them if I could stay at the place where I did my practice but the principal said I had lost my good reputation there. I told the principal: if they really think that I will become nobody while others are given a chance, then there is nothing left for us to talk about. I told my parents what had happened. My dad was very disappointed with how things had ended, but he tried to encourage me. He suggested I should move to Budapest.

**In fact, my dream is to dance. I have danced for a long time and I've wanted to become a dance teacher since I was a kid. To pass on my knowledge to**

**others. My hobbies are dancing and music. Dancing makes me happy and cheers me up. I find myself in Roma dance.**

It comes from my father. I learnt it from him. I would like to share and pass on what I have received myself. I've already had the chance to show my talent; I used to perform in Hungary and even abroad. In a talent contest I won the first place. I also performed in China where I was given the title of the „king of dance.” I was finally able to show the whole world what I know.

## **INTER-SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN THE CITY OF GYŐR**

The city of Győr is the sixth largest in Hungary and one of the seven main regional centres of the country halfway between Budapest and Vienna — situated on one of the important roads of Central Europe. The Kossuth Lajos Primary School of Győr is located in an area in which most of Győr's Roma reside. According to official documents two thirds of the students in this primary school belong to the Roma minority. Further official documents underlined that the number and proportion of socially disadvantaged students is the highest in the Kossuth Lajos Primary School compared to other schools of Győr.

After extensive field visits and interviews with local Roma, CFCF filed an *actio popularis*<sup>14</sup> action against the municipality of Győr in 2008, requesting that the court determine that the municipality segregates Roma and socially disadvantaged children at school level. CFCF requested the Court to order the municipality to prohibit the launching of new classes in the primary school in which Roma and socially disadvantaged children are overrepresented. The case went to the Supreme Court, which upheld the findings of the Court of First Instance establishing that the municipality is responsible for segregation based on social class (socially impoverished status) but dismissed CFCF's claim ordering desegregation.

The Supreme Court stressed that a civil court cannot order the respondent to prohibit enrolment in a class in which the Roma and socially disadvantaged children would be overrepresented. The Supreme Court feared that such a judgement would lead to closing down the school, a consequence that would extend beyond the competence of a civil court. CFCF challenged the final decision of the Supreme Court in front of the Constitutional Court, claiming that the judgement is unconstitutional as it fails to provide effective remedy against segregation.

The Constitutional Court did not examine the petition on the merits but dismissed it on procedural grounds (17 June 2013) claiming that CFCF as an NGO acting on behalf of public interest is not entitled to submit a constitutional petition.<sup>15</sup>

CFCF, disagreeing with the arguments of the Constitutional Court and having exhausted all domestic remedies, submitted an application to the European Court of Human Rights in December 2013.

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<sup>14</sup> Actio popularis action means that an organization (such as CFCF) can go to court as a legal entity and can submit a complaint on its own right representing the interest of a group of unidentifiable people whose rights to equal treatment have been violated based on an essential quality of their personality.

<sup>15</sup> The Constitutional Court reasons that CFCF as an NGO is not directly affected by the decision of the Supreme Court, there is no fundamental right belonging to CFCF which has been violated by the judgment of the Supreme Court. The Constitutional Court stressed that only Roma children who were segregated in Győr have the right to challenge the decision of the Supreme Court. As a consequence, the Constitutional Court took the position that there is no room for actio popularis petition before the Constitutional Court and as a result, did not examine the case on merits.

## **K.M., A FORMER ROMA GIRL STUDENT IN THE SCHOOL**

My name is K.M. I am 18 years old and I used to go to the Kossuth Lajos Primary School. I graduated three years ago. My classmates were mostly Roma. I had one or two classmates who were non-Roma, but about 80 % of the students in the school belonged to the Roma minority.

The school was OK, more or less. On the one hand, it was good that this school was quite easy. I liked the fact that we didn't have to study a lot at home. We hardly got any homework. Teachers were not strict either. To describe an average class, I would say it was pretty cool, we were talking to each other or colouring our books. I remember that there were classes in which we were talking to the teacher or to each other the entire time. As for behavioural problems, I don't think I misbehaved.

There were some students who had problems with their behaviour, but I was not one of them. I had some Roma friends who went to different schools. They were complaining how hard it was for them.

They had to study more and they said we were so lucky that school was easy for us. In their school, there were only a few Roma

and the teachers were stricter, so these friends wanted to transfer to our school.

These were all Roma friends. I had some non-Roma friends too, the few non-Roma classmates, and I got along well with them.

**As for the teachers, some of them accepted us while others made it clear that they didn't; they were talking to us in a condescending manner, or they were snooty and high-minded towards us. For example, when we asked or requested something, these teachers were indifferent or unkind. But most of the teachers were fine, we got along. Some of them I actually liked.**

As for further education, some of my classmates went forward with their studies, while some of them gave birth and now they are at home. I study in the Kossuth Lajos Vocational School; I am going to be a tailor. I'm in my third year. I graduate next year.

