

AGNES KENDE

Comparative overview of the capacity of the education systems of the CEE countries to provide inclusive education for Roma pupils

Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia

ABOUT THE PROJECT

The “**Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context**” (EDUC, <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/educ>) is a two year comparative research project aiming at assessing the ability of the education systems of five Central-Eastern European countries to adapt to various ongoing changes, such as technological changes and their impact on labor markets, demographic changes, populist politics and autocratic governance, old and new inequalities, changing gender roles, globalization, etc. The research focuses on the adaptability of education systems determined by the interplay between governance and the institutional operation of schools in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia and Romania. This report was supported in part through a grant from the Open Society Foundations.

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**COMPARATIVE OVERVIEW OF THE CAPACITY
OF THE EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF THE CEE COUNTRIES
TO PROVIDE INCLUSIVE EDUCATION FOR ROMA PUPILS**

Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia

Agnes Kende

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“Early modern policies, such as those of modernising Habsburg rulers Maria Theresa and Joseph II in the eighteenth century, attempted to change Roma into “Christians”, “new citizens” and “new farmers” by removing them from Romani families, placing them with non-Romani ones, and sending them to schools to have their difference educated out of them. These strategies were echoed in the countries of central and eastern Europe after World War II as governments used schools to enforce policies of assimilation - Roma were forcibly settled, expected to conform closely to rigid standards of sameness, and display a demonstrative loyalty to the ethnic majority. Romani children were to learn such norms by having their Romaniness removed in school, and their culture itself was viewed as a package made up of social disadvantage and deviance which a tide of systematic schooling would cleanse”. (Cahn et al, 1998)

INTRODUCTION

“Future Challenges to Education Systems in Central Eastern European Context” (EDUC, <https://cps.ceu.edu/research/educ>) is a two-year comparative research project that aims to assess the ability of the education systems of five Central-Eastern European countries to adapt to various ongoing changes, such as technological changes and their impact on labor markets, demographic changes, populist politics and autocratic governance, old and new inequalities, changing gender roles, globalization, etc. The research focuses on the adaptability of education systems determined by the interplay between governance and the institutional operation of schools in Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia, and Romania.

Education has always been regarded as an instrument for solving economic, social, cultural, and political problems. The growing complexity of modern societies – and the introduction of mass education – has increased the number of issues for which we find that education should deliver long-term solutions. Despite serious doubts about the omnipotent power of education, all major challenges we face are becoming “educationalized” (Depaepe-Smeyers, 2008). Perhaps this pressure on education has never been as strong as in our times, when we face so many challenges. Changes are ongoing in the societal, demographic, political, economic, and technological environment of schools that are imposing serious adaptation challenges for all schools and education systems, and will determine the alignment of strategies for educational change in the forthcoming years. Due to the rapid acceleration of these changes, we are losing the references required for strategic thinking. In addition to this, what education systems need to face is not simply the impact of individual isolated changes, but rather the fundamental overall change created by the combined effects of all technological, economic, societal, and political changes in our very near future.

Inclusion as a concept has established a global presence in the world of education and educational policies. As claimed by PISA, the first dimension of equity is inclusion, meaning ensuring that all students attain essential foundation skills. Education systems in which a large proportion of 15-year-olds have not learned the basic skills needed to fully participate in society are not considered sufficiently inclusive.

Equity in education can be examined by looking at a range of student outcomes. First, access to schooling can be seen as a precondition for children to benefit from education. Access is chiefly reflected in school enrolment rates; more equitable and inclusive systems succeed in minimizing the share of school-age youth who are not enrolled or are significantly delayed in their progression through school (PISA 2015). Second, according to a publication by the OECD entitled *Excellence and Equity in Education* (2016), the correlation between school performance and socioeconomic background is weaker in countries that operate more heterogeneous schools. A second dimension of equity, fairness, is defined in relation to contemporary debates about equality of opportunity in a public policy context. Education systems are fairer if students' achievements are more likely to result from their abilities and factors that students themselves can influence, such as through their will or effort, and less fair the more they are conditioned by contextual characteristics or "circumstances" that students cannot influence, including their gender, race or ethnicity, socio-economic status, immigrant background, family structure, or place of residence (OECD 2016 – PISA). According to this view, fair education systems provide all students, regardless of their background, with similar opportunities to succeed academically.¹

Selection in education – i.e. the tracking of pupils on the basis of their family background, which results in homogeneous bodies of pupils in schools – is a complex phenomenon generated by the combined effects of various characteristics of educational systems: the strength of various societal inequalities that put pressure on institutions and actors in education; the strength of pressure for separation generated by the prevailing pedagogical practice and the individual and institutional interests stemming from this pressure; the degree of educational performance gaps that emerge at very early stages of education; the characteristics of school structure, including the number and location of formal selection points; the characteristics of school networks, especially the average size of schools and the amount of redundant school capacity; parental aspirations and choices; the characteristics of the governance of school systems, various governance failures; and overt and hidden external policy expectations. These factors alone do not necessarily generate social selection. However, if combined, they create a local and/or institutional space within which the rational choices (i.e. decisions on the basis of real or perceived interests) of various actors result in the separation of pupils of different backgrounds.

The methodology of the study is based on academic studies, statistical data, and policy documents on education, including an analysis of the relevant regulations and policy measures and a range of country-specific and international academic and policy sources.

The study first briefly presents the context of the status of Roma people in general in the given countries, and the status of Roma people in the education system of each country. However, I will not elaborate on the general characteristics of the education system of the observed countries, since detailed analyses of these systems can be found in the studies written for the EDUC research. In the further chapters of the study, I elaborate on the approaches and strategies towards the education of Roma children, the educational outcome gaps between Roma and non-Roma pupils, the attitudes towards the education of Roma pupils, the conditions of inclusive education and the mainstream equity education strategies that are in place and their impact on the education of Roma pupils, the social selection and the segregation of Roma pupils in the five countries, and finally, the supplementary policies aimed at improving the education of Roma pupils.

1 This may involve compensatory mechanisms in the allocation of resources, so that education systems reduce pre-existing inequalities among students from different backgrounds in terms of their chance of succeeding academically. It also follows that inequalities in outcomes (e.g. performance) among students of different backgrounds can only be seen as acceptable or fair if they are driven by factors under students' control, such as effort (OECD 2016 – PISA).

1. KEY TERMS AND ANALYTICAL CONCEPTS

In the following study, I will analyse the degree of inclusivity of the education systems of five different countries: Hungary, Poland, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia. I conduct this analysis by way of investigating how the education systems of the aforementioned countries can manage the differences among children, with an emphasis on the issue of providing inclusive education for Roma children. However, in order to understand the status of Roma children in an education system, and its degree of inclusivity, it is essential to investigate the general manner of conduct towards Roma people in a given society: namely, the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism. It is impossible to analyse the status of Roma children in the education system of a given country without also analysing the historical and social context of that country in this regard.

In the study, I aim to discuss the similarities and differences among the five countries, which, on the one hand, will demonstrate the similarities and differences in the various education systems, while on the other, will also demonstrate how prejudices towards the Roma people, and the phenomenon of anti-Gypsyism, which is present systematically in each society, makes the status of Roma people almost uniform in each given education system.

