

SOCIAL INCLUSION THROUGH EDUCATION
IN HUNGARY:
POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

VERA MESSING, MÁRIA NEMÉNYI AND JÁNOS ZOLNAY



The research leading to these results has been conducted under the auspices of the project EDUMIGROM: Ethnic Differences in Education and Diverging Prospects for Urban Youth in an Enlarged Europe, and has received funding from the European Commission's Seventh Framework Programme (FP7/2007-2013), under Grant Agreement SSH7-CT-2008-217384-EDUMIGROM.

ABOUT EDUMIGROM

The EDUMIGROM research project aimed to study how ethnic differences in education contribute to the diverging future prospects of minority ethnic youth and their peers in multiethnic urban settings. It made a departure by recognising that, despite great variations in economic development and welfare arrangements, recent developments seem to lead to similar disadvantages for certain groups of second-generation immigrants in the western half of the continent and Roma in Central Europe. Although formally enjoying social membership with full rights in the respective states, people affiliated with these groups tend to experience new and intensive forms of involuntary separation, marginalisation, social exclusion, and second-class citizenship. By selecting specific communities and schools in nine member states of the European Union (the Czech Republic, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), the project explored in a cross-country comparative perspective how existing educational systems, policies, practices, and experiences in markedly different welfare regimes contribute to these processes of "minoritisation". Considering that schools are key agents in knowledge distribution and socialisation, the project examined how educational practices in compulsory education conclude in reducing, maintaining, or deepening inequalities in young people's opportunities for advancement and their access to the labour market, and, concurrently, how they are forging the social contacts, interethnic conduits, and strategies of identity formation of adolescents from diverse ethnic backgrounds.

© EDUMIGROM

The EDUMIGROM Consortium holds copyright for the Papers published under the auspices of the project. Reproduction in whole or in part of this text is allowed for research and educational purposes, with appropriate citation and acknowledgement.

Copyedited by Tom Bass

CENTER FOR POLICY STUDIES
CENTRAL EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

Nádor utca 9
H-1051 Budapest, Hungary;

info@edumigrom.eu,
www.edumigrom.eu

Background: Roma and education in Hungary

The collapse of state socialist regime brought about fundamental changes in all spheres – political, economic, and societal – of Hungarian society, all of which have considerably affected both Hungary's majority and its ethnic minorities. On the political level the one-party political leadership was replaced by democratic parliamentary arrangement and the centralised public administration was changed into a decentralised municipal system. As a result, each settlement, even the smallest village, elected its own municipal council and mayor and this concluded in an extreme fragmentation of local politics and policymaking (Pálné Kovács 2001). This change brought about an overly decentralised arrangement for education: local municipal councils became responsible for organising public education, local welfare, the institutional structure of primary and secondary schools, local pedagogical programmes, and curricula. This had major consequences on the workings of the entire educational system. Due to significant differences in the sizes of the local educational markets and the impacts of diverse historical heritages, social and personal conditions, and local political leaderships, inequalities among schools have grown significantly in terms of human resources and infrastructure.

The democratic transition also significantly changed the political and legal situation of ethnic minorities. Act No. LXXVII of 1993 on National and Ethnic Minorities provided the right to registered ethnic and national minorities (among them the Roma) to form their political representation in the form of minority local self-governments, which had – at least formally – a say in various fields of public and local politics that concerned members of the minority community. They received the right, for example, to establish "ethnic" schools or to comment or veto the curriculum of the local public school if it had a programme targeting ethnic minorities.

Roma have been the major losers of the transition of the political and economic regime over the last two decades. This general observation is supported by statistical data, revealing that the disadvantages of the Roma population – with regard to unemployment, low education, poor living and health conditions, and shorter life expectancy – have dramatically increased, and despite some improvements in residential and housing conditions in certain areas, their segregation has been further increased: new Roma colonies and ghettoised slums in have begun to appear in larger cities (Kemény, Havas, and Kertesi 1994, Kemény, Janky, and Lengyel 2004). Employment rates began to fall already during the economic crisis of the late 1980s, and this process accelerated due to privatisation, the deterioration of outdated branches of industry, the ceasing of agricultural cooperatives, the following disintegration of rural communities, and the loss of external markets after 1989. With the collapse of the state socialist economy – and the closing of large industrial enterprises – masses of Roma, characteristically employed as unskilled workers, lost their jobs, and therefore often their subsistence, too. Presently, the most significant share of working-age Roma are excluded from the primary labour market and are forced into the arena of unstable and short-term public employment complemented by low paid and unregistered daily work in the construction industry

and agriculture, providing unstable employment and little or no security. By 2003, only 28 per cent of Roma men aged 15–54 held jobs, and the employment rate was down to 15 per cent among Roma women (Kertesi 1995, Kemény 1997, Kemény, Janky, and Lengyel 2004). The increasing residential segregation of Roma into regions of economic depression, the continuing economic crisis of the 2000s, and increasing discrimination on the labour market has most probably further reduced the proportion of officially employed Roma in Hungary. Alongside the growth of social and economic disadvantages of the Roma minority and the widening of the income gap between them and majority society, an internal differentiation started within the Roma population, whereby a small group of entrepreneurs and intellectuals developed, facing masses living in despair and dependent on the welfare system. (Dupcsik and Vajda 2008).

Residential and housing conditions represent a critical factor in the fate of Roma, who characteristically live in dilapidated, overcrowded buildings with little home comforts in segregated colonies, slums, and neighbourhoods located in economically disadvantaged areas, with no perspective of employment or upward social mobility. Another important factor in the increase of poverty is of a demographic nature: the fertility rate of Roma women is significantly higher when compared to the ethnic majority while the life expectancy is radically – over a decade – lower. Since urbanisation was important during the last decades of state socialism, housing conditions were somewhat improved, but these positive tendencies stopped or were even reversed during the 1990s when new forms of segregation started to emerge (Havas and Kemény 1995, Kertesi 2000). As a result of a process of re-ruralisation (i.e., escaping from the expensive cities due to the collapse of the "socialist" heavy industry, the chance for work, and acceptable living conditions evaporated), most Roma live in the northeast and southwest of Hungary (parts of which serving as the sites of EDUMIGROM empirical research): an estimated half of them reside in small villages, while the other half are concentrated in urban slums of the deteriorated industrial areas in these regions and in the capital, Budapest, respectively. As a result of the process of "spontaneous segregation",¹ 72 per cent of Roma lived in more or less segregated circumstances by 2003 and 40 per cent were residents in small villages (Kemény, Janky, and Lengyel 2004). The "ghettoisation" of villages and small regions has been intensified due to "white flight" of middle-class families. If the middle-class starts to abandon the settlement (move away or simply work and use public services – education, healthcare – elsewhere), the trend seems to be irreversible. The poor, and first of all the Roma, are trapped in those settlements and their surrounding institutions.