I am the only one from my primary school class who studies in this vocational school. My sister goes to this school, too. I came to this school even though one of my teachers told me I should apply to a grammar school, where I can have the final exam, because she thought I was smart. But I was scared, because it's difficult. Some of my friends went to grammar school and they were

complaining that it was too difficult. I was afraid I could not perform well.

In fact, nobody from my primary school went to grammar school. Some classmates went to vocational school, but some of them did not even go to a vocational school. I had sometimes thought of studying somewhere else, but then I realised that this school is very close to my home, so I don't have to go far to get to school. In the meantime, my sister and some of my cousins enrolled in this school so we decided to stick together.

As for going to a different primary school, I'm sure my parents would not have allowed me to transfer to a school in a different city because of the long bus trip alone. Besides, I did not want a new atmosphere and new friends. Also, I didn't want to be the only Roma in the class.

I heard stories that in these (integrated) schools students harassed Roma. So I was afraid that I would not be accepted in the new school. But it was also important that my siblings were in the same school and I didn't want to travel to get to school every day. I felt safe in the Kossuth Lajos Primary School. We were afraid of possible conflicts in other schools.

In my current school I haven't had any conflicts because of my Roma background, but my sister and my cousin did.

**Some boys in the vocational school were shouting to them that Roma live on social allowances and similar things. They reported the incident to the principal, who punished the boys with a written notice or something. Ever since, no such thing has happened.**

At the time it happened, the three of us were the only Roma in the vocational school. In this school, there are still not that many Roma students. Romani students go to Eötvös School after primary school, but my parents didn't allow me to go there.

They wanted me to get a better education in another school. They didn't want me to go to a segregated Gypsy school again. Even though I wanted to go to Eötvös, my mom would not let me.

Now, after spending three years here at this school, I have some friends. Sometimes I regret that I didn't make non-Roma friends in the primary school because I might have chosen a different school and career path then. I do regret that I went to a segregated

school because in an integrated school I might have had studied a lot more.

**In a segregated school students can't focus, they don't study that hard, they misbehave. I think a teacher should be strict and have higher expectations, because this way, students will perform better. As for my children, I don't want my children to study in a segregated school. I want my children to have the best education possible.**

house with my family, to an area where mostly non-Roma live. I am really looking forward to it and I think it will have an impact on who I make friends with.

## **B.J., A FORMER STUDENT OF THE KOSSUTH LAJOS PRIMARY SCHOOL**

I started school in the Kossuth Lajos Primary School in 2002 and I graduated in 2011. I had to repeat the first grade as I was absent from a lot of classes. I had to go for regular treatment in the hospital because I was bitten by a dog as a small child. I missed six months from the kindergarten and about five and half months from school. I had to go to the capital for these treatments.

Currently I study at the Lukács Sándor Mechatronic and Mechanic Vocational School at the department of metal motor vehicle parts manufacturing. I have two more years before I finish school. Last year I was in year zero, which is a preparatory year when we studied a foreign language.

We could choose the language and I picked German. I would like to work at the Nimak Company; that's the reason I picked German. This is a company making master cylinders for motor vehicle production

I have never visited my non-Roma classmates in their home but it would be interesting to see how they live. I have already invited a few of them to give them a notebook for example. When we see each other in the street we greet each other and talk, that is normal.

But then what will happen after graduation, I'm not sure if we will keep in touch... It would be nice. We are moving to another



companies. I am doing my internship there now.

**I don't think it was a disadvantage for me to go to a weaker school. If one concentrates, then one can perform well here in Lukács Sándor as well. But, yes, it is true; there were no difficult requirements in Kossuth such as in Kazinczy or in other bigger schools.**



I became aware of this in 8th grade when I picked secondary school. My friends from soccer had all

been going to Radnóti and there were different requirements there.

**I don't know what my life would have turned out to be like if I had changed school and enrolled in a different primary school. I have had thoughts about what it might have been like if I had attended another primary school in the city which was not segregated.**

I wanted to attend Jókai but I couldn't. I wanted to go there because that school was closer to me. At that time we lived in the socialist-era housing complex in Marczalváros (Győr) and Jókai School was about 500 metres from our home.

After I finished primary school, I picked Lukács School because I was and am still crazy about cars. In Kossuth school I was asked why I did not continue my studies "normally". Then I answered that I loved cars and I would like to have a profession.

Furthermore, I will also have a Baccalaureate here. There are not many Roma students there. But I can see a few familiar faces that used to attend Kossuth. I am not the only Roma student there. I think they will stay, and they won't drop out. If they make an effort, surely. They will have to accommodate to things here, as they had to in Kossuth. But I think it depends on the person.

Besides school, I am registered as a regular player at Gönyű Sport Club. I would like to become a professional player, but I need many years to go till then and it doesn't work like that. I don't think I will be able to make a living on that only. But otherwise I am not the type of guy who would declare and boast that I was this big professional player. I am a player of the junior club but I train with the

adults. It's been 7 games that I've played with the adults.

