

# **SCHOOL AS GHETTO**

## Systemic Overrepresentation of Roma in Special Education in Slovakia



### **ROMA EDUCATION FUND**

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# CONTEXT

- Romani children are overrepresented in special education in most countries in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE)
  - European Court of Human Rights decision in *D.H. and Others vs. the Czech Republic*
- UNICEF (2005) study of 23 countries in CEE:
  - Slovakia had highest enrolment rate in basic special education programs in 2001
  - Enrolment rates in special education increased in the period 1989-2001
- OECD (2007): “Streaming at an early age tends to increase the impact of socio-economic background on student performance.”
  - Slovak education system divides children into streams 3 years earlier than OECD average (later only than Austria and Germany)
- The Slovak government has expressed a commitment to reduce the number of Romani children in special education
  - REF seeks to assist the Slovak government in meeting this commitment

# AIMS AND APPROACH

- **Aims of the study**

- Quantify representation of Roma in special education for children with mental disability
- Analyze factors accounting for level of representation
- Provide sound empirical basis for measures to address situation

- **Approach**

- Complements country studies on Czech Republic (2008) and Serbia (to be published in 2009)
- Combines quantitative and qualitative research
- Statistically representative sample allows conclusions about country as whole

# ENROLMENT

Type of school	Number of all pupils enrolled	Number of Romani pupils	Proportion of Romani pupils
Special primary schools	13 807	8 200	59.4%
Special classes in standard schools	5 590	4 795	85.8%
Special secondary schools	5 114	1 794	35.0%
<b>Totals</b>	<b>24 511</b>	<b>14 789</b>	<b>60.3%</b>

*Source:* Author's calculations based on director and teacher estimates from field research conducted for this study

# OTHER KEY FINDINGS

- **Children in special education face extremely limited possibilities for:**
  - (Re-)integration to standard education
  - Further education
- **Special education is a poor investment...**
  - *For individuals:* They cannot find stable work
  - *For the state:* Persons with incomplete primary education or who completed basic education in practical school cannot be expected to provide a net financial benefit to the state

# BARRIERS TO CHANGE

- **Level 1: Policy**
  - Official awareness of problems appears relatively recent
  - Lack of coherence among official prescriptions
- **Level 2: Institutions**
  - Normative funding system creates perverse recruitment incentives
  - Conflict of interest between special schools and special pedagogical advising centres
- **Level 3: Families**
  - Attraction of special education
  - Problems in standard education
  - Insufficient awareness of consequences of enrolment in special education

# RECOMMENDATIONS - 1

1. Set target for eliminating overrepresentation of Roma in special schools and classes.
2. Discontinue psychological testing as a mechanism for assigning children to special education in pre-school and the early years of primary school.
3. Apply mechanisms for identifying and reversing inappropriate placement in special education.
4. Abolish special primary schools for children with mild mental disability.
5. Distinguish explicitly and clearly between mental disability, social disadvantage, and ethnicity.

# RECOMMENDATIONS - 2

6. Promote and practice informed parental consent.
7. Ensure access to ethnically integrated standard pre-schools.
8. Review and revise the school funding scheme to create incentives for integration of Roma in mainstream schools and classes.
9. Restructure the system of advising centres.
10. Provide appropriate pre- and in-service training for education staff.
11. Collect and maintain ethnically disaggregated data in conformity with EU standards on data protection.



**THANK YOU!**



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