Anti-Gypsyism is related to a stereotypical and non-diversified perception of Roma people that leads to prejudice against them in both private and public areas. Moreover, the neutralization and approval of “pathological” perceptions of Roma may lead to the dehumanization of Roma people (Marinero - Sigona, 2011; Heuss, 2015). Anti-Gypsyism is a similar explanatory theory as critical race theory. Just as critical race theory is based on the assumption that race is the central structure in society (Delgado and Stefancic 2001; Gillborn 2005; Yosso 2006 quoted in Zamudio et al., 2011:3), anti-Gypsyism is also a special form of racism against Roma. The anti-Gypsyism perspective is associated with complex beliefs and an ideological system that supports the school exclusion of Roma children. At the personal level, ideologies and stereotypes often shape our initial impressions and judgments. “Those very beliefs are also embedded in our educational system. Students of colour find themselves tangled in the middle of all these racialized (i.e., race-based) social relationships, structures, institutions, ideologies, and beliefs” (Zamudio et al, 2011:3). The core assumption of anti-Gypsyism is the inferiority and deviance of Roma. Anti-Gypsyism is about the way the majority and institutions view and treat those portrayed in the public imaginary as ‘Gypsy’. Unlike Romaphobia, which suggests an unreasonable fear of Roma, the term ‘anti-Gypsyism’ encompasses direct actions against Roma, and emphasises its systemic features by bringing into discussion the role of the state in producing and reproducing this illogical, racially biased fear and hostility. Anti-Gypsyism is therefore deeply embedded in social structures, especially in state institutions like the police, the military, and the education system, and is constantly reproduced. The stigmatisation of Roma identity within the education systems has happened through failing to include within the mainstream curricula any information on Roma history, arts and culture (Rostas 2017:761). Just as colonization by European countries set the foundation for contemporary racial inequality, the

Roma people arriving to Central and Eastern Europe around 600 years ago became the foundation for the present ethnic differentiation – and just as how colonial processes divided the world between conquered and colonizer, the arrival of the Roma people, the only visible minority in the region, led to the differentiation between white and non-white, and the word “other”. “From these past relationships, legal practices, ideologies, and social mores emerged the construction of racial difference as natural and fixed. Law upon law, practice upon practice, and construction upon construction has brought racial inequality to its current state. Importantly, attempts at racialization in every generation have been met with opposition and resistance. ... there is nothing natural, essential, biological, fixed, or objective about race. It is a historical, fluid and forever changing concept subject to competing viewpoints (that is, contestation), conflict and redefinition” (Omi and Winant 1994 quoted in Zamudio et al., 2011:4). Like critical race theory, anti-Gypsyism theory sees race and racism, or ethnicity and ethnocentrism in the case of the Roma, as central to understanding inequality; thus, it seeks to advance a deeper analysis of educational inequality based on that perspective. The meritocracy in education assumes that all individuals in society have the same opportunity to succeed. A belief in meritocracy in education also assumes that education is a great equalizer and that individual attributes such as aptitude and intelligence determine success, thus those who fail to achieve, or their families, are themselves responsible. Thus, despite pre-existing inequalities in society, it is believed that universal education in a free society provides every child with the equal opportunity to achieve his or her potential (Zamudio et al., 2011).

The historical efforts to improve the education of Roma children in the countries hereby analysed were not undertaken due to a focus on human rights. Rather, the motivation was the process of assimilation typical of socialist-communist countries that did not tolerate otherness, and was designed to create a uniform, socialist person out of every individual. The aim was to assimilate the Roma people – who were thought of as a social group defined by their lifestyle, and not their ethnicity – through education. As it will become apparent throughout this study, this effort to assimilate Roma people led to very different results in each country. This difference was based on the resolve of the given system, on the history of the social relations of Roma people in the given system, and also on the various degrees of diversity of the Roma people in the different countries.

Approaching the disadvantages of Roma children in education systems from the point of view of human rights is a legacy of transnational organizations, like the World Bank, UNICEF, UNDP, the Council of Europe, European Commission, etc.; and of foundations that deal with issues regarding international human rights, such as the Open Society Foundation, European Roma Rights Center, and the Roma Education Fund. These organizations created a wholly different language and approach regarding the education of Roma children in the respective countries at the time when the latter sought to join the European Union.

This approach was formerly and essentially non-existent – or rather, wholly alien – in these societies, which may be characterized as having a system penetrated by anti-Gypsyism on all levels and areas. The terms for becoming a member of the European Union included creating strategies and action plans whose language mirrored in a uniform way an approach to the education of Roma children from the point of view of human rights. However, local regulations, public discourses, and, most importantly, the actual, local manifestations of these strategies were very different from those envisaged by the original terms outlined by the EU. This explains the slow pace of improvement – inasmuch as there has been any improvement. In some areas, the circumstances of the education of Roma children

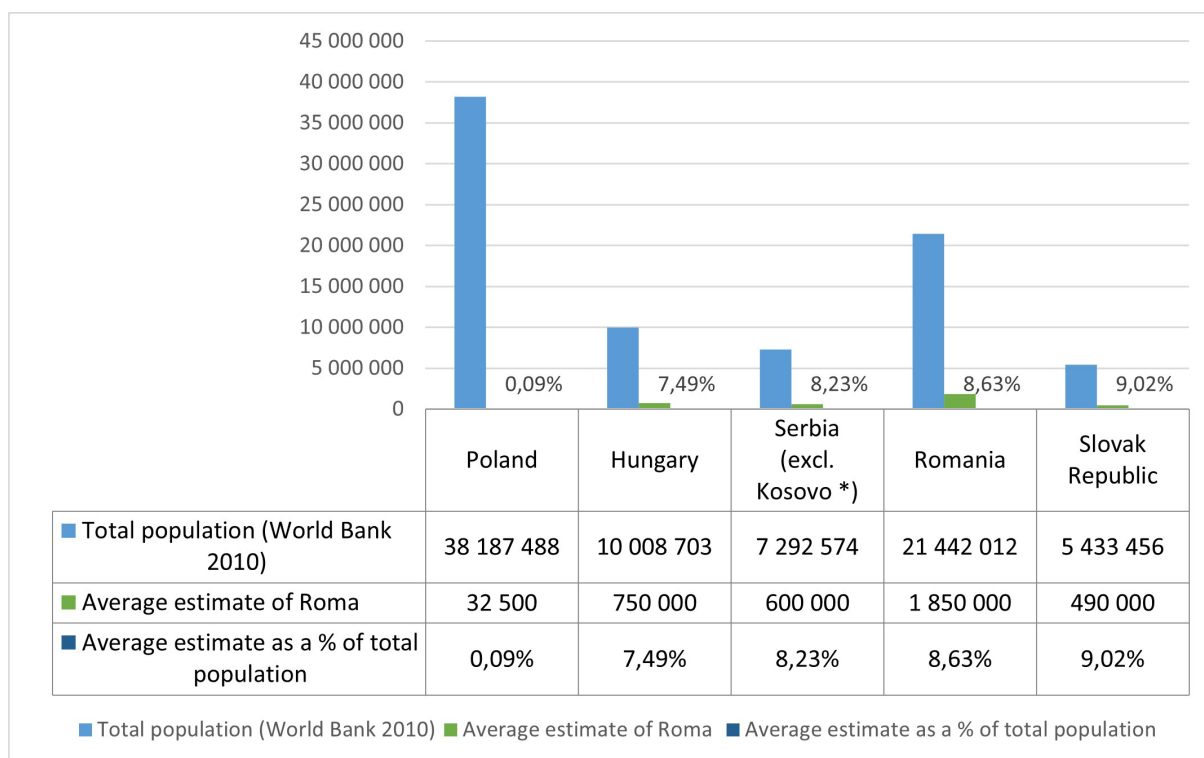
have even deteriorated. To give three examples, in Romania, the proportion of Roma children going to kindergarten has decreased; in Hungary, segregation is presently strengthening; while the ESL rate is stagnating in many countries, and in some is even deteriorating. To summarize, the education systems of the observed countries are not inclusive towards Roma children: they were not inclusive before the countries joined the European Union, and they are not inclusive now, when all of them are members, except for Serbia. The reason is the absence of real political will for change at the government level, and the absence of a Roma or pro-Roma civil rights movement capable of forcing the government to create real social inclusion in schools.

From the point of view of methodology, the strongest limitation of this analysis was the linguistic barrier, due to which I was only able to use sources in English, being unable to incorporate studies written in the language of the countries under analysis.

2. THE MAIN EDUCATIONAL CHALLENGES WITH THE EDUCATION OF ROMA CHILDREN

The Roma population constitutes the largest ethnic minority in Europe, totalling close to twelve million citizens. The Roma are present throughout the European continent, but are highly concentrated in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE). Estimates from research and international organisations put the number of Roma at as many as 750,000 in Hungary, 600,000 in Serbia, 1,850,000 in Romania, 490,000 in Slovakia, and 32,500 in Poland.

1. Figure: Average estimate of Roma as a % of total population



Source: Support Team of the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues

The Roma population has historically experienced widespread poverty, exclusion and discrimination in these countries. “The painstaking socio-economic gains experienced by most Roma during the socialist era were swiftly reversed after the collapse of communism, where a right to work was enshrined in the political ethos. Increasingly severe poverty, growing intolerance and prejudice led to a situation that some sociologists described as the formation of a Romani underclass, with all its negative aspects, including a high degree of exposure to social exclusion, discrimination and victimisation” (Ladanyi, 2001 cited by Rostas - Kostka, 2014).