I've been playing soccer for 13 years and I 'learnt there how to behave among people.' It was practically only through soccer that I met non-Roma children. If my other primary school classmates had done any sports, then they too would have learnt some discipline, regularity, and duty.



**Sport can teach you many things. The problem is that a child that goes to a segregated school won't get to know a person with a different "style." I used to hang out with Hungarian kids most of the time because of soccer. I actually no longer have any friends from my old school.**

I meet them only occasionally in the street. I actually cannot even remember the name of the head of my class. I lost practically all contact to my old school. I have always had the attitude that I look forward to the future and build on the past. There were a few teachers that I liked in Kossuth school. I liked Pista Horváth, who was a kayak trainer and was my physical education teacher.

He urged everybody to make a move in life and not just sit around and wait for things. I respected him immensely. He was my favourite teacher, but not because he was a cool guy or because we did not need to make an effort and run fast in his class. In fact, we did run fast; I am talking about something else. What I meant was that he helped me move further in life.

**It is not good for a child to go to a segregated school because it gets into their head that they are different – simpler.**

There are ways of behaviour that one picks up or doesn't and then later it is harder for them to integrate somewhere. Luckily I had no problem integrating here in this school.

## RESEGREGATION IN THE CITY OF NYÍREGYHÁZA

At the edge of the town of Nyíregyháza there is a Roma settlement called Guszev. In the mid-2000s, the children from the settlement went to the school located there because it was the closest school, and also because the school district was identical with the settlement. CFCF started visiting the settlement from the summer of 2006, trying to convince the town's leadership to close the school because it was segregated. First the town did not act and, as a result, CFCF sued the local government for segregation<sup>16</sup>.

In 2007, as a result of CFCF's court action and extensive negotiations, Nyíregyháza closed the segregated school in the Guszev settlement. Children continued their education in 6 other primary schools in the city, helped by school buses and a few former teachers from the closed-down school acting as mentors.

In 2011, the new mayor moved to have the settlement school reopened as part of the Greek Catholic Church's primary school in Nyíregyháza, providing the school building for free and committing substantial local funds for extra financial help. At the same time the local government stopped bussing children from the Roma settlement to integrated schools in the city centre.

The new school, the Sója Miklós Primary School, provides religious education in a segregated setting, as only Roma children residing in the Roma settlement are enrolled in this school. Alongside the Roma Education Fund, CFCF has been engaged in advocacy and lobbying against this move, as well as in negotiations with the Bishop of the Greek Catholic Church, to no avail. The judgement of the court of first instance was delivered on 28 February 2014 stating that the town and the Church unlawfully segregate Romani children in this school.

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<sup>16</sup> Segregation based on ethnic background (and other protected grounds listed in the Equal Treatment Law) is prohibited by law in Hungary.

## **P.M., A ROMA MOTHER RESIDING IN THE GUSZEV SETTLEMENT**

My child is currently enrolled to the Móricz Zsigmond Primary School. Earlier, he used to go to the settlement school because we belonged to that school district. But now I couldn't tell which school district we belong to.

There are some other Roma children living in this settlement who are also enrolled to Móricz, and a few children from the other Roma settlement have also been going to the Móricz School since the Benczúr Primary School was closed down.

Previously, there used to be only a few Roma in this school. Out of 29 students in my son's class, only 5 are Roma. There are no Roma-only classes; Romani students are evenly divided among the classes. There is no problem with the Roma in my son's class. They behave properly. I think Móricz is still an elite school.

Fellow students do not bully my son, and for me this is the most important thing. In my opinion, there would be more Roma enrolled in this school if the Sója Miklós Greek Catholic School was not so close to the settlement. On the other hand, in the Móricz School students have to pay „class money”

regularly to cover expenses of the class, which obviously discourages poor families.

All these expenses can get quite high. „Class money” is 800 HUF (approx. 2, 5 Euro) per month. This money is to cover soap and tissues. I think that this causes problems for some of the families. It also happened to me that I could not provide it for months, and the school called my attention to it. However, other families are better-off, in comparison to our family.

**Once my son had to skip a school excursion because I did not have the 2500 HUF (approx. 9 Euros) to cover the expenses. Imagine how hard it could be for families where there are 4-5 children.**

Those children who were transferred to the Móricz School after the Benczúr was closed down struggle the most. Once I heard a parent complaining that her child could not cope with the school and that she was willing to take her child to the Sója School in the settlement.

**Many families are simply not able to cover the school related expenses and this is why they decide to transfer their children to the Sója School.**

**Because at the Sója School you don't have to pay for anything.**

While books are still free in the Móricz School, supplies have to be provided by the parents. Usually this costs me around 6.000-10.000 HUF (20-33 Euros). The school is about to start and many families have nothing at all. There is an NGO, called Human-Net, that helps us in managing our debts, and they provide clothes donations sometimes. They opened their office in the settlement at the same time the segregated school was closed down.

Renáta Ádám, caretaker of the settlement, convinced the parents to choose the Sója School. Her strongest argument was that there would no longer be buses provided by the school from the settlement to schools in downtown; therefore, families will have to pay for the monthly pass.