Under-education became a major factor in the exclusion of Roma from the labour market, in the two decades since the transition. This is because the demands and requirements characterising the labour market of the market economy involve new types of challenges, producing a shift in Roma educational disadvantages from the level of primary to secondary education. In other words, although young Roma have better chances to complete primary education since the 1990s (Havas and Kemény

1 "Spontaneous segregation" was a widely used expression in the Hungarian public discourse of the 1990s with a similar meaning to Western sociologists' expression of "white flight".

1995; Kemény, Janky, and Lengyel 2004), they are still lacking opportunities to receive the secondary or higher education that has become the critical factor concerning employment opportunities. At best, young Roma continue their studies in vocational schools, but the inflexible structure of these institutions, which are incapable to accommodate their training to actual market demands, and the delay of a radical reform in this sphere of public education, contributed to the growth of a redundant workforce. Thus the grasp of the vicious cycle of poverty – lack of education – unemployment – poverty – has become ever more powerful, constantly widening the social distance between the Roma minority and the social majority (Kertesi 2000).

Increasing social and residential segregation also makes its imprints on the school system, reflecting a widening gap in performance and educational opportunities linked with social status. According to the PISA surveys (OECD 2005, 2010), the Hungarian educational system is one in which parental background is not only the most determining factor in students' academic performance, but education even amplifies these disparities. Twenty-six per cent of the variance in reading competences is explained by students' family backgrounds, which is not only the highest rate among OECD countries but almost twice the OECD average. This fact may be attributed to several parallel reasons: extreme regional inequalities, the above-described acute fragmentation of the municipal system which is in part responsible for the financing and maintaining the schools, and the free choice of schools by families accompanied with the above-mentioned "white flight," all adding up in the extreme disparities of teaching and infrastructural quality of schools. These conditions, together with numerous harmful factors associated with unfavourable family origins, underpaid and often disillusioned teachers, hostile interethnic relations, and prejudice toward poor and Roma students, contribute to the diverging performance and opportunities of 14-year-old children in Hungary (Dupcsik and Molnár 2008, Zolnay 2010).

Some additional information has to be added here concerning the processes characterising everyday life and schooling of Roma children. First, the process of segregation: local politicians, even if dedicated to desegregation and social integration, are most typically incapable of managing the problem of enduring low employment, poverty, and increasing educational segregation of their socially marginalised population among circumstances of fragmented municipal system. One important driving power behind increasing educational segregation is the flight of non-Roma middle-class families as a consequence of which schools in smaller settlements or poorer districts of larger urban areas become "ghetto schools". Schools often try to mitigate white flight by offering internal separation for middle-class students in the form of initiating parallel classes, one of which offers specialisation or intensive language teaching (separate class for talented students in maths, bilingual classes, etc.). A third factor in the increasing gap between schools is systematic: a special type of secondary school, six- and eight-year *Gymnasia*, operating mainly in larger settlements are institutions which "cream out" the best performing, most talented, and highest status students in the mid of their primary school career causing early institutional selection in settlements where they function.

The result of these complex and intersecting processes is, that despite normative (per capita) financing of education from the state budget, municipalities in difficult financial straits use these restricted resources for tasks that do not have even indirect bearing on education. As a consequence, students studying in "selective" elite schools or classes receive high-quality education, with a number of extracurricular activities and pedagogical services, while students in "ghetto" schools of the poorest settlements, which are in desperate need of educational services, are provided low-quality education and are deprived even the most essential services, such as afternoon classes (a non-compulsory but generally provided educational service in the course of which children receive teachers' help in doing their homework and making up any arrears), adequate heating and sanitary conditions, and school equipment, not to mention leisure, cultural, or sport activities.

After the above description of the complex nature of the causes leading to extreme inequalities in the educational system of Hungary, it might have become evident that a change in the present situation necessitates a complex reform not only of legal regulations in the educational sector but also in the municipal system (including its tasks, rights, and financing). These changes necessitate laws that require two-thirds of the votes. In the parliamentary election held in April 2010, the right-wing Fidesz Party won an unprecedented two-thirds majority in the Hungarian Parliament, thus the party was, in theory, empowered to modify or change all the regulations that have proved to be an utter obstacle to meaningful educational reforms. The new government coming into office in June 2010, however, had an ambivalent attitude towards educational policies targeting social inclusion, and so far it is uncertain how profoundly it wishes to rebuild the legal framework and financing system of public education, and how committed it is towards enhancing equity in education (Kende 2011, Messing 2011, Radó 2011).

Framing of public and political discourse on education and the 'Roma question' in Hungarian society

The necessity of ethno-social inclusion in education is a widely debated issue in public and political discourse on education. The majority actors in the Hungarian political arena have recognised that education is an essential tool for integrating socially marginalised communities that are permanently excluded from the labour market and condemned to long-term poverty and destitution. This aim has been arrived at now after twenty years of intensives discussion and debate in the political, policy, and public arenas. The most powerful policy agenda of the left-wing government ruling between 2002 and 2010 was ethno-social integration. Still, as a consequence of the above-described fragmentation of the local municipal system, municipalities' capability to influence segregation depended on their size, the social composition of the settlement, and power relations in the local educational market. Small settlements,

for example, with a dominantly poor and/or Roma population operating one primary school cannot do anything about the ethnically and socially segregated schooling of their children.

The public and policy discourse on education and more specifically, its role in providing equal chances for Roma and non-Roma children, have been extensive in the past couple of years. Several frames of argumentation have come up in the political and public discourse. In the following section we introduce the most dominant ones.

