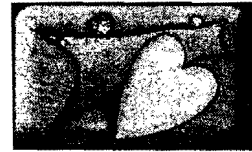


**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting  
Early Education for Roma and Sinti Children  
7 October 2009**

**STATEMENT**



**HUNGARY**



In the past 15 years, Hungary has seen a clear decrease in the provision of early education services by the state. Not only has the number of kindergartens available to Hungarian children decreased but those still open have huge difficulties in overcoming the barriers created by the conditions of deep poverty in which most Roma children live and in creating the proper basis for successful intercultural communication between Roma and non-Roma parents and children. Due in part to the country's demography, many kindergarten closed down in these past 15 years, while, during the same period, the share of Roma children belonging to our society's most disadvantaged group has risen sharply and can be found almost exclusively in Hungary's most ill-equipped kindergartens.

The population's strata living in deep poverty is strongly concentrated and segregated. There are approximately 100 municipalities in the country which have irrevocably become poor Roma ghettos and more than 200 others which are fast becoming just such places. These municipalities are mostly concentrated in the north-eastern and south-western, poverty-stricken and isolated parts of the country, meaning that the aggregation of ghettoized settlements in these regions is resulting in ghettoization on regional levels. Similar processes can be observed in some districts of Hungary's big cities, at the periphery of bigger municipalities and in some rural areas of the country's lowlands.

This territorial concentration of the poorest and most uneducated is the basis of school segregation and makes even moderate developments in the issue illusory. In Hungary there are at least 180 primary schools with a majority of Roma pupils. Additionally, in more than 70 other schools, this situation is in the process of becoming a reality since more than 40% of their pupils are Roma. These are schools for the poor, where children belonging to the majority population are also from the very lowest strata of our society. In the country's primary schools, there are at least 3000 classes where Roma form a majority, and at least 1200 of these are Roma-only classes.

All in all, approximately one third of Roma pupils get their education in schools or classes which are segregated to an extreme level. And while there are no clearly reliable statistics

regarding other persons with multiple disadvantages, this rate is usually the same for them. All segregated schools have their adjoining segregated kindergartens, meaning that the chance for children educated in these kindergartens to move on to ethnically mixed schools or classes is close to none. But attendance even of these kindergartens is extremely low among disadvantaged children. 11% of them do not benefit from public early education even after the age of 5.

The quality of staff working in segregated kindergartens and schools has a significant effect on the future abilities of Roma to enter higher education and an employment market dominated by the services sector. Segregated education is in a great majority of cases accompanied by sub-standard levels of pedagogic service. Teachers tend to refuse work in ghettoized municipalities or districts since the same salary is offered for tasks which are much more complex to achieve and which require specific vocational training. The result is that Roma parents often refuse to put their children in kindergartens where they will not be treated well. In the past two years, the government has been implementing a program which includes financial incentives for disadvantaged families to push them to put their children in kindergartens. Roma parents, however, are not being informed about this possibility.

In Hungary, the responsibility for state-provided early education services falls exclusively on municipal authorities, meaning that national equality bodies responsible for monitoring anti-discrimination measures enshrined in Hungary's Law on Equal Opportunities are not effectively monitoring the application of equality standards in early education services in our country. The result is that about one third of Hungary's kindergartens and schools are not functioning in accordance with legal prescriptions. It is therefore necessary to create a decentralized monitoring system which allows control of measures taken by municipal authorities regarding education, case by case, child by child. This would allow closer scrutiny of such decisions, taken at the end of the pre-school period, as placing a child in an institution for the mentally disabled or deciding to make them „private students”, meaning that the child does not assist to courses in primary school and goes there only to take final examinations.

It is crucial that kindergarten teachers take part in trainings for educating children belonging to national minorities such as Roma. The inclusion of Roma educators from NGOs specializing in education for Roma children is absolutely necessary to make these trainings effective.

Authorities, especially local authorities, have to make their determination to fight the practice of school segregation clear to school staff and to Roma parents by financially supporting only those institutions which respect the Law on Equal Opportunities and by providing additional support for those which use their funds for the advancement of anti-segregation policies. Making the drafting of „equal opportunities” planning mandatory for schools would also be a great step forward in the fight against school segregation.

It is necessary to consistently enforce support policies based on the principle of equal opportunities for all. It is therefore crucial to ensure that reliable statistical data on persons with multiple disadvantages is made available. The current collection of data on education in Hungary has to be adapted so as to allow authorities and civil society to assess the legality of developments happening in public education and to analyze current trends related to school segregation.

The participation of Roma children in desegregated early education has the potential to greatly improve these worrying trends and to advance Europe towards the reality of truly becoming a knowledge based society which guarantees social mobility to all its citizens.

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**STATEMENT**

**HUNGARY**



Constant fear of discrimination, harassment and violent attacks mean that in Hungary, Roma from all strata of our society live in a state of constant terror and are forced to exclude themselves from mainstream society. Racism against Roma is widespread in public discourse. While there is only so much a state can do to regulate private actors, the public authorities are not without responsibility in creating this situation.

While Romaphobia is common in European societies, the outburst of its most violent forms on a regular basis is directly linked to the hardening tone of Hungary's political and social discourse regarding Roma. The murder of a popular handball player, Marian Cosma, by a few Roma men led to extensive media coverage stressing the ethnicity of the suspects and ultimately to the radicalization of the whole social discourse about crime in Hungary. As the story of the murder itself was progressively disappearing from front pages, the debate about "Gypsy crime" remained at the centre of Hungary's public discourse. In a deeply polarized political climate in which extreme vilification of the "other", in terms of political choices, is the norm, and with the effects of Hungary's economic crisis being increasingly felt on a day to day basis, the outburst of anti-Roma sentiments were set to take increasingly violent forms.

The extreme polarization of our country's political discourse and the effects of the economic crisis have resulted in everyday discrimination being accompanied by bouts of deadly attacks on Roma, including Roma children.

Here are the most recent cases, which prove that while the authorities have made arrests in the cases of the murders of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, the attacks continue, thus pointing to an extremely worrying trend:

14 September 2009:

Three swastikas were painted on the Roma Holocaust Memorial monument in Budapest. Police are investigating the case.

27 September 2009:

Saturday night in the Újhegy district of Pécs a middle-aged Roma man was shot several times in front of his home. He was brought to hospital with severe injuries. Police are investigating the case.

27 September 2009:

At least a hundred members of the Hungarian Guard lined up in front of a Roma family's door, introducing themselves as „csendőrség”, a term used for Hungary's police force in the 1920's and 1930's, when pogroms against Roma were led by the country's authorities. Blocking the door, they asked for the surrender of one of the family's underage relatives. The youngster had beaten up, the previous day, a mentally disabled woman. The family, who strongly condemns their relative's behavior, were blocked inside their house and called the police. In the whole settlement, Roma were trying to escape the crowd of Hungarian Guards, making the atmosphere heavy with fear and verbal as well as physical violence. The police arrived and dispersed the crowd but did not make any arrests for harassment or for participation in an illegal organization. The Hungarian Guard was declared illegal by a Hungarian court in July 2009.

As you may know, the Hungarian Guard is the militant wing of Hungary's Jobbik party, which entered the European Parliament this year with 15% of the Hungarian vote, and which still marches through towns and villages wearing black military-style uniforms, professing to promote public safety by curbing "gypsy crime" and defend the interests of "the physically, psychically and mentally defenseless Hungarians" against Roma, Jews and other minorities.

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