My son is not entitled to the allowance provided by the municipality for a students' monthly pass, because it only takes 15 minutes for him to reach the school.

**When the school bus service was terminated, there were several children from the settlement who switched schools and enrolled in the Sója. I believe that those children even got coupons for clothes in the department store.**

However, I have no problem with the Greek Catholic Church, since I don't even know them.

**But there was no need for a school in the settlement because only Roma children go there. They are excluded from the outside world. I still don't understand why they reopened the school.**

I think the rest of the parents do not want to talk about these things because they are afraid of the head of the local Roma self-government, Terike. They don't want to ruin their relationship with her because she helped them before.

On the other hand, I have no idea as why Terike supports the Greek Catholic School so much. I guess she gains something out of it because in the past she was against the segregated school which was later closed



down, so it's very hard to understand why she likes and supports it so much now.

## INTER-SCHOOL SEGREGATION IN THE CITY OF JÁSZLADÁNY

The city of Jászládány had only one primary school until September 2003. On the initiative of the mayor of Jászládány, a private school – maintained by a foundation of which the mayor was a board member – was established in the same building with the public school to educate children who “wished to study.”

As a result of the opening of the new school, Roma and socially disadvantaged children – who could not afford to pay the tuition fee – remained in the public school, while non-Roma and well-off children enrolled in the private school. CFCF, together with a local Roma NGO, submitted a claim against the

municipality and the foundation.

On June 29, 2011, the Supreme Court ruled in favour of the CFCF claim arguing that there is segregation in Jászládány between the two schools, which are in comparable situations, and the segregation between them needed to be terminated.

The “how” of the desegregation was not prescribed, as the Court has no competence for that but it remitted the case to the first instance Court. Owing to the transfer of the school to the Klebelsberg Kuno School Maintenance Centre<sup>17</sup> (hereinafter KLIK) as of January 1, 2013, CFCF amended its claim and involved the new school maintainer to the procedure. The foundation school has been replaced with a Catholic school, therefore segregation in Jászládány still persists.

## A ROMA MOTHER TESTIMONY

The opening ceremony was held today at the school. The mayor said that we have the right to enrol our children anywhere, but if any problem will come up in connection with the kids or parents, we should not try to get help from her.

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<sup>17</sup> A state body that supervises and maintains all public schools in Hungary as of January 1, 2013.



As a Roma parent, I think that is why Roma kids have not enrolled in the new school. There was an academic year when the mayor distributed sport outfits for the students thanks to a foundation, and then parents were afraid of not getting support like this anymore if they enrol their kids in the new school. The mayor has also mentioned that she does not understand why the local Roma people asked for the help of a legal aid NGO.

Why didn't they talk about their problems with her instead?

**I would also like to add that Roma are not permitted to enter the mayor's office. Personally, I cannot reach her either, I have never managed to meet her since I moved here.**

The mayor's children go to the primary school of Szászberek. She took them away from Jászládány. But the principal has done the same; he has five kids. I am asking: why don't their children go to the same school with Roma students, and why are they taken away to a private school?

I talked to the principal of the school and he said that the children will be educated in religious classes. They will start the morning with a joint prayer. They will try and teach the

kids according to the church, so that the children will love and not hurt each other.

**I chose this school for my children because I had to get them out of the other school because they were maltreated. They were maltreated within and outside of the school, too. The principal did not care about this.**

I think that the principal of the new school is a good person. Previously he was the principal of the primary school of Szászberek and I heard a lot of good things about him. About 70% of the children in Jászládány go to the school in Szászberek. There are some Roma kids as well who go there; they go by a school bus every day. Every parent is content with this. I also wanted my kids to get enrolled there, but unfortunately somehow I never managed to due to space limits.

## **TESTIMONY OF A ROMA GIRL**

My name is Cs.E. and I am 14. This school is very bad. The things that are going on here – you cannot go to the bathroom because of that. And you don't want to go in because it is so smelly.

**They don't even clean in that school. And the kids are smoking in the bathroom. The teachers are cruel, they beat the children. They do all sorts of things. I am nervous because of a teacher every day.**

I hate her, I really hate her. She is vicious. If I don't do a thing, then she is cruel as well. She is threatening us that she will report us to the police and I will be taken away. She keeps telling me that the child benefit will be removed. And I didn't do anything. She is not only doing this with me. She is doing the same with the others. I cannot even ask her why she is doing this because she doesn't let me talk. She starts screaming immediately.

**We are 26 students in the class and all of them are Roma. I don't think there are any Hungarian students in the entire school. Only Roma.**

I go to „B” but there are no differences between the classes. Besides the teachers, this school is bad because there is always fighting there. Policemen are always there... sometimes the ambulance, too. The teacher hits the children too, sometimes. Once this special needs teacher hit this small kid so hard that his nose was broken. Because there are special needs classes in our

school. But I don't go there. These classes are in a different building.