'Colour-blind' approaches

A colour-blind approach to education was the dominant attitude of governments – both right- and left-wing administrations – in the past two decades. The educational integration policy during the period 2002–2010 also has followed this framework, when it defined its targets in terms of social disadvantages and not ethnicity. The government considered ethnic and social segregation as merely a symptom of extreme inequality within the broader context, disregarding its ethnic dimension. Without using ethnic terms, two target groups were named instead: *multiply disadvantaged children* and *children with special educational needs*. There are objective criteria for the category of "multiply disadvantaged": it involves families where the level of education of the parents is not higher than eighth grade, and that, due to their low income per capita, are entitled to regular child protection support. Undoubtedly, this policy assumed that not only Roma pupils are affected by an unequal distribution of educational goods and services, but rather every pupil who does not have the opportunity to choose among schools or who does not have access to at least medium-quality education. The introduction of the other category – children with special educational needs – has emerged in the anti-segregation discourse, as well. According to this conception, children with learning difficulties or with physical or mild mental disabilities have to be integrated with their majority peers in regular classes. Following the contemporary debates among experts, politicians and representatives of civil movements, it is obvious that to some extent, this category also overlaps with the category of Roma children from disadvantaged family backgrounds who lack adequate early education in kindergarten and who are often considered as immature for school at school-age and, consequently, frequently are directed into "special" schools originally established for mentally handicapped children (Kende and Neményi 2006).

The policy was built on positive incentives: constructing integrated classes was supported by providing additional financing for improving infrastructure, additional teacher training including courses on innovative pedagogical methods, and courses on the specificities of teaching a socially and ethnically diverse student population. Another important aim of this policy framework was desegregation. A prevalent institutional formation of ethnic segregation (not only in Hungary but the entire Central European region) was a separate type of special schools. The whole framework of educating special need children was reexamined: both the process of defining who falls into the category of "special needs" and

the necessity of maintaining segregated institutions were revised and the need to integrate these children – when possible – into regular schools was formulated as a priority. Still, in many cases, the integration of special needs students in advanced grades (or mature age) proved a failure, because it was not tied to any further special care or services needed by these children in regular schools.

Many critiques have been raised concerning measures aiming at integration. First, the policy could not do anything about schools in marginalised, ghettoised settlements; second, it was also unable to treat the consequences of white flight; third, integrating special needs children at an advanced age proved to be problematic in practice. Leading politicians – both on the right- and left-wing – also questioned whether educational integration was the best route to social integration. The dominant majority of municipal councils providing schools – irrespective of their political affiliation – considered the government's arguments incorrect. Local educational officials interpreted the government's claims as a violation of parents' right for free school choice and found that, in practice, non-Roma pupils were forced to attend schools and classes together with socially disadvantaged Roma peers.

As a response to accelerated process of white flight and municipalities' resistance to desegregation, two elements were included in the Education Act after amendments in 2007 that restricted the schools' opportunities for selection and limited the municipalities maintaining schools in their practices reinforcing segregation:

- *Rules referring to reshaping catchment areas* were amended to make sure that in settlements where more primary schools operate the proportion of multiply disadvantaged pupils would not differ between their catchment areas by more than 25 percent.
- *Rules referring to admittance of children from outside the catchment area* were amended so that the freedom of schools to select freely from children applying from outside their catchment area was severely restricted.

A main conclusion about the reforms might be that the process could not handle the immense power of the counteracting middle classes, and only those few towns were successful in implementing educational integration where the elite and leadership of the town had an honest belief in the policy's success on the long-run. In those towns – and these represent the majority – where the local elite was convinced that separating their children from low-status peers was in their best interest, integration was unsuccessful. This is also supported by the fact that educational segregation – despite powerful integration measures by the government – has increased in the last decade (Kertesi and Kézdi 2010). An exceptionally telling index of inequalities in public education demonstrates that, while in the case of pupils learning in OECD countries the differences in performance of reading and comprehension are due to differences between schools is 36 percent, in the case of Hungarian pupils this proportion is 71 percent. The performance of children at school and chances for further education is determined by early school choice to a much greater extent than in most other OECD countries.

There is, however, a significant, though small development: reading competences, as measured by PISA, have improved due to the decrease in the number of the lowest performers (functionally illiterate) by 2009. Some experts attribute this improvement to the increase of pedagogical quality in those schools participating in the integration programme and the decrease of the number of students with special needs studying in segregated institutions (Szira 2011, Radó 2011).

'Colour-conscious' approaches

Although the dominant approach to treating inequalities was framed by colour-blind policies, several measures were introduced that applied a colour-conscious approach. Such measures are justified by considering that ethnic "otherness" adds to the disadvantages that Roma children suffer in education due to their deprived social status. Affirmative interventions are all the more needed because prejudices and hostility on the part of the majority often pervert programmes to reduce social and educational inequalities in a colour-blind way and conclude in the exclusion of Roma from access to many spheres of public life. Colour-conscious measures include scholarship schemes for Roma students in public education that solely address Roma students. Nonetheless, this scheme addresses social disadvantages, providing a modest monthly scholarship, but not offering any other services that would add to treating disadvantages stemming from the prejudiced and hostile environment Roma students often face (i.e., courses on how to treat prejudice, community programs enhancing positive ethnic identity, educational support) (Messing and Molnár 2008).

Another scheme that might be categorised as colour-conscious policy is the founding of after-school academy ("*tanoda*") network. These are institutions organising extracurricular activities that are usually maintained by the local Roma self-governments in cooperation with the local schools. These academies provide after-school tuition for talented (or less talented) Roma children where they can catch up with school with the help of some teachers. A number of leisure activities – excursions, computer courses, Roma cultural/ music/ dance courses – are also organised here that aim to enhance positive ethnic identity and create a community for children who live among desperate conditions (Messing 2007). Many of the after-school academies function in ghettoised settlements or in rundown urban areas with a high concentration of poverty and are visited by children in destitute social conditions, irrespective of their actual ethnic belonging. The program proved to be successful in most of the places where it functioned; still the arbitrary nature of the financing (mainly from competitions on European Union funds) made the network disintegrate.

Some of the schools also operate Roma courses, which provide Roma-language teaching and a syllabus on Roma traditions, history, culture, and crafts. Still, such courses/classes became most frequently a means of ethnic segregation rather than a tool for multiethnic education (Zolnay 2010, ÁSZ 2008).