The schooling problems of the Roma children can be observed from three different angles in the respective countries. On the one hand, one must look at the assimilation process in all five countries, because it is due to this that Roma children entered the education system in the first place, and how all the prevailing negative tendencies started. On the other hand, it is worth examining the schooling of Roma children from the perspective of a given country’s education system, because the status of the former is strongly determined by how developed the system of the latter is. Third, the diversity of the Roma groups in different countries also influenced how successful their assimilation was during the earlier regimes, thus what their educational situation looks like these days.

2.1. Social selection and the segregation of Roma pupils in the five countries

Anti-Gypsyism theory enables an exploration of the deep contradiction between the promise of schools as the great equalizer, and the reality of inequalities in education. Colorblind theory suggests that everybody can enjoy equal treatment, equating political rights with social equality without interrogating the ways that ethnicity and ethnocentrism play out in society to reproduce ongoing social inequality. As a result, the educational segregation of Roma children has always been present and flourished in these countries, regardless of political systems and governments. Despite residential segregation, the educational integration of Roma children could have been accomplished had there been real political will. Using Kozol’s ideas, the continuing school segregation of Roma students in the Hungarian case is a product of the failure to affirmatively remedy the totality of the social conditions that have produced ongoing racial inequality (Kozol, 2005).² Despite discrimination being prohibited by law, the latter country fails to address less tangible forms of the former that keep school segregation alive today: white flight from schools, disinvestment in public education, the semi-privatization of education, structural problems that reproduce poverty, and discrimination against the majority of Roma people.

Radó argues that highly selective education systems provide great latitude for ethnic separation. Selection in education – i.e. the tracking of pupils on the basis of their family background that results in homogeneous bodies of pupils in schools – is a complex phenomenon generated by the combined effects of various characteristics of educational systems. When considering the possible reasons for social selection in education, the impact of the following factors should be assessed: 1. The strength of the various societal inequalities that put pressure on institutions and actors in education; 2. The strength of pressure for separation generated by the prevailing pedagogical practice and the individual and institutional interests stemming from this pressure; 3. The degree of educational performance gaps that emerge at very early stages of education; 4. The characteristics of the school structure, and the number and location of formal selection points; 5. The characteristics of school networks, especially the average size of schools and the amount of redundant school capacity; 6. Parental aspirations and

2 Kozol, Jonathan (2005) *Shame of the Nation: The Restoration of Apartheid Schooling in America*. Westminster, MD: Crown Publishing Group.

choices; 7. The characteristics of the governance of school systems, various governance failures; and 8. Overt and hidden external policy expectations. These factors alone do not necessarily generate social selection. However, if combined, they create a local and/or institutional space within which the rational choices (i.e. decisions made on the basis of real or perceived interests) of various actors result in the separation of pupils of different backgrounds. Therefore, further analysis that helps with understanding the mechanism of social selection should focus on the interplay among these key factors. Also, the focus on local educational spaces calls for a certain level of caution with generalization: such spaces may differ from country to country, and from settlement to settlement. Obviously, the potential of educational policy to mitigate potential issues in relation to these eight underlying factors is not the same. For example, reducing broader social inequalities might be the result of a much broader package of coordinated government measures, including social policy, labor policy, health policy, housing and others. Similarly, influencing parental aspirations might be a legitimate educational policy goal, but it is basically outside of government control. The remaining six factors also differ in terms of the potential space for policy intervention. The reduction of formal selection points, altering educational policy expectations, mending certain governance failures, or school network rationalization might be matters for an “education reform” initiated and partly implemented by a single government. However, changing the prevailing pedagogical practice of schools or the reduction of early performance gaps can be the result of sustained development efforts only, which “education reforms” can only initiate by creating the necessary institutional conditions (Radó, 2020:5-7).

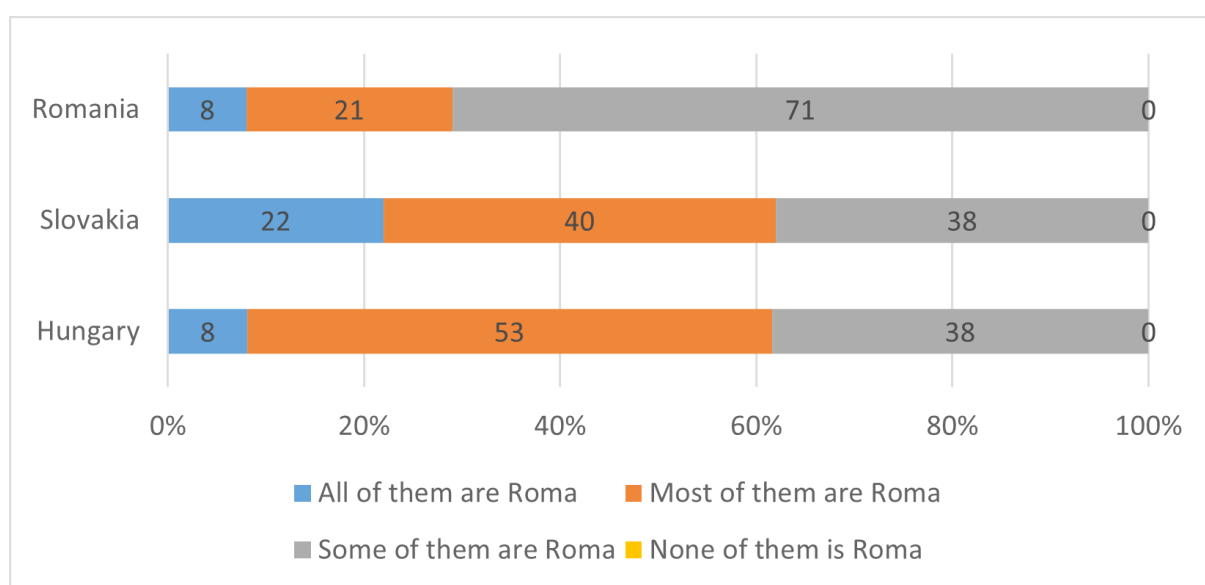
The segregation of Roma children in education can take place in special (remedial) schools, but it is also widespread in mainstream education. Ethnic segregation is not limited to the placement of Roma students into separate schools; intraschool segregation is similarly widespread in the countries concerned. This practice is not at the forefront of sociological and policy discourses for various reasons: it is difficult to identify such behaviour, as data on the ethnic identity of students grouped into parallel classes is evidently not accessible, and also because many policy makers believe that segregation ends once children study under the same roof (Messing, 2017). Messing argues that the most important reasons for school segregation – namely, residential segregation and the selectivity of school systems alone – do not explain the overwhelming presence and persistence of educational segregation, and that complex societal and power dynamics are at play (Messing 2017). Ryder et al. argue that “the creation of and maintenance of separate schools is linked to the cultural and political powers of a privileged majority able to legitimise the power control of the status quo” (Ryder et al., 2014:520). According to Szalai, the most important societal role of educational segregation is to draw and institutionalize the dividing lines between the lower-middle-class “white” majorities and the marginalized, socially deprived “colored” Roma, and thus strengthen the hierarchical relations and the relatively inferior position of Roma (Szalai, 2010). Segregation in education thus reconstructs the structures of social inequality (Ogbu, 1978).

The different forms and varying motives behind the segregation of Roma children in education have different consequences for children. Segregated schools provide a poor educational environment for Roma students, and teachers in such schools are frequently indifferent about the learning environment, which involves them failing to insist on adherence to regular school norms, weaker disciplinary expectations, and reduced expectations about performance, as well as implementing the curriculum to the absolute minimum. However, these schools can be “safe islands” for Roma children living in social exclusion. Many pupils feel comfortable at these schools because they are not confronted with racial

prejudice and bullying, and, due to the lowered expectations of teachers, many feel that their school performance is reasonable. Intraschool segregation is similarly harmful for Roma youth. Intraschool segregation serves the interest of local majorities, maintaining physical and social boundaries that are consistent with the social hierarchies constructed along the lines of ethnicity and race. Techniques of segregating Roma children within the school may vary – they include forming specialized tracks, providing ethnic minority education, and creating zero classes for disadvantaged students – but the rationale behind such organizational arrangements at schools is reported to be either the racist views of headmasters themselves, or the need to comply with the anti-Roma prejudices of parents of the ethnic majority, aimed at preventing “white flight” (Messing, 2017:101).