The trauma I experienced at school was when I asked the IT teacher to be so kind and come and help me because I did not know how to operate the PC. Then he replied that he would not be so kind, and why I did not know how to operate the PC? Then he grabbed my hair and pulled it to the ground and pushed me through the door out of the classroom. I didn't tell anyone that this happened.

**They wouldn't have done anything, so it doesn't matter if I tell it to someone or not. This teacher, by the way, abuses others in class as well. They have this long stick and they hit the children with that.**

But not like that they hit the nails, no, they hit the back of the children. I don't know why they are doing this. The heads of the classes don't do anything. In my class this teacher regularly beats one of the girls and one of the boys. She hits their head with something that she shouldn't.

The head of my class, she only shouts at me. But with others – she regularly opens their bags and throws out everything inside and kicks them. This teacher expects the

children to talk back in foul language. Then she lets them be. I have a classmate who lives next door, and he talks to this teacher using bad language but the teacher doesn't say a thing. I don't talk back but she takes my bag and throws it on the floor.

I ask her „Mrs... why are you doing that?” And she tells me off, although I am not doing anything, meanwhile she doesn't say a word to those who use foul language and spit at her. Then she starts shouting. She keeps threatening to have my family's childcare benefit removed or that she will call the police if I asked my mom to come to school to help me.

Beside this, nothing else comes to my mind regarding me, but my sister... yes. The older kids were together with the little ones in daytime school care. And this older guy, 16-18 year-old, he beat my sister. Everybody had seen it, the teacher as well, but nobody did anything. They beat her for more than half an hour.

This teacher let this big guy kick her on the floor; her coat was torn and her earring was torn out of her ears. Her whole body was covered with bruises. The teacher said he did not get involved because he was afraid. This teacher is a man. We know that a guy from the Suki family beat my sister but we did not dare to tell them. This is a large family and they lead a bad lifestyle.

The police was called and they talked to the teacher but nothing happened. We went to see the doctor with my sis, but the doctor told us that he could not give us the report and that we would need to go to Berény, as they would give it to us there. But the trip would have cost 10,000 HUF and we could not afford that.

This school was not like this a long time ago. It started to be like this when I entered 5th grade. Before that, teachers did not hit children.

I would be happy to change school, to the church school, for example. But the teacher doesn't let me. Sometimes he tells me that he would sack me from school if I wanted to switch schools. I would like to continue my studies and become a massage therapist.

## **REOPENING OF A ROMA SCHOOL IN PILISCSABA**

In August 2013, CFCF was notified that a once closed Roma school, the Jókai Mór Primary School, had been reopened with fewer than 35 students in Piliscsaba. The state - as the new school maintainer - for unknown reasons decided to end desegregation in the city.

CFCF has paid several field visits to the settlement and negotiated with the school maintainer and the principal of the school. The Commissioner of Fundamental Rights initiated an investigation on the case. CFCF presented its arguments to the Commissioner and submitted evidence against the school and its maintainer. Further legal steps are subject to the report on the findings of the Commissioner.

Two Romani mothers whose children go to the segregated Jókai Primary School gave testimonies about their experiences with the school.

## MOTHER 1

My son was regularly abused by other children in the Jókai Primary School. I went to the school to complain because of this problem. I complained for 3 years regularly, but there was no change.

**And my son did not want to go to school because he was afraid of the other kids. He was mocked every time, for every reason. I was not content with the quality of the education either.**

In the first month of the school semester, a child from a family with a very bad reputation

was taken out of the school because this boy had almost set my son's jumper on fire with a lighter. After this incident I went to see the principal in the school, but the parent wanted to attack me. Things like this happened.

Last year, too, when my son was badly abused, I went to talk to the principal. The other parents came to my house and said that we should deal with these issues outside of the school. Then I told them it was not fair that my son had been beaten up, and they asked how I dared to report this to the principal and ask him to take more care of him. That is why I wanted to take my son to another school.

I wanted to take him to the German school (in which certain subjects are taught in German language) when he was in 3rd grade, but I did not manage to. The reason was the German language. The principal said that my son had not learnt any German so far, so he could not make up for that. He should have taken an exam but he could not speak German at all.

In that German school there are only about 3 Roma children per class. They are rejected at the enrolment. But fortunately there are no such incidents anymore in the school. Since the new principal arrived, things have changed. I think now they care more about the children. I have already met the new

principal. I noticed that he is direct, strict, but also forgiving.

After school my son and the other children play in the courtyard of the school. Then they have snack-time, and after 4 P.M. he comes home. They do not study during the day care. They usually play. He brings his bag home. But here at home, he does not study at all. He usually says that there is no homework to do.

I talked to the former head of his class who told me that his kit stays in the classroom. They do all the tasks at school. He has an exercise book but he does not use it in the afternoon. They do not study after 2 P.M. at all. He just colours pictures and plays.

Children spend the day-care time with this teacher called Tünde. Some children who have permission may leave the school at 3 P.M., while the others stay till 4 P.M.