The legal framework of human and minority rights

A third approach to inequalities that Roma children experience in public education (and other spheres of everyday life) is a legal one. Two basic discourses – equal opportunity discourse and anti-segregation discourse – may be identified within this framework.

Act CXXXV on Equal Treatment and Equal Opportunities (2003) has a special section on school segregation emphasising that segregation – both in educational institutions and its subdivisions (classes, streams) – is qualified as the violation of equal treatment. This Act filled important gaps by providing the legal base for revealing discrimination cases and offering remedies for them. It formulated the definitions for both direct and indirect negative discrimination and identified protected groups. An important constituent of this act is *actio popularis*, or the "claimed enforcement of public interest", that is to say, it is possible to initiate a lawsuit without an actual plaintiff, if the rights of a larger group are violated and the persons concerned cannot be defined.

The most influential organisation that frames the segregated educational environment as a manifestation of ethnic discrimination and fights against it with legal means is the Chance for Children Fund, which sues schools and school-providing municipalities for maintaining ethnically segregated schools or branches, as well as for separating Roma children from their peers in other everyday activities of the school (lunch in the canteen, physical training).² The Fund has succeeded in many of its suits to prove that Roma children have been unlawfully segregated and discriminated against, and as a consequence denied the right for equal quality education. The consequences can range from stopping segregating and discriminating practices by the school-providing municipalities to the complete negligence of the courts' decision.

In 2005, an important governmental agency – the Equal Treatment Authority – was created, the main task of which is to treat complaints about discrimination, to prove such cases, and to fine discriminating institutions. Most typical cases relate to discrimination based on gender, age, handicap, and ethnic belonging, and only a few of their cases report about public education. Another important institution regarding protection against discrimination is the Ombudsman's Office, which regularly initiates investigations and issues recommendations to Parliament and other public bodies.

Ethnicisation of social problems

The dominant framework of discourse in the local arenas and also in the media ethnicises social problems, including poverty, long-term unemployment and welfare dependency and extreme regional inequalities prevalent in the country. Aversion and hostility towards Roma communities and Roma people have

² Similar activity is done by the European Roma Rights Fund in Slovakia and the Czech Republic

intensified in Hungarian press as well as in the political discourse in the past few years. A large part of the public shares the view that Roma communities have only themselves to blame for their current miserable conditions in most cases, and their "over-assistance" and "over-support" should cease or should be bound by strict conditions. Local municipal councils have to interpret what common good, social justice, public welfare, equal distribution of resources, transfers, and services mean in local context. Actors in local politics are inclined to describe not only educational inequality by using ethnic terms but all social problems in general as the "Roma problem" or the "Roma question" in their localities. Worryingly, the phrase implies that the existence of Roma population is the problem in itself. The "Roma problem/Roma question" discourse has become noticeably more hostile in recent years.

The norms of local public discourse are largely "permissive" of the generation of hatred or incitement against Roma communities in Hungary. Using abusive language, slander, or insults when talking about Roma, or the Roma community as a whole, is generally accepted in local political communication, even in the general assemblies of local councils. Many of the local elites: mayors, local councillors, notaries, or police officers unscrupulously state that Roma children are inferior, that Roma women give birth to many children in order to maximise the amount of child-care allowance and social benefit as a source of living; and the increasing number of the Roma population violates national security, etc., while never pausing to relate these behavioural patterns to the social and physical exclusion that these people experience.

The above discourse, i.e., blaming the poor for their desperate situation, is an inherent element of struggles for scarce public resources in the local arena and a powerful means to exclude the most vulnerable groups from resources such as welfare services, schools, health and paediatric services, and most importantly, access to labour. These are spheres of life that the local elites do not want to share with those living in desperate poverty. This assumption is supported by the fact that highest racial discrimination and ethno-social exclusion is registered in regions that are the most economically disintegrated and where the lower-middle classes fear that economic failure is all too realistic.

Discourses of the extreme right

A relatively new development in the Hungarian public and political arena is the immensely rapid gain of the extreme-right's discourse and power which has built on anti-Roma and anti-Semitic prejudices. Increased demands for public order, leaning towards autocratic power, together with conveniently scapegoating Roma, have characterised the response of large segments of the Hungarian population to the economic mismanagement of the post-transition economic crisis and impoverishment of large segments of society. The proportion of those responsive to extreme right's ideology have risen from 9.9 per cent in 2003 to 20.7 per cent in 2009 according European Social Survey data; for comparison, this ratio is below 2.7 per cent in Germany, 5.1 per cent in the United Kingdom, and 7.4 per cent in the Czech Republic. Only Latvia

and Bulgaria have demonstrated similarly high proportions of respondents agreeing with the extreme right's ideologies. As a result of these processes, the extreme-right party (Jobbik) gained support in the political vacuum that emerged after the left-wing government lost its political credibility and most of its public support in the autumn of 2006. The party also exploited a tragic incident that brought about a change in Hungarian society's general attitude towards Roma: in October 2006, a teacher was lynched by a group of Roma men and women in a village after he accidentally hit a Roma girl with his car. The incident triggered a "moral panic"; extreme and moderate right-leaning media blamed the government for mismanaging its policy targeting Roma, and their arguments met a willing audience among the public. Following this event, anti-Roma prejudice welled up, and open discrimination and racial hatred became an acceptable frame of discourse.

Roma were attacked not only verbally but physically: a racially-motivated series of murders in segregated parts of villages inhabited by poverty-stricken Roma took place in 2009. Several murders occurred until the police realised that there might be a link between these cases and the motivation of the perpetrators might have been anti-Roma hatred. These tragic incidents reflected well the general attitude of the authorities: they were reluctant to assume any racial motivation behind crimes, even if it was a rather obvious possibility.

Jobbik formed its paramilitary unit in 2007, the Hungarian Guard, which regularly organised marches in settlements where the cohabitation of Roma and non-Roma was problematic and where Roma people were living in physically segregated parts of the settlements. These marches were intended to demonstrate physical power and threaten Roma communities. The state was unable (or unwilling?) to stop the unlawful marchers till 2010. The general atmosphere of threat and fear has deepened significant interethnic mistrust, conflict, and related problems in the most disintegrated settlements, while Jobbik gained increasing political power in these regions.