The less selective systems among the examined countries are those of Poland and Romania, although students in Romania have the lowest mean scores in science, and in Poland the highest. While the mean score of Hungary is better than for Slovakia and Romania, in the former country all the indicators related to the selectivity of the system are the worst among the four countries. Slovakia is ranked second place in this regard (with a worse mean score for degregation, but a more equitable system than in Hungary). When comparing the segregation-related situation of Roma students in our examined countries, we find the segregation data to be fully in line with the extent of the selectivity in the education systems in the respective countries.

2. Figure: School segregation – concentration of Roma children aged 6-15 years in school



Source: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016, Roma

In **Hungary**, the phenomenon of separating Roma children from their non-Roma peers in schools has been discussed by academics since the early 1980s (Csanádi - Ladányi, 1983; Havas - Liskó, 2004; Kertesi - Kézdi, 2006). Using statistical methods and comprehensive data about the ethnic composition of Hungarian primary schools for 1980 and 2011, Kertesi and Kézdi (2013) found that the school segregation of Roma children had significantly increased since the transition in 1989 (Messing, 2017). The Hungarian educational system today is not only unable to compensate for the disadvantages arising from a child’s social background, but is actually reinforcing them through the

selection and segregation mechanisms present at all levels of public education. Segregation measured in primary schools has been increasing sharply since 2010. The commuting of the children of higher status parents to “elite” schools has resulted in the schools of certain towns becoming “ghetto schools,” despite the fact that the towns themselves have not necessarily become Roma majority towns (Virág, 2010). Having no assigned compulsory school districts, church-maintained primary schools contribute to heightening segregation in education. Church schools even in disadvantaged regions and in smaller towns are primarily engaged in the education of the children of more affluent families, meaning that they help the local elite escape state-maintained schools. From 2013 onwards, the education system became more centralized, although the right to the freedom of choice of school and the most important school incentives remained the same. When examining the segregation processes at play, Kertesi and Kézdi (2014) arrived at the conclusion that “the primary source of segregation in schools is not that non-Roma families are trying to avoid Roma students, but rather the strong selection that is based on the presumed quality of the schools and the observable abilities of the students, which is made possible by the freedom of choice of school and the low cost of commuting” (Kertesi – Kézdi, 2014:39 cited by RCM2 – Hungary, 2019).

Even though the issue of “Roma schools” or systemic segregation in education seemingly belongs to the past in Poland,³ the problem of so-called “Roma classes” persists, as is demonstrated by a case from Poznań, where a separate class for Romanian Roma was created for the year 2015-2016. Despite success in desegregation, anti-Gypsyism in schools remains a problem, yet is often not systematically monitored. Roma parents point out that more needs to be done in order to overcome teacher biases and prejudices and the anti-Gypsyism that still continues to significantly impact the outcomes of the education process (RCM2 – Poland).

Educational segregation is still a challenge in **Romania**. It is estimated that around 27 per cent of Roma children receive education in de facto segregated schools (Education and Training Monitor – Romania, 2016).

In **Serbia**, a significant number of Roma children are enrolled in schools for children with special needs on no justifiable grounds. Although in recent years some progress has been achieved, the share of Roma children in special education schools is still far too high (about 30% of children in special schools are Roma, while their representation in the general population is about 3-4%). The segregation of classes and schools is not that frequent, but what causes concern is that the trend is towards an increase, while there are no preventive measures in place, or desegregation measures for schools in which segregation has already occurred, nor measures to determine individual responsibility for the resulting situation. Some of the problems the segregated schools with large numbers of Roma have to cope with are: poor working conditions, the low quality of educational work, other students leaving the school, the low status the teaching staff in these schools enjoy among their colleagues and members of the local community, and a lack of support from other schools and local governments, all of which significantly reduce the quality of education for Roma children (The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period from 2016 to 2025, 2016).

3 In the 1990s, so-called “Roma classes” were introduced across the country; the aim was to adapt Roma children to Polish schools. In the school year 1994/1995, there were 25 of the former, and 430 children were studying in such classes. In grades I-III, the youngest children were helped to overcome educational and adaptive barriers and were prepared for learning in older classes, in an integrated system. At the beginning of 2000, there were a dozen or so Roma classes (seven in the Małopolskie Voivodship) containing about 200 students (children and youth of various ages) at different stages of schooling. Ultimately, by 2010, with the participation of the Committee for Human Rights and Roma leaders, all previously operating “Roma classes” were systematically abolished

In **Slovakia**, the segregation of Romani children in education remains a systemic and deliberate practice. There is a lack of systemic measures for preventing and eliminating the segregation of Roma children in Roma-only classes and in Roma-only schools (Country Report Slovakia 2020). It is estimated that 62% of Roma children attend a school where all or most other children are also Roma (FRA, 2016); no real progress with desegregation has been observed in the recent past (Amnesty International, 2016) (Education and Training Monitor 2019 Slovakia). Segregation also extends to secondary schools through so-called branches of vocational schools set up next to settlements. The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport (MESRS) continues to argue that segregation is incidental. The remainder of the legislative and financial measures that are implemented are not likely to have been intended to address segregation in practice, further deteriorating the situation of the already segregated education of Romani children. In fact, the state has no plans concerning how to prevent ongoing white flight, to manage desegregation, or to support the transition of Romani children from segregated to integrated schools (RCM2 – Slovakia).

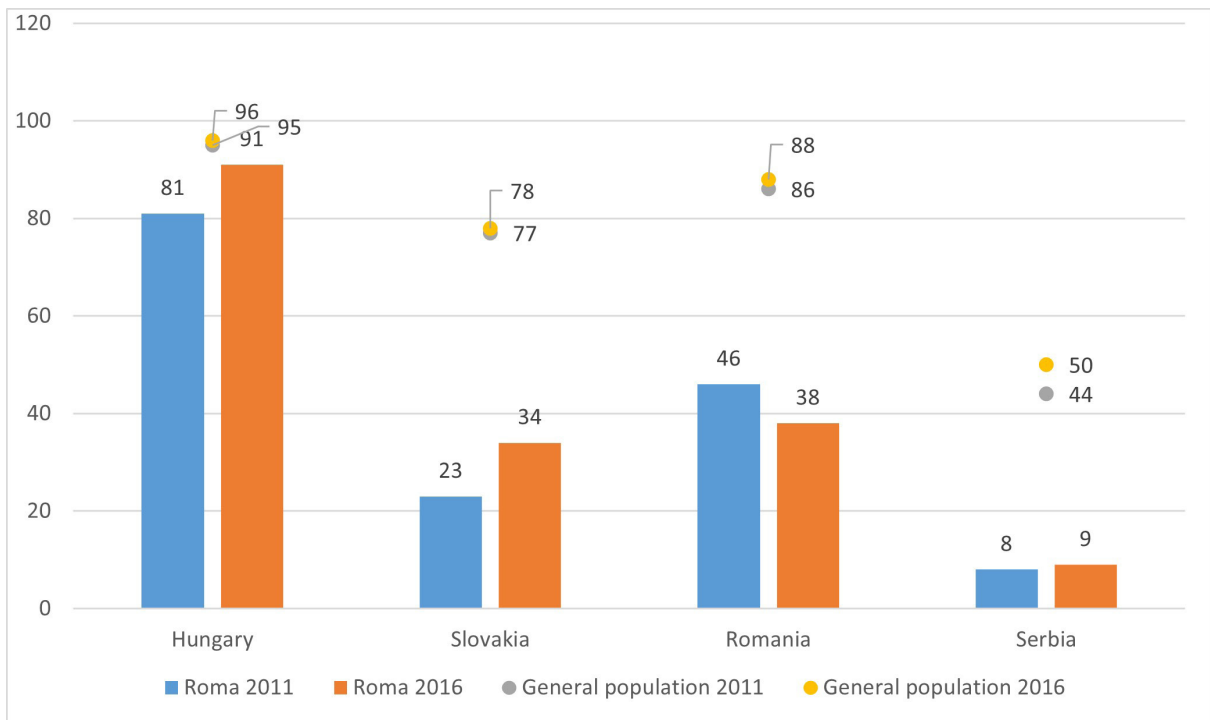
2.2. Early childhood education

The lack of early childhood services greatly contributes to the low educational achievement among Roma. Since 1989, there has been widespread elimination of free kindergartens from most of the countries studied here, or, even if they are free, the additional costs associated with kindergarten attendance are too high for most Roma families. This lack of provision contributes to a lack of readiness for school, which in turn serves to impact negatively on children's capacity to benefit from primary education (The Right of Roma Children to Education, 2011)

Enrolment in early childhood education increased among the Roma in most of the examined countries, and the trend is similar to that among the general population. However, for the Roma population in Romania it declined, from 46 % to 38 % between 2011 and 2016. In Hungary, which had the highest enrolment rates in 2016 (95 % and 91 %, respectively in 2011), there was a high base even in 2011 (77 % and 81 %, respectively).