**My son didn't want to go to the after school study hall<sup>18</sup> so far, but now he wants to, surely because his cousins tell him that the after-school study hall is very good.**

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<sup>18</sup> After school study halls („tanoda” as is called in Hungarian) are NGO-organized study centers which provide learning opportunities for children in school subjects (practice) and ideally in other fields as well such as music and sports. They are not supposed to be organized by schools and provide an informal, joyful learning environment.

Anyway, my boy likes to go to the Jókai Primary School. He says he likes it there. There are only 8 or 9 students in each grade, which is not many. In the first grade there are only 5 or 6 children enrolled.

They have a joint physical education class with the first graders. My son has not yet been to swimming class, but it's not compulsory anyway. But now no one goes swimming because they are covering the swimming pool. Previously he used to take taekwondo classes but he doesn't do it anymore. He was not behaving well and his father didn't let him do it. Sometimes he did not do his homework because of the taekwondo.

## MOTHER 2

Earlier, I wanted to have my two children enrolled in a different school because I was not satisfied with the principal or with the teachers, except for a few. I also didn't see anything in their studies, in their level of knowledge.

Szidó in particular was very much behind... She was in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, but her knowledge was at the level of a 2<sup>nd</sup> grade student. She could read and write all right but the multiplication table or the hours... And the children complained about the other children, too.

There were many poorly behaved children in this school and there still are... These were the problems.

I can see some changes now, I've noticed. This new principal, he is quite strong and strict. But I also heard bad things about this principal, too. Whether this is true or not, I don't know... I don't trust him for sure because I have only talked to him twice. I hear about him when the kids are coming home from school and they talk about him and say how strict the principal is and that he called the police.

The police are at the school about twice a week. I was at the parents' meeting recently and he said that if he cannot cope with a child, he calls the police. But last year and the year before, the kids went to school whenever they wanted. No matter if the classes started at 8 A.M. At half past 8 they were still loitering around in the streets. Then they went in the school and nothing happened...

There are still kids who behave very badly but fewer... A few students got exempted from school and they have to take exams<sup>19</sup>.

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<sup>19</sup> In Hungary children can get exempted from attending school daily due to various reasons such as regular professional sports activity, participating in certain professional art projects (e.g. acting). Those who get the status of „home student” will have to take end of the term exams. It has become common in recent years that children with whom it is difficult to cope with are given this status. However, these students do not benefit from this: they learn

This is thanks to the principal who removed the bad kids. He told them to become „home students,” that is, to study at home and then come to school only for the exams at the end of the semester.

**The worst kids all attended school here last year, but now, from that difficult family, only half of the kids go to school as regular students. The nicest.**

The other reason I wanted to take out the children from this school was the lice. I spent 2000 HUF (app. 6, 6 Euro) every week to prevent them from getting lice. Despite this, they brought lice home anyway. I treat their heads every Sunday now, too. Still, after every Sunday lunch, I do this because there are some children from that family that go to this school.

Now they have dance classes after school. Also, the school takes them to swimming class in Budapest. They can do boxing or play soccer.

Jenny goes swimming. There is horse-riding, too, but so far only the children from the first grade can go. They will open it for the elder children soon. Until now, there was nothing

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very little and drop out early.

available at this school. All this came with the new principal.

They come home every day at 4 PM and then they leave immediately and go back to the after-school study hall. Jenny attends as well, but she is in a lower grade and so she can only stay until 4 P.M. She is home earlier today because today is a sports day at school. She was at home at noon already.

When Jenny was in 2<sup>nd</sup> grade and Szidó in 4<sup>th</sup>, I tried to enrol them in Jászfalu. I actually know about 2 other parents who wanted to have their children enrolled in Újfalu but they have the same story as us. We talked to the principal personally during the summer break and she said that she would ask the teacher how many students there are in her class.

The next day she called me saying that she had talked to this teacher and said that there was no place for Jenny for sure because they needed to reserve 2 places for those who move to Pilisjászfalu. She said that she was obliged to accept those.

There were 18 students in that class. But she also said that I could take Szidónia. Then I said that I needed some time to think it over. But I didn't want to take them to different schools so they both stayed in Jókai.

And also at the time when Szidóka was at kindergarten just about to start first grade, then I wanted her to go to the German school. But we were notified that she was not accepted at the school due to lack of space. And I thought that I was not going to take a first grader to a school in a different village.

I knew that she would not be accepted in Ward because no children from Piliscsaba go there. Only children from Klotildiget go there and the millionaire's kids from Vörösvár. That is an elite school, Catholic. Not a single Roma child goes there. Only children whose parents are businessmen.

We haven't tried Jászfalu since then. The reason is that Aunt Kati, who is Szidó's teacher, said that there would be a new principal at Jókai and she was sure that there would be positive changes. She asked me to wait, just wait and leave the child at the school for the moment.

If I could choose any school, I would like my children to go to Jászfalu. They say it is a really good school. A few kids from Piliscsaba go there. We were thinking about Tinnye as well, but travelling there is quite complicated. In winter it would be impossible to get there. There are many accidents around there. The roads are impossible.