During the parliamentary election in 2010, Jobbik gained over 16 percent of the votes and got into the Parliament. They openly voice racist ideas and support direct discrimination and segregation of Roma people in Hungary inside and outside the walls of Parliament.

Main findings of Hungarian EDUMIGROM research and their contributions

The context of EDUMIGROM research was broader than most research focusing strictly and exclusively on inequalities of public education, for example, ethnic and social segregation, school achievement, national or local decision-making, etc. Our study confirmed that the extreme inequalities in Hungarian public education originate from the multiplicity of selective processes driven by diverse social, political, and economic interests that coalesce in the serious segmentation of the school system. We can also claim

that segmentation in itself works toward deepening already existing inequalities. The primary aim of our research was to reveal the interplay between institutionally framed structural arrangements in education and the personal reactions and reflections on them.

We approached this duality by looking at the entire spectrum of primary schools in two urban areas where the estimated number of Roma students was higher than the average in Hungary. In our questionnaire-based survey research, all students in their concluding year of schooling were asked about their experiences, future plans, and longer-term ideas about adult life. The qualitative fieldwork research allowed us to deepen our knowledge about several aspects of our central research query: factors behind differences in the school performance and the educational careers of ethnic minority students. This design allowed us to concurrently apply two prisms, "structural" and "personal", and seek the mechanisms about how they affect each other.

Performance and future opportunities

Two rather closed communities of this study provided an opportunity to look at a refined, internal socio-economic and ethnic structuring of them, and thus we were able to map three intersecting factors that gave rise to diverging quality of schools:

- The impact of recent socio-geographic trends, in the course of which residential inequalities in and around urban areas have increased and that brought about "elite" units as well as impoverished ethnic slums and Roma ghettos/villages;
- The right of free choice for schooling manifested itself in a massive flight of the middle classes, and thereby has further intensified selections conditioned by socio-geographic disparities;
- Divergent policies of the schools that, by responding to parental pressures, concluded in varied techniques of "streaming" children into homogenous class communities.

The design of the research made it possible to see how these three distinctive processes of selection strengthen one another. Our data revealed the depth of ethnic divides from a novel angle by showing that, in terms of acknowledged school achievement (i.e., grading), ethnic belonging overrides the strength of social background and gender and concludes in the devaluation of Roma students' performance en masse. It is not only social and ethnic divergences in assessed performance, but the institutional framing of them that matters: being aware of the massive inequalities among the primary schools of the community, local secondary-level institutions apply a refined differential reading of students' certificates, and strongly devalue those school results that come from weaker institutions. The selective power of "scoring" proves to be efficient in turning earlier segmentation into now visible forms of separation, and distribute students along the dividing lines of social class and ethnic belonging

– where students from lower-status backgrounds, with a heavy overrepresentation of Roma, find themselves at the bottom of the scale. As a result, the last phase of compulsory education loses ground in the eyes of these most disadvantaged groups, and what is more, aspirations for upward mobility quickly dissolve after being squeezed into low-prestige institutions known for hardly-useable, poor-quality training, disinterest in students' occupational advancement, and the concomitant high rates of early leaving.

Composition of the school and the class

The research found that the school setting and the social-ethnic composition of the class, in particular, have a major influence on everyday experiences of adolescent youth at school. The analysis of data demonstrated that performance, future aspirations, peer-group relations, and student-teacher relations are similarly affected by the actual composition of the class and school community. Apparently, it is the internal separation of Roma and non-Roma students into parallel classes that brings about the most damaging environment for both ethnic majority and minority students. The everyday experience of separation and discrimination is damaging in terms of relationships as well as performance and aspirations. In such a school setting, bullying, teasing, and rivalry dominate the general atmosphere of the school. Segregated schools provide an inferior environment for school advancement and future aspirations, but inter-group relations and identity formation seem to be less damaged than the surrounding environment, where separation and discrimination is an everyday experience of adolescents. It is rather evident that an integrated school and class environment provides the best circumstances for the healthy development of adolescents' personality, and it does not necessarily hinder the academic advancement of majority students but occasionally is able to improve school achievement of ethnic minority students.

Interethnic relations

Despite the rather general feeling of comfort with the given setting, it seems that the school is a harmful place as well: it is especially teenage peer relations that are badly affected by daily conflicts, direct experiences with discrimination, and a lack of solidarity along the lines of social class and ethnicity. Given their young age, it is a worrying that the majority of Roma students have collected a lot of degrading experiences due to their ethnic belonging. At the same time, these perceptions are informed by the actual arrangements: by far, it is the segregating schools (especially in cases when intra-school selection is evident) where frustrations about institutionalised discrimination and manifest exclusion turn most frequently into conflicts, quarrels, clashes between gangs, and a general negative viewing of the

entire surrounding. Social and ethnic divisions do not leave unaffected the most personal spheres of self-evaluation and placing it in the surrounding relations: low self-esteem and self-degradation is frequent among students whose most fundamental daily experience is devaluation from their direct environment.

In the qualitative part of our research project, we realised during our fieldwork that while both sites are of similar dimensions and industrial in character, with more or less the same percentage of Roma population, yet they do not provide identical conditions for Roma students in their final grade of primary education. Although the central effort of Hungarian educational policies – the integration of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, with special educational needs, or of Roma origins – was present in both towns, and thus measures have recently been taken in all local schools, we found significant differences in the achievements and opportunities for further education characterising Roma students who attended the classes selected for investigation.. A comparison showed that Roma parents and children feel more secure in places where the immigration of Roma population was linked to a common workplace – for instance, a mine – for several decades; where there are/were other forms of ethnic difference apart from being Roma; where ethnic mixing started in the previous generation; and where, partly as a consequence of intense Roma civil self-organisation, a local Roma elite has been formed. On the contrary, the "ghettos" provide experiences day after day of visible marginalisation, hopeless physical and mental enclosures made of lost perspectives, and a futureless outlook, which develop into a general feeling of insecurity and a pronounced need to cut off ties with the outer world considered a source of danger. Roma students in segregated schools and the ghettoised enclaves of the distressed villages demonstrate all the symptoms of threatened identity.