In the countries analysed here, the proportion of Roma children in kindergartens rose only as a result of the generally improved early childhood policies of the given countries, and not because of targeted programs aimed at Roma children. In most countries, kindergarten is only compulsory for one year before school, and although there is no official fee for this, additional costs make it difficult for Roma children to attend. The poor network of kindergartens and the lack of teachers also create problems. There are countries where segregation is already present at the kindergarten level (Slovakia, Serbia, and Romania) or there are no kindergartens at all near where Roma people live (Serbia, Romania). In Slovakia, for instance, local municipalities are not motivated politically and/or financially to take on the responsibility for creating kindergartens, so they spend their money on other projects. In Serbia, local municipalities in many cases are so poorly funded that they cannot even begin to think of building kindergartens and thus facilitate Roma children's attendance. It is thus quite clear that strong political will and financial incentive policies are needed to improve Roma children's attendance at kindergartens.

3. Figure: Children aged between four and the compulsory age for starting primary education who participated in early childhood education (household members, %)⁴



Sources: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016, Roma (weighted data); FRA, Roma Pilot Survey 2011 (weighted data); UNDP-World Bank-EC 2011 (for Croatia, weighted data); Eurostat 2016, General population; Eurostat 2011, General population (A persisting concern: anti-Gypsyism as a barrier to Roma inclusion, 2018)

In **Hungary**, the regulation of education has been contradictory in respect of equal opportunities and Roma integration. A measure mandating the enrolment of children into kindergarten from the age of three effective as of 1 September 2015 may contribute to the development of severely disadvantaged children. However, the quality of early childhood education and school education is threatened by a chronic shortage of educators and teachers, a problem to which the government has been unable to find a solution for many years (RCM2-Hungary, 2019). In **Poland**, from 1 September 2017 pre-school education became obligatory and free of charge for children aged six, which should improve the educational opportunities of Roma students. In **Romania**, in the case of pre-school, the enrolment rate for Roma children between three and six years of age is below the rate for the majority population, as in most cases the schooling costs of a child exceed the means of most Roma families. Pre-school is currently not compulsory in Romania; however, the draft bill proposes extending the length of compulsory education, including the last two years of pre-school education. In **Serbia**, Roma children in pre-primary education are severely under-represented, but the number has been increased significantly in the last years. This increase is obviously the result of the introduction of new laws and strategies in the area of Roma education, and the implementation of numerous measures, such as the work of health mediators (Macura-Milovanović, 2013). The main barriers to their enrolment in kindergartens are the poverty of Roma families, discrimination and prejudice against Roma, insufficient inter-sectorial

⁴ No data are available about Roma children in Poland.

cooperation, the underdeveloped network of preschool institutions, and the absence of kindergartens in Roma settlements. In **Slovakia**, a subsidy was introduced for poor children attending kindergarten from the age of three as of 1 January 2018 to aid preschool enrolment among Roma children. However, this subsidy of approximately 164 EUR a year per child (payable to the kindergarten) probably does not cover the fees normally requested from parents in state facilities. On the other hand, the introduction of universal free lunch for all children as of 1 January 2019 for all children in their last preschool year is likely to improve the accessibility of kindergartens for poor families (RCM2 – Slovakia, 2019). One of the key reasons for the low rate of the enrolment is the lack of preschool capacity, which is lowest in those regions with the highest share of marginalised Roma.

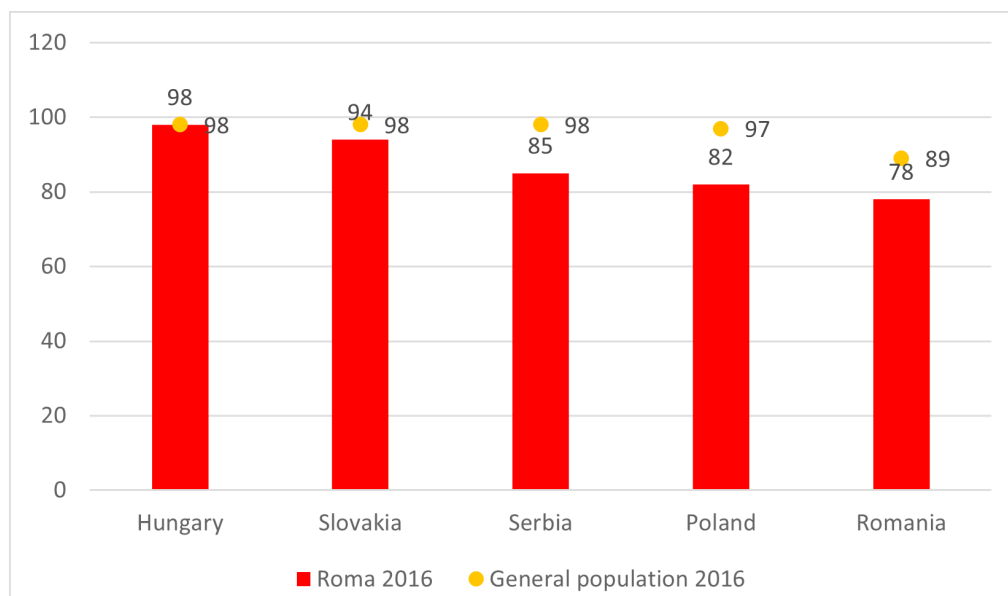
2.3. Primary and lower secondary education

In spite of the fact that one of the indicators of the efficiency of an educational system is the rate of school attendance, this does not say much about the quality of education. Although the former has improved a great deal in the countries analysed here, the most fundamental problems affecting Roma children – namely, exclusion from quality education – still prevail. Although segregation is partially a by-product of given residential conditions, in most cases it is a result of educational policies. Local educational policies aim at raising efficiency through inter- and intra-school streaming and tracking. “Educational segregation often concludes in a significant downgrade in the quality and the content of teaching. This results in lowered performance and the accumulation of disadvantages in the advancement toward the secondary and higher levels, whereby segregation proves a key driver of inequality regarding educational and vocational opportunities and the reproduction of social deprivation on ethnic grounds. Furthermore, segregated conditions in education tend to result in early ethnic enclosure and isolation. Young people from ethnic minority backgrounds have very limited contact[...] with their peers from the majority. While students and parents often note that segregation in school helps them feel safe and protected, they pay a high price for it: inclusion into the practices, routines, and institutions of mainstream society is often blocked simply by lacking the knowledge about how to proceed. Lowered aspirations and limited paths for mobility are evident implications” (Szalai, 2011:3).

The blame for the failures of Roma children in education has been put on Roma families, although the dysfunctional training of teachers, underpaid teachers, the lack of proper perspectives, and unfit methodology are the main hindrances to the successful education of Roma children. This is why in many cases attempts are being made to compensate for a dysfunctional education system by risky – in terms of sustainability – civil initiatives, or by project-based EU funded programs.

The enrolment of Roma children in primary and lower secondary school has greatly improved over the last decade in the examined countries, although there is room for further improvement to achieve the goal of full enrolment (RCM – Synthesis Report, 2019). The share of Roma children attending compulsory schooling-age education is above 90% in all examined countries except for Romania and Serbia, where the share of total population attending is also under 90% (78% and 85%) (FRA, 2018).