Near Garancs there is a death-bend – many people have died there already. In winter it is icy and covered with snow. I cannot drive and my partner works, so we would need to go by bus. Because of travelling, we didn't choose this, although they say it is a very good school there.

**We are disturbed by the fact that our children go to school only with other Romani children. I don't like the fact that they go to school with only Romani children... It's like the children are excluded.**

In Jászfalu the children go to school together. There are more Hungarians there. 10-15 years ago, or even more... when children went to school, then you could see 40-50 first graders. Now there are 3 maybe. My children are not problematic but there are enough here who are. Of course, one cannot be happy with this school with only three students. If it were a normal school as it was when I was a kid, then there would be more students here.

**Even then, in my time, they knew that I was Roma or this other kid was Roma too, but there were Hungarians as well and we went to school together. A Hungarian child would study the same**

**as I did. The problem is that this school has a very bad reputation.**

And the parents stopped enrolling their children here. Szidó has improved a lot in her studies. But this is due to the after school study hall. But which school could I take them to? This school is stigmatized: people say this is the Gypsy school. A long time ago, even children from Liget went to this school. All of us were together here.

#### **HARASSMENT AND RETALIATION OF A ROMA GIRL IN A LUTHERAN PRIMARY SCHOOL**

A Romani father contacted CFCF in early 2013 as his daughter was harassed and discriminated against by the principal of a Lutheran primary school in Albertirsa. The class where his daughter belonged had been divided into two groups: a weaker and a stronger (more "advanced") one.

The daughter had been put into the weaker group despite the fact that she had very good grades. The father issued a formal complaint to the principal. The father feared that the decision was biased on the basis of the Roma origin of his daughter. After the complaint was formulated, the principal started to harass the girl.

First, CFCF tried to mediate but it became obvious that the principal was not open for negotiations. CFCF learnt that there were other non-Roma - parents as well who had complaints against the principal. CFCF visited the parents in Albertirsa and collected their complaints in April 2013. After further meetings and correspondence with the Bishop and the school maintainer, the father decided to enrol his daughter in another school because the negotiations and formal letters did not bring positive results. The family decided not to take any further legal actions.

## **TESTIMONY OF THE FATHER**

The interview with the father was taken prior to her transfer to the primary school maintained by the state.

My daughter goes to the school maintained by the Lutheran church. She is in 5th grade. I did not enrol my child to the Lutheran Primary School of Albertirsa to make her learn bad things.

**I enrolled my daughter there because I thought that there would be order and discipline there, and they would provide a normal education. But**

**unfortunately they did not, absolutely not.**

As time passed I learnt what was really going on in that school. My daughter's class was divided into two study groups: one group for the mediocre students and one for the advanced ones.

**She was put into the mediocre group although she had good results, a 4.5 GPA.**

In grades 1 to 4 she had very good results. As she started the 5th grade this September, her class was divided into these two study groups. However we were not informed about it. The principal and the former head of her class did not say anything to us about this. I learnt about these study groups from a Roma parent in February.

I went to complain about this to the principal with another parent. This parent asked some question and the principal started to argue with me. At that point I knew that we could not talk about it in a decent manner.

So I wrote a letter to the school in which I asked the principle to let me see those of my daughter's Maths tests on which the teacher based his decision to put my daughter into

the mediocre group, and to get more information about the study groups.

**The reaction was the following: “I didn’t know that you were so stupid that you learnt about the study groups only now.” Then I thanked her for her kind words and asked her to answer my request officially, pointing out that she had to do it within 14 days.**

During these 14 days period my daughter faced discrimination. She got two written warnings from the head of her class. She has seven lessons every Tuesday but during the 6<sup>th</sup> she is free and students have lunch then. Petra does not eat at the school cafeteria – we do not pay her the set school lunch menu. At that time I regularly bring her some snack, muesli.

On that day I forgot to pack her a snack, so I went to the grocery store with her to buy something to eat. It is known that kids normally go out after the 5th lesson to the store that is very close to the school, just across the street. My child was under parental control while she was out of school, as she was with me. Then I accompanied her back to the school.

**She got her first warning because of this, because of leaving the school. It**

**was not only my daughter who left the school after the 5th lesson, but only she got a warning.**

That is one of the cases that happened during those 14 days. On the following Tuesday again, while she had an “empty” 6th lesson, 12 students stayed in the classroom. Five of them were at the board, and they were scribbling on it while the others were running around in the classroom. She got another warning the next day.

I wanted to go to the principal to ask why she got two warnings. I sound-recorded our conversation with my phone. The principal was very hurried with me. As it was revealed, my daughter did not get the second warning because she was writing on the board, but because there was a mark next to the board on the wall.

They wanted to charge me for the price of the damage, since they alleged that my daughter caused the damage. I wanted to go to the principal and ask why only my daughter got a warning, as 12 students were in the classroom at that time.

All of them should have got a warning or no one. God knows when this mark got to be on the wall. Finally, only two children got a warning, my daughter and another Roma

child. No one else, only them. The teacher gave the two written warnings at the same time, dated the same day although these were two different cases that happened on two different days. That is awful.