Responses of schools and forms of 'othering'

While the intentions of municipal educational administration are unambiguous with respect to integration, school management and, even more, teachers relate to central educational policies in a highly ambivalent manner. The ways in which they actually connect with integrative school policies, as manifested in discourse and pedagogical practice, range from superficial and apparent acceptance through passive resistance to active rejection. Several causes were identified behind these approaches, including: teachers are unprepared for the changes in school policies and their consequences; teachers have neither the means to adequately adjust pedagogical work to the new circumstances, nor the experience in how to employ those means, so that they are completely helpless when implementing new school policies. In addition, as the teachers themselves are not exempt from the cultural prejudices adopted by their own social strata, they also may contribute to sustaining the cultural and social distances between the majority and the ethnic minority. Most of the actors we contacted, save one school and a few teachers, have been unable to overcome these obstacles.

When examining teachers' discourses and classroom interactions, three discursive strategies were reconstructed with respect to "othering" children:

- *"Fatalist discourse"* suggests that the fate of children coming from undereducated Roma families is predetermined. Teachers may not necessarily communicate their conviction explicitly, but their indirect messages chisel away at pupils' motivations. Students perfectly understand that their teachers do not believe in them or that their efforts can be successful. This unsaid communication by teachers suggesting that the students' fate is predetermined, prevents pupils from being successful at school and lowers their aspirations towards further education on its own.
- *Social argumentation* claims that the lower performance and aspirations of Roma students and the greater frequency of "problems" are primarily due to their socially disadvantaged situation. This is the only discursive framework among teachers that also reflects the experiences and interpretations of parents. This type of argument is common, especially in places where the concept of pedagogic work includes the consideration that it should be shaped by liaising with the local community.
- *Cultural fundamentalism*: this attitude can be best described in terms of racism, supposing hierarchical relations, in which the speaker, that is, the teacher, talking from an invisible position, as opposed to the culturally and/or racially different subordinated subjects, holds on to the moral claims of his or her own superiority. Here, "Gypsy" is a synonym of not only social but also "genetic" or "racial" inferiority in this discursive framework.

As to schools responses to desegregating school policies, three types of school were identified:

- The *colour-blind* school that, on the one hand, eliminates differences by structural means and that, on the other, creates an environment that enforces taboos. As we have seen, this approach offers a chance for some minority students, as well as providing the impetus to help them continue using the strategies of assimilation already employed by their parents. For some other Roma children, however, this makes school a strange and hostile environment that does not deal with their real problems.
- The *colour-conscious* school offers a (Roma) cultural framework to dealing with otherness. Yet this type cannot be considered as a source of multicultural alternative because it does not meet with students' needs of a more positive ethnic identity and preventing their sense of racialised exclusion. Moreover, at the point when it was introduced, it was too late since the cultural assimilation of the Roma population in question was already quite advanced.
- The *segregating* school where tensions and mutual fears between families and the staff are constrained within the walls of the school. Instead of treating these problems, teachers try to maintain the illusion of immovability, for their own acquiescence as well

as to serve middle-class parents. Roma students do essentially the same thing when they continue living their lives linked to the outside world, that is, to their families, relatives, and the ghetto, when also at school.

Ethnic minority students' responses to 'othering' and patterns of identity formation

In our experience, the different social-historical traditions characterising the two sites, the various forms of accepting or rejecting Roma minorities on the part of the institutions or the their representatives in majority society, and the structural givens and qualitative standards of the schools under investigation, all impact the attitude of Roma students towards school and learning, and thus their aspirations for further education and ideas about the future. As selective mechanisms at schools already reflect on family categories – distinguished by the social background of families, the educational attainment of parents, their employment status and social integration – it was expected that the school performance and career choices of Roma students we examined would also depend on these factors. In the majority of cases, it is hardly probable that significant changes would take place with respect to their position in society when compared to their parents' generation.

At the same time, the weak school performance and limited future aspirations of most Roma students are closely connected with a sense of ethnic discrimination, mentioned in nearly every interview, and felt by our adolescent respondents both in and outside the school, in their relations with their teachers, and with fellow students. We perceived the most extreme forms of "othering" in segregated classes attended by Roma students. In this environment the school failed to enable Roma students in establishing friendships outside their close social network. But, in responding to racist threats, Roma students isolate themselves by forming their internal network into a protective shield. In this sense, their ethnic perception of the world is grounded on the dichotomy of "Roma versus Hungarian" and plays a decisive role in the evaluation of social interactions and of society as a whole.

Discrimination threatening minority ethnic identity, sometimes perceived as racist, also determined the identity strategies available to students. By pushing their Roma identity into the background, most of these children expressed a desire to melt into the social majority, which they wished to realise by giving up their traditions, occasionally still followed by the families, and by adopting majority norms. Thus their ethnic identity, still in the process of formation, is predominantly negative in the examined age-group, and its most important constituting elements include following another reference group instead of the group of origin and turning away from, or even against, the community provided by their family backgrounds. The adoption of identity did not seem to entail positive aspects, even in cases where the attachment to the group of one's own was maintained more by outside threats than by striving to preserve the cultural/ethnic inheritance. Our research experiences

clearly suggest that the policies of educational integration, in their present form, are unable to stop the process of the social/ethnic dividing of Hungarian society. The residential, social, and lifestyle disadvantages of children of Roma origin, making up nationwide about 10 per cent of the age-group targeted in the research, are not only not diminishing but, instead, are further increasing during school years. Thus, the new generation still does not have much opportunity for upward social mobility and for reaching an equal status in terms of citizenship. As long as "Roma" remains Hungarian society's pariahs, synonymous with social malaise, deviance and public disorder, there is no chance that the social majority will acknowledge the dignity of ethno-cultural difference and make Roma ethnicity a source of viable identity for Roma youth.

Policy recommendations

The problem of ethnic and social segregation is just a symptom of extreme inequalities characterising Hungarian public education as a whole and cannot be regarded as an isolated phenomenon. Failures of the significant efforts and measures by the government in the last decade have proved that within the current administration and financing system, the possibility of enhancing social and ethnic inclusion in education is rather limited.