4. Figure: Children of compulsory-schooling age participating in education (household members, 5-17 depending on country, %)



Sources: FRA, EU-MIDIS II 2016, Roma (weighted data); FRA, Roma Pilot Survey 2011 (weighted data); UNDP-World Bank-EC 2011; Eurostat 2016; Eurostat 2011 (FRA, 2018); Poland: 2009/2010 school year. Source: The Ministry of the Interior and Administration.⁵

In Hungary, access to quality education is restricted by the fact that there has been a consistent shortage of teachers, and that the number of classes held by non-specialist teachers in schools is growing as well – especially in districts where the proportion of disadvantaged children is high.⁶ In addition, it is also often the case that Roma students attend segregated institutions, which prevents them from accessing quality education, reduces the chances of relationships forming between different groups of young people, and contributes to maintaining already strong prejudices (Kertesi – Kézdi, 2016 cited by RCM2 – Hungary, 2019). In Poland, there are currently about 50 integration day-care centres for Roma children funded by the 2014-2020 Roma Programme, at which children can do homework after school lessons with the help of a teacher and participate in other activities, like learning foreign languages, playing computer games, taking part in organised summer camps and trips, integrating with non-Roma peers, etc. In Romania, one of the major challenges is related to the non-equal access to education, with significant differences between rural and urban areas, and also between Roma and non-Roma. There are no highly qualified teachers in Roma schools; on the contrary, they are legally hired with tenure, but merely use the (largely urban) schools as launch pads for pre-transfers to other schools in the city, and sometimes untrained substitute teachers replace them in schools with numerous Roma students. Roma students face numerous problems: poor learning outcomes, high risk of drop-out due to poor attendance rates, low family income, early marriages, parents’ non-involvement in school, discrimination in terms of the grading of students, the staff’s lack of inclusive educational skills, and Roma students’ non-involvement in extra-curricular activities that could help increase self-esteem.⁷ The cost of schooling a child exceeds the means of most Roma families. In Serbia, the absence of children in compulsory education and the disproportionate presence and schooling of Roma children in “schools

5 <https://www.refworld.org/docid/5072bab62.html>

6 The shortage of teachers is very acute at the national level as well: it is particularly difficult to find specialist teachers in schools located in disadvantaged areas. <https://szakszervezetek.hu/hirek/12615-tanarhiany-tobb-szaz-szaktanari-allast-hirdetnek>

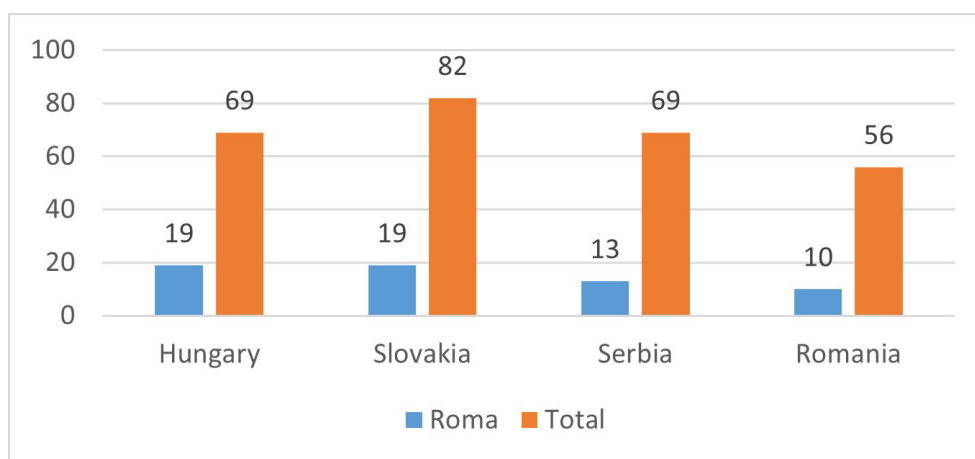
7 https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/roma_romania_strategy2_en.pdf

for children with special needs” represents serious discrimination and violation of the right to quality education. As a result of insufficient preparation for school, only about 30% of Roma children enrol in the first grade on time (they usually do so after a one-year delay). Due to the difficulties they face during elementary school (discrimination, lack of adequate additional support, poverty, etc.) only 64% of Roma children complete their primary education. In Slovakia, Roma children are overwhelmingly segregated in Roma-only mainstream schools and classes, or in special schools and classes for children with “mild mental disabilities”. As a result, they are condemned to low-quality segregated education. Due to the low quality of the education received in segregated settings, they have limited prospects of continuing their education beyond the age of 16 and, if they do, it is usually in vocational schools, without the possibility of accessing university education later. Teachers’ low expectations about Romani pupils can contribute to their lower achievement, as can deeply entrenched prejudice and a lack of individual support.

2.4. Upper Secondary education, including vocational training

It is typical of all the countries that very few Roma students make it to graduation. Hungary, with its 24%, excels, although this proportion is far below that of non-Roma, at 70-75%. Roma following the VET track is also typical, which on the one hand represents an educational dead-end, while on the other hand VET schools often become segregated – or, even within the system, Roma often attend a priori segregated VET schools, like the Branch schools in Slovakia. In addition, it is a characteristic feature of these countries that a large proportion of pupils do not reach the upper secondary level because of the need for frequent repetition, thus when reaching the end of compulsory school age, pupils have not, or have only just finished lower secondary school, so some do not pursue further education at the upper secondary level. It is an interesting phenomenon – although a detailed analysis goes beyond the framework of this paper – that while in Hungary the dual three-year vocational training cannot prevent students from dropping out, countries that have just introduced the VET track are hopeful that the dual training system will facilitate the inclusion of Roma children (Romania, Slovakia, and Serbia).

5. Figure: Completion rate in secondary education⁸



Source: Roma Inclusion Index 2015 by Decade of Roma Inclusion Secretariat Foundation

8 Difference in the completion rate in secondary education between Roma and the total population. The completion rate in secondary education is the number of graduates of secondary education divided by total population in the age group 25–64 expressed as a percentage. Graduates of secondary education are those persons that have completed the equivalent of 3 or 4 years of general higher or vocational (secondary) education. The ‘gap’ is the product of subtracting the completion rate of the total population from the completion rate of Roma (females).

In Hungary, every other Roma young person drops out of the Hungarian educational system without obtaining any qualifications (early school leaving). More than half of those who complete secondary school complete a vocational school, and only one-fifth graduate from a grammar school. The proportions are reversed in non-Roma populations, thus the gap between the two groups is growing (Kertesi – Kézdi, 2016). In Romania, the share of early leavers from education and training (youth aged 18-24 years) is still high: 18.1 per cent in 2017 in Romania, compared to the EU average of 10.6 per cent.⁹ Of all the early school leavers in 2015, 77 per cent were Roma (FRA, 2016). The main support measure with a focus on secondary education is the allocation of places for Roma students in upper secondary education. Special places for Roma students are allocated in addition to the regular number of places in upper secondary and vocational schools, with a limit of one to two places per class. In Serbia, the involvement of young people from the Roma community is unsatisfactory, particularly in secondary and higher education.¹⁰ There is also a lack of systematic mechanisms for providing support for the continuation of education to children and youth who leave school before completing their secondary education. The affirmative measures for enrolment in high schools are insufficient with regard to the number of Roma students who leave education after graduating from elementary school (The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma – Serbia, 2016). In Slovakia, 80.3 % of 16-year-olds were enrolled into schools, while in case of the youth from marginalised Roma communities, the figure was merely 49% in 2017/2018. Furthermore, a large number of children are unable to complete lower secondary education (i.e. grades 5 to 9) at elementary schools on time as defined by legislation (16 years), caused by a high number of grade repetitions, end up in segregated branch departments of private and state secondary schools.¹¹

2.5. Special education

The educational systems of the countries examined here typically emphasize the memorisation of large quantities of facts and the regurgitation of information provided by the teacher, a figure who is often authoritarian. Rather than aim at the best education for all, schools aim to differentiate quickly between weaker students and would-be achievers. A relatively small number are thus prepared for university education, and by the time children reach the end of lower secondary school (the eighth class in most cases), most of them have their future clearly delineated. Roma students – for reasons ranging from early-age language differences to the cultural specificity of both curricula and pedagogical methods and the different forms of abuse meted out by different educational actors – do not perform well early on

9 https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/document-library-docs/et-monitor-factsheet2018-romania_en.pdf

10 The primary source of information when identifying key issues concerning the education of Roma is the Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of Women and Children in Serbia 2014 and Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey of Women and Children in Roma Settlements in Serbia 2014, conducted by the Serbian National Statistics Office and UNICEF, 2014 (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey-MICS), which was conducted in 2014 and also in 2005. The Survey contains a wide spectrum of indicators related to a representative sample of the general population and the Roma population in settlements. The fact that studies on Roma education in Serbia lack systematically data that would allow for the monitoring of the exercise of right to quality education for Roma children in itself reveals that the solving of problems concerning the Roma in education is still not a priority in the reforms currently underway in Serbia.