The head of her class and the principal used to work together in another public school in Pilis. They have been colleagues for a very long time. That school in Pilis is a Roma-only school with a very bad reputation.

I heard stories that Roma kids are charging their teachers to go to the toilet. People say that those teachers resent Roma children for this and they have carried this with them. I'm sure that these teachers remember these things and at a certain level you can feel that they hate Roma. Why did only my kid and another Roma child get a written warning? Why not all the 12 students who were in the classroom that day?

Other parents were criticizing me for always going to the school to complain. The principal likes people who are less smart than she is so she can mislead them. And she is very annoyed when someone is aware of his or her rights.

Once a father of my daughter's classmate called me on the phone. His child is in the 'advanced' group. We were talking about the school for more than an hour on the phone.

He said that he totally agreed with me when I expressed my concerns about these issues at the school. But he also said that he would not stand up for me openly, because he was just happy for managing to enrol his child to this school.

I think I will just transfer my child to another primary school.

## **CLASS LEVEL SEGREGATION IN KALOCSA AND DIRECT DISCRIMINATION IN LAW SCHOOL**

### **B. V. TESTIMONY**

I am from Kalocsa, Hungary. I went to kindergarten, primary school and grammar school there. Now, I live and study in Budapest. I am a 5th year student at the faculty of law of Eötvös Loránd University. In the primary school I attended, there were normal A, B, and C classes, but I was lucky because in the year I started school, the Soros Foundation financed a pilot program on integrated education.

In my class, there was a mixed group of girls and boys, and 8 Roma and 8 non-Roma students studied together for 2 years. It was absolutely well organised, and the main point was that we learned to read and write together, and participated in workshops as well.

Two years later the program was terminated. I asked my teacher about this program, and she said that they managed to reach very good results with us and that the program had a great effect. The second year, however, was not financed anymore by the foundation, and our teachers wanted to continue it. But as there was no budget for it and the teachers got exhausted, we were put into a normal class then.

**There were A, B, C classes and obviously, class 'C' was the "Gypsy" class<sup>20</sup> and the so called "difficult" and overage students were put in this class. They openly appointed a very strict teacher to head this class, and this teacher did not use humane methods when a child was mischievous.**

To admit the truth, I studied in a very little school at the outskirts of the city for four

years. Then we had to go to the centre from 5th to 8th grade. That was a bit hard, because it was a new and strange environment. I had only 3 Roma classmates.

The other guys, who came from different schools, were put into class C. I wasn't put into class A either, despite the fact that my parents asked the school to put me in class A, as they knew what it meant to be a student in class A, B, or C, but even so I got into class B. In class A there were no Roma at all.

In the grammar school I was the only Roma student, and this was very difficult especially because it was a new environment with new people.

**I also had financial problems. It was not easy to buy the books, I didn't have nice clothes and kits and I had the cheapest from everything. Then I found a little group of friends who stayed with me even until now, and that added a lot of positive things beside the negative experiences.**

I had a teacher who suggested that we have a short presentation in class about Roma as a minority, within the subject of society and ethics, and I keenly took it on and presented

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<sup>20</sup> The word „Gypsy” is „cigány” in Hungarian.

on the origin of the Roma people and other topics.

**After graduating at the grammar school I was accepted into the Faculty of Law at Eötvös Loránd University and the faculty of fine arts in the department of painting and graphics, but in the end I chose the faculty of law.**

There have been some bad experiences during my studies here because of my ethnicity.

For example, I lived in a dormitory during my first year at university, and as I got home in the evening, some students were drinking, getting drunk in the corridor, and shouting **“death on you, gypsies.”** It was so frustrating that I was afraid to enter the corridor in the evening while they were drinking.

**As for the professors, obviously, sometimes they make an implicit note like “you know who” when they refer to Roma.**

Once I had a problem when I had an oral exam about the history of the Hungarian state and law. A guy took the exam before

me. He spent 45 minutes in the room and finally got a mark ‘2’<sup>21</sup> for his, in my opinion, invaluable knowledge.

Then I sat down and got two questions that I was happy about, as I was confident I knew the answers. I answered the questions, but then the teacher said that it was not enough.

I asked him to ask me more questions because I thought that I would also be worth a 2, so at least I would not fail. Then he said that he wouldn’t ask any more questions, because what I said was absolutely not enough. It was clear that it wouldn’t matter what I said, as he would bring me down anyway. Then he asked if I could evoke a text from a code of law (the “Golden Bull”) in the language of the 16th century. I said that I couldn’t because that was not what we had to learn for this exam.



**He then said that “Miss, as you know, somebody of your type always has to perform better than anyone else.” I ran away and cried.**

<sup>21</sup> Out of 1 to 5, 1 is fail, while 5 is the best mark in Hungary.

I even forgot my GPA certificate there; when I calmed down I went back to pick it up and I made a complaint. As nobody else was in the classroom at that time, I could not prove how the teacher had acted.