From the above account about policy and discursive frames, it is obvious that the extreme inequality of the Hungarian educational system and educational exclusion is not a Roma-specific problem, although Roma pupils are affected to the most. Therefore, defining the target group might be the most complex dilemma of an educational policy targeting inclusion. By using "colour-blind" categories, inclusion policies might cover Roma if correct and benevolent data collection and data management is secured. At this stage such data collection is unavailable or unreliable (municipalities often manipulate data on socially disadvantaged students in order to draw on extra budgetary support, while the collection of ethnic data by public service providers is prohibited by law). But at any rate, colour-conscious policies are insufficient to reach out to all who are in need (many Roma are reluctant to identify themselves as Roma due to striving for assimilation or for fear of stigmatisation), while such an approach might cause unnecessary social tensions (i.e., many non-Roma are in a similar situation and would need similar support, while this approach easily leads to ethnicising social problems).

Below we list some of our recommendations relating directly to equity and equal opportunities in education originating from major lessons learnt during the EDUMIGROM project in Hungary.

Recommendations aiming at structural changes in education

- The school system has to be reformed in a way that eliminates institutional segmentation (elimination of the six- and eight-year secondary schools which cream out best students in the mid of their primary school career) and that provides a more comprehensive system educating children in the same institutions throughout their compulsory education age.
- Schools maintained by private foundations and churches should be financed by state normative subsidies exclusively in the case they are willing to make an educational agreement with their respective municipal councils and to share the teaching of socially disadvantaged and Roma pupils.
- Knowing that disadvantages develop at a much younger age than the legally defined age of compulsory education (currently: age six), the age-limit of entrance to the educational system has to be lowered including younger ages (three- to four-year-olds) while access to nursery schools and/or preschools has to be secured for every child, irrespective of the region and type of settlement she or he lives. In parallel, the rigidity of the transition from preschool to school has to be significantly moderated.
- The minimum standards of primary school should be defined (e.g., building, infrastructure, curricula, etc.) as well as the required minimum competence results that are measured among pupils. Schools that do not meet these requirements should be closed if they do not improve their indicators after a period of monitoring.
- The scales of segregation regarding multiply disadvantaged and/or Roma pupils has to be maximised in relation to the proportion of the target group(s) in the localities. Schools that do not meet the requirements should be legally obliged to take measures aiming at desegregation.
- In order to enhance mobility and equal access to quality education, free school bussing should be organised and financed by state subsidies.

Recommendation aiming at improving the content and quality of education

- The system of teacher's education and in-service training has to be essentially reformed. Innovative methods of competence-based teaching should replace the dominance of lexical, knowledge-based tuition in the regular curricula of teacher training.
- Interethnic conflicts in the educational arena can effectively be eliminated and managed by teachers using integrated pedagogical programmes (IPR) and interactive, project-oriented teaching techniques. Implementation of these programmes must be continued.

- Introduce differentiated wages in public education, which would take into consideration the difficulties of teaching socially disadvantaged students.

Recommendations targeting specifically Roma education

- Extracurricular activities focused on Roma and socially disadvantaged students such as after-school courses, and after-school academies have to be standardised and financed by per capita budgetary funding that should be allotted much in line with the general routines in public education.
- In order to enhance Roma children's positive identity and acceptance by their non-Roma peers and teachers, several measures might be taken such as anti-discrimination training for teachers, including the culture and history of Roma in the regular curriculum, extracurricular activities aiming at awareness raising, etc.
- Introduce affirmative action in teachers' education with the aim to increase the number of Roma teachers in regular primary and secondary education.

It is obvious, however, that measures implemented exclusively in order to secure equal educational opportunities for Roma students are insufficient on their own. As we have seen, the disadvantages of Roma students originate from a complex system of different intersecting factors: regional disadvantages, destitute residential environments, substandard and overcrowded housing conditions, poor health, and most importantly, an underprivileged labour market status. Even if both parents and their children explicitly express the need of studying, the lack of employment possibilities for undereducated parents, together with experiences of labour market discrimination that leads to the long-term hopelessness of unemployment, discourages families from investing in education. Everyday experiences stemming from families' backgrounds obstruct students in their belief that schooling would lead to any meaningful upward mobility, and the value of studying is frequently questioned. The vicious circle of low education – unemployment – ethnic discrimination on the labour market – desperate poverty – is inherited generation by generation and cannot be broken by education alone. There is a necessity for complex programs to target simultaneously the shortage of employment possibilities, poor housing conditions, inadequate welfare and health provisions, and low-quality education for inhabitants of the most disadvantaged regions. Programs that adopt such a complex approach could be the only possibility to significantly improve Roma's social integration and enhance their equal social membership.