11 Over the last decade, the practice of opening lower secondary schools (ISCED2C) as branches of vocational schools next to settlements has emerged. Currently, there are 68 state and 44 private branch offices of secondary schools. We assess that except for a few that are in prisons, all are located next to settlements. The learning programs include assistant-type jobs, often in food and textile production, construction, or the stereotypical ‘Practical Lady’ course attended by approximately 600 Romani girls (RCM1 – Slovakia, 2018).

in their schooling lives. The former are, in the overwhelming majority of cases, streamed into classes offering substandard education and, in the worst cases, transferred early in their educational lives to so-called “special schools”: schools for the mentally handicapped (Cahn et al., 1998).

The segregation of Roma children and youngsters in special schooling is a result of disproportionate streaming, leading to the overrepresentation of Roma in special schools or special classes for children with (mental) disabilities, or special education needs. Special schools and classes offer a reduced curriculum and seldom enable their students to enter the regular school system or the labour market. According to the Regional Survey 2011, the share of Roma aged 7 to 15 who attend or have attended special schools (not including special classes) exceeds 5% in Hungary and Serbia, and 10% in Slovakia (according to EU-MIDIS II, it was 18% in 2016). Findings from a separate UNDP Household Survey conducted in Slovakia in 2010, based on a different sampling methodology, show that 16% of Roma aged 7 to 15 attended special schools, and another 4% attended special classes (Brüggemann – Škobla, 2012). A considerable proportion of pupils who attend special schools are Roma in Romania too, although the numbers are very uncertain (Jigou - Surdu, 2007). The share of Roma aged 7 to 15 for whom a longstanding illness or health problem¹² is indicated is far below the share of Roma attending special schools. One in four Roma who are or have been attending a special school in Hungary have a longstanding illness or health problem. Considering that illness or health problems are reported for a minority of Roma students that attend special schools, institutional mechanisms might be the main reason for the high share of Roma students in special schools. Streaming into special schools can be triggered by decision making within the family. Roma families might prefer special schools to regular schools (a quasi-rational choice) if, for example, special schooling is associated with lower transaction costs, such as the provision of hot meals and free textbooks or clothing, as has been observed in Serbia (Szira - Kočić-Rakočević, 2010), or when students have a significant chance of receiving achievement-based scholarships, as observed in Slovakia (Friedman et al. 2009). Parents might also expect less discrimination towards their children in special school settings, or welcome a special school’s quasi-specialisation in the conditions found in the local Roma community. In Slovakia (Rigová et al. 2003) and Serbia (McDonald - Mihajlović 2010), it was observed that students are likely to attend special schools if older siblings were also attending special schools. Nevertheless, UNDP/ World Bank/EC survey data¹³ suggest that Roma do not believe that special education is a sufficient level of education: Out of 8792 (randomly selected) respondents from Roma households in Central and Southeast Europe, only 28 (0.3%) stated that education in special schools is sufficient for a girl (sample average). The proportion of Roma respondents aspiring only to special schooling for a girl did not reach 1% in any country. This is because special schooling is associated with disadvantages in terms of learning and life chances, and institutional mechanisms that drive streaming are perceived as discriminatory. The streaming of Roma into special schools and classes is a result of both direct and indirect discrimination. Direct discrimination has been observed, for example, in Slovakia, where Roma children have been

12 The existence of a longstanding illness or health problem was indicated by the household head based on a subjective assessment.

13 Two parallel and complementary surveys were carried out in 2011 in an effort to map the current situation of Roma in Europe, one focusing on social and economic development aspects and carried out by the UNDP and the World Bank, and one focusing on the fulfilment of key fundamental rights carried out by the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA). The UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey was conducted in May-July 2011 on a random sample of Roma and non-Roma households living in areas with higher density (or concentration) of Roma populations in the EU Member States of Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, and the non-EU Member States of Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Republic of Moldova and Serbia. See: Brüggemann, 2012.

enrolled in special schools without any diagnostic examination (Tomatová, 2004). Moreover, Roma have been found to be indirectly discriminated against through the use of intelligence or school readiness tests, which guide streaming decisions. Diagnostic tests that are used in Slovakia, Hungary, and Serbia show a cultural and language bias that disadvantages Roma children¹⁴ (White, 2012). It is neither limited intelligence nor talent, nor physical or psychological dysfunction, but rather their disadvantaged situation that seems to trigger the streaming of Roma into special schools and classes (Brueggemann, 2012).

In Hungary, placing Roma children into special schools or classes is not practiced anymore, as other ways of segregating Roma children have now become typical. In Poland, changes in the law (since 2013 Roma school assistants have been authorized to participate in children's diagnoses or mechanisms that allow for the re-diagnosis of children) as well as in practice (day centres, Roma school assistants, supporting teachers) have helped to reduce the number of Roma children in special education institutions. Romania has a complex parallel system of primary and secondary schools for children with physical and developmental disabilities.¹⁵ There has been no research to precisely evaluate the potential over-representation of Roma children in special schools, because Romania has neglected to include this problem as part of a Phare project (Advancing Education of Roma in Romania, 2007). In Serbia, there is an overdeveloped network of primary and secondary education special schools that cater for children with learning disabilities and other special needs. Additionally, many primary schools, and a few secondary schools, have special classes for the same purpose. Due to biased categorisation, lack of non-Roma special education students, and the social benefits attached to special education, Roma children are overrepresented in these schools – in some schools as many as 80 percent of the students are Roma. Hence, special schooling has become a means of segregation in Serbia (Advancing Education of Roma in Serbia, 2007). However, Serbia has undoubtedly taken very important steps in terms of both legislation and policy related to Roma education, and especially the segregation of Romani students in schools for the education of students with disabilities. The slight decrease in the representation of Romani students in such schools does indicate that changes are slowly taking place (A Long Way to Go..., 2014:35). In Slovakia, the proportion of pupils with special educational needs is among the highest in Europe, at almost 20% of primary school pupils. Some 5.9% of these pupils (EU: 1.6%) are educated in special classes or special schools. In several districts in Eastern Slovakia, the proportion of primary school pupils in special schools for children with mental disabilities exceeds 10% (MESA10, 2019). This trend especially affects the Roma population: 22.6% of Roma children are in special primary schools (Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, 2018).

14 Research carried out in Slovakia also points to indirect discrimination as a result of informal routines, in the form of teachers advocating the advantages of special schooling to Roma parents (Friedman et al. 2009).

15 This information relies on Advancing Education of Roma in Romania by the Roma Education Fund: I was not able to find out more current information and data about this issue in the case of Romania.

3. MAINSTREAM EQUITY EDUCATION STRATEGIES AND THE CONDITIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN THE FIVE COUNTRIES AND THEIR IMPACT ON THE EDUCATION OF ROMA STUDENTS

Inclusion as a concept now has a global presence in the world of education and educational policies. However, definitions of inclusion are “all over the place, representing diverse perspectives and ideologies” (Smith, 2010:38), causing confusion as to what they imply (Ainscow, 2007), but I argue that the real challenge is how to detect or understand exclusion in education. Roma students are still disproportionately channelled into special education or segregated classes. The practices meant to support inclusion apply not only to students with special needs, but also to various groups of students with cultural and linguistic differences. Cultural and linguistic differences often lead to segregated education (Harry, 2005). As Acton argues, however, “the perception of ethnicity as disability remains subliminally damaging, especially for Gypsies where the achievement of an antiracist approach remains fragile” (Acton, 1998:15).

According to Radó, successful inclusive education requires a great variety of necessary conditions to be in place. All these conditions constitute an “ecosystem” around students that is composed of various services, provisions, measures and resources. The core element of the “ecosystem” is differentiated teaching practice, which is based on responding to the specific individual development needs of students. These development needs are as diverse as the potential obstacles to the successful learning of individual students are. Meeting these needs might require supplementary program elements to be provided to a certain group of students, remedial or developmental hours provided to individual children on the basis of individual educational plans, or enrichment programs and projects for talented children or psychological treatments – or any other services beyond regular contact hours. The next layer consists of those provisions that are not necessarily educational in the narrow sense of the word, but are essential for successful learning; these are methods and institutionalized procedures that include the medical, educational, and social profiling of children, various social allowances, and various means of ensuring the empowerment and involvement of parents. The third layer is composed of those elements of the “ecosystem” which are necessary conditions of the improvement and maintenance of the inclusion capacity of schools. The key elements of this layer are as follows: enrolment policies (regulations, incentives, local and school policies) that, by preventing separation and selection on the basis of student background and segregation, ensure the integrated education of students in heterogeneous schools and classrooms; institutionalized and readily available professional support for teachers; a professional development system which is able to respond to the capacity-building needs of teachers generated by inclusion; a local cooperation framework within which various social, health and educational services and service providers are well-connected and which is built around the needs of individual families and children; mandatory self-evaluation-based school improvement, institutionalized cooperation among teachers and other professionals; all necessary elements of a full and effective anti-discrimination

system that ensures that related regulations prevail; and the availability of all the necessary financial and human resources (Evaluation report, 2016:17-18).

Inclusive education can be explored in three interconnected dimensions:

- Inclusive cultures – this refers to the encouragement of those beliefs and value systems that generate a secure, accepting, collaborating and inspiring community for all participants. A central identifier within the organization is its congenial and welcoming atmosphere and the presence of inclusive values. People are encouraged to help each other and collaborate. Everyone (i.e. all stakeholders) is treated with respect.
- Inclusive policies – the explicit aim of promoting inclusion is contained in plans and other policy documents. The focus is on policies related to admission and the accessibility of the organization (and buildings), the recruitment of staff and students, and on the policies the organization has developed to organize support for diversity, and perhaps the celebration of diversity.
- Inclusive practices – these focus on what actually is going on in the organization: on the practices that reflect inclusive cultures and policies by ensuring that activities encourage the participation of all participants (EASPD, 2012:7).

If we examine the conditions of inclusive education in place in these countries, a number of policy initiatives have been proposed in the context of education of Roma children. One of those policies is the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) aimed at eliminating marginalization and discrimination against the Roma minority in four priority areas: housing, health care, employment, and education. Hungary, Romania, Serbia, and Slovakia (among the 12 Member States) were required to develop a national Action Plan. The Action Plans were to include national assessments and to provide clear and pragmatic goals and transparent benchmarks to demonstrate the progress of Roma students in formal education (Curcic et al., 2014). The implementation of the goals depended on an accountability system that included local municipalities and schools, stakeholders in Roma and non-Roma political and educational organizations, and governments, as well as pan-European bodies such as the European Council (Miskovic - Curcic, 2016). Because of the intensity of anti-Roma sentiment and the lack of social reforms on a broader societal level, the effects of the Decade were haphazard and fragmented. As a very important consequence, it is considered impossible to achieve educational inclusion without social inclusion. Individual schools and teachers are supposed to perform “heroic acts,” while the larger system remains intact (Miskovic - Curcic, 2016). Furthermore, “Roma civil society remains weak in terms of influence and pressure, dependent on EU and foreign aid, opportunistic, and inexperienced in dealing with the complexities of efficiently influencing the Member States and European agendas” (Nicolae, 2015:6).

Despite some progress in education, mainly through the advancement of literacy and the completion of primary and some secondary schooling (Friedman, 2013), since the end of the Decade there has been little evidence that disparities between Roma and non-Roma citizens of Europe have decreased.

National Roma Integration Strategies 2013-2020 in 28 EU Member States were part of another comprehensive and expanded policy proposed by the EU after the Decade’s minimal success. The EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies was adopted in 2011, but each state was left to tailor its national policy according to its own national situation (EU, 2014). As a positive result, the importance of early childhood education has been widely recognized across the member states (EU, 2014).

The examination of inclusive policies and practices across a number of European states reveals the intertwined and sometimes opposing developments pertinent to inclusive education. Both overt and covert racist behaviour makes school environments hostile to many Roma students. There are tensions that seem to be inherent regarding inclusion within schools that are not ready for all students, but which expect all students to be ready for (such inadequately prepared) schools. Practices that filter Roma children based on their “readiness” for school begin as early as preschool, and continue throughout elementary and secondary schooling. Those Roma students who continue their schooling and develop interests and aspirations regarding various career goals often face an “ethnic ceiling” and lower their aspirations based on normative societal- or teachers’ expectations. However, Roma youth cannot wait for schools to be ready for them. They need solutions to prejudices and animosity that, over time, and especially in times of economic recession, seem to have increased, not decreased (Miskovic - Curcic, 2016:8-9).

Overall, however, the EU has mandated, encouraged, and financially supported inclusionary efforts towards Roma, which have led to many inclusionary practices, policies, and institutions. As a result, substantial improvements in the lives of socially excluded Roma will slowly emerge. EU efforts have had some positive effects, which could conceivably lay the groundwork for real change. Such efforts, however, have not motivated any broad-based grassroots demand for the governments to improve the inclusion and equality of Roma, nor have they erased pre-existing anti-Roma attitudes and practices. Substantive change will remain difficult in such an environment. In their pursuit of EU membership, all countries with large Roma populations have adopted a variety of inclusionary policies and institutions that have enabled the defence of equal rights and some Roma participation, and various programs and projects supporting Roma integration (Ram, 2014).

Preschool education has been obligatory from the age of three in **Hungary** since 2015. Additionally, governmental programmes aim at increasing the number of kindergarten teachers and their training in social inclusion and integration. Two programmes aimed at reducing early school leaving have been implemented, including remedial schools, second chance educational models, and tutoring. Further, one program aims to reach youth that have already dropped out. The state supports a portion of the salaries of the staff in “Sure Start Children’s Houses,” which offer early childhood programmes for disadvantaged children. The children’s houses have been proven to improve social skills, vocabulary, and motor coordination. Higher education scholarship programmes funded from the “Human Resources Development Operational Programme” are targeted at Roma students (yet only traditional church schools and universities are eligible for funding) (Comparative analysis of data from all 27 Member States: Education, 2019:2).

Education is a priority in the 2014-2020 Roma Programme in **Poland**. About 65% of the total funding of the latter has been devoted to education (i.e. day-care centres, preschool subsidies, and scholarships). From 2017, pre-school education became obligatory and free of charge for children from age six. In areas without facilities, preschool education is provided by various types of community centres. In the last years, the number of Roma children in special education has been reduced. Scholarship schemes for Roma primary school-, high school-, and university students aim to foster their enrolment and graduation rates. The institutionalisation of Roma school assistants and supporting teachers’ positions is aimed at increasing school attendance and educational outcomes (Comparative analysis of data from all 27 Member States: Education, 2019:9).

From a policy development standpoint there is progress in the areas of the right to education in the mother tongue, assistance in a Roma language, and the inclusion of the history of national minorities in the national curriculum in **Romania**. The government utilises ESIF for support when addressing the shortage of kindergartens and teachers. There are three targeted programmes to reduce the dropout rate for Roma youth, including afterschool education, financial incentives, and second chance education. The state has initiated the placement of Roma mediators in schools with a higher proportion of Roma students. Several measures for improving Roma inclusion in secondary education have been adopted, including an extension of compulsory schooling to 10 years, and the allocation of places for Roma students in upper secondary education (affirmative action). In 2017, the Ministry of Education provided grants to 271 upper secondary schools to implement remedial/tutoring classes, career counselling, and school infrastructure. The Ministry of Education established a National Commission for Desegregation and Educational Inclusion, which includes two representatives of Roma NGOs and several respected experts (Comparative analysis of data from all 27 Member States: Education, 2019:2).

In Serbia, children from vulnerable groups have the right to priority enrolment in pre-school education, although the inclusion of Roma children has not increased because almost every Roma child could be thus classified.. The preschool preparatory program is mandatory, and has been created to ensure that all