Literature

- Berkes, Béla, Gábor Bernáth, Erno Kadét, and János Zolnay (2005) *Az ország és a romái: jelentés a magyarországi roma közösségekkel kapcsolatos kormányzati politikákról* (The country and its Roma: Report on governmental policies targeted at Roma communities). Budapest: Roma Sajtóközpont.
- Feischmidt, Margit, Vera Messing, and Mária Neményi (2010) *Ethnic Differences in Education in Hungary: Community Study*. EDUMIGROM Community Studies. Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies.
- Havas, Gábor (2008) Esélyegyenlőség, deszegregáció (Equality of opportunities and desegregation). In: Károly Fazekas János Köllö, and Júlia Varga (eds.) *Zöld könyv a Magyar Közoktatás Megújításáért*. Budapest: Ecostat. Available online: <http://www.biztoskezdet.hu/uploads/attachments/ZKTartalom%5B1%5D.pdf>
- Havas, Gábor and István Kemény (1996) Cigánynak lenni (Being Roma). In: Rudolf Andorka, Tamás Kolosi, and György Vukovich (eds.) *Társadalmi Ríport 1996*. Budapest: Századévég.
- Horváth, Tamás. M. (ed.) (2000) *Decentralization: Experiments and Reforms*. Budapest: OSI LGI. Available online: <http://lgi.osi.hu/publications/books/decentralization/EntireBook.pdf>
- Hungarian State Audit Office (2008) *Jelentés: A magyarországi cigányság helyzetének javítására és felemelkedésére a rendszerváltás óta fordított támogatások mértéke és hatékonysága* (Report on the magnitude and efficiency of subsidies aiming improve the situation and the integration of Roma in Hungary since the systemic change). Available online: [http://www.asz.hu/ASZ/tanulmányok.nsf/0/79ED5720B293EBC9C12574F30031B5C7/\\$File/t206.pdf](http://www.asz.hu/ASZ/tanulmányok.nsf/0/79ED5720B293EBC9C12574F30031B5C7/$File/t206.pdf)
- Iványi, Klára (2006) "Impacts of the New Anti-discrimination Policy." In: Erno Kállai and Erika. Törzsök, (eds.) *The Age of Reorganisation Roma's Life in Hungary. Report 2002–2006*. Budapest: EÖKIK
- Kemény, István (1997) "A magyarországi roma (cigány) népességről két felmérés tükrében" (About the Gypsy/Roma population in Hungary on the ground of two surveys). *Magyar Tudomány*, No. 6, pp. 644–655.
- Kemény, István and Gábor Havas (1995) "A magyarországi romákról" (About Roma in Hungary). *Szociológiai Szemle*, No. 3. Available online: <http://www.mtapti.hu/mszt/19953/havas.htm>
- Kemény, István, Béla Jankó, and Gabriella Lengyel (2004) *A magyarországi cigányság 1971–2003* (Roma in Hungary, 1971–2003). Budapest: Gondolat Kiadó-MTA Etnikai-nemzeti Kisebbségkutató Intézet
- Kende, Ágnes (2011) *Szegregisztán* (Segregistan). Available online: <http://www.community.hu/2011/01/20/szegregisztan/>.
- Kende, Anna and Mária Neményi (2006) "Selection in Education: The Case of Roma Children in Hungary." *Equal Opportunities International*, Vol. 25, No. 2, pp. 506–522
- Kertesi Gábor (1995) Cigány foglalkoztatás és munkanélküliség a rendszerváltás előtt és után (Employment and unemployment of Roma before and after the systemic change). *Esély*, No. 4, pp. 425–469.
- (2000) "A cigány foglalkoztatás leépülése és szerkezeti átalakulása 1984 és 1994 között" (The disintegration and restructuration of Roma employment between 1984 and 1994). *Közgazdasági Szemle*, Vol. 47, No.5, pp.406–443.

- (2005) *A társadalom peremén. Romák a munkaerőpiacon és az iskolában* (On the margins of society. The Roma in the labour market and in education). Budapest: Osiris.
- Kertesi, Gábor and Gábor Kézdi (2010) Segregation in Primary Schools in Hungary. A Descriptive Study Using Data from the National Assessment of Basic Competencies." In: Károly Fazekas, Anna. Lovász, and Ádám. Telegdy (eds.) *The Hungarian Labour Market 2010*. Budapest, pp. 99–119.
- Köllo, János (2009) *A pálya szélén. Iskolázatlan munkanélküliek a poszt-szocialista gazdaságban*. (On the margins. Undereducated unemployed people in the post-socialist economy). Budapest: Osiris.
- Messing, Vera (2008) Good Practices Addressing School Integration of Roma/Gypsy Children in Hungary. *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 19, Issue 5. Available online: <http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title%7Edb=all%7Econtent=t713393965%7Etab=issueslist%7Ebranches=19-v19> pp. 461–473.
- (2011) Elsietett győzelmi jelentés (Hurried report of victory). Available online: http://index.hu/velemeney/2011/01/13/elsietett_gyozelmi_jelentes/
- Messing, Vera and Emilia Molnár (2008) "Tanulmányi ösztöndíjak etnikai és szociális alapon" (Comparative analysis of scholarships awarded on the basis of ethnic belonging and on social need). *Educatio*, No.4, pp. 480–494.
- Messing, Vera, Mária Neményi, and Júlia Szalai (2010) *Ethnic Differences in Education in Hungary: Survey Report*. EDUMIGROM Survey Studies. Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies.
- Molnár, Emilia and Csaba Dupcsik (2008) "Country Report on Education: Hungary." Manuscript. EDUMIGROM Background Papers. Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies.
- OECD (2010) PISA 2009 Results. Volume II: Overcoming Social Background: Equity in Learning Opportunities and Outcomes. Paris: OECD. Available online: http://www.oecd.org/document/24/0,3746,en_32252351_46584327_46609752_1_1_1_1,00.html
- Pálné, I. Kovács (2001) *Regionális politika és közigazgatás* (Regional policies and public administration). Budapest: Dialóg Campus.
- Radó, Péter (2010) "PISA 2009: néhány első üzenetrol" (PISA 2009: on some of the first lessons). Available online: <http://oktapolcafe.hu/pisa-2009-nehany-elso-uzenetrol-4333330>.
- Szalai, Júlia et al. (2008) *Ethnic Differences in Compulsory Education*. EDUMIGROM Policy Brief, No. 1, Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies.
- Szira, Judit (2011) Suba a subához. Az új közoktatási koncepció és a társadalmi egyenlőtlenség (Same old same. The public education reforms and the issue of social inequalities). *Magyar Narancs*, Vol. XXIII, No. 2, 13 January.
- Vajda, Róza and Csaba Dupcsik (2008) Country Report on Ethnic Relations: Hungary. Manuscript. EDUMIGROM Background Papers. Budapest: Central European University, Center for Policy Studies.
- Zolnay, János (2010) 'Olvashatatlan város.' Közoktatási migráció és migrációs iskolatípusok Pécsen ('The unreadable city'. Educational migration and school types in Pécs). *Esély*, No 6, pp. 40–64.

EDUMIGROM POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Social Inclusion Through Education in the Czech Republic: Policy Recommendations

Ela Klementová, Radim Marada and Michal Nekorjak • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Denmark: Policy Recommendations

Bolette Moldenhawer and Marta Padovan-Özdemir • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in France: Policy Recommendations

Claire Schiff • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Germany: Policy Recommendations

Sabine Manitz with contributions from Frauke Miera, Rainer Ohliger, Gaby Strasburger and Meryem Ucan • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Hungary: Policy Recommendations

Vera Messing, Mária Neményi and János Zolnay • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Romania: Policy Recommendations

Eniko Vincze • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Slovakia: Policy Recommendations

Zuzana Kusá, Jurina Rusnáková and Monika Borovanová • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in Sweden: Policy Recommendations

Marcus Carson, Jenny Kallstenius, Kristina Sonmark and Barbara Hobson • 2011

Social Inclusion Through Education in the United Kingdom: Policy Recommendations

Ian Law and Sarah Swann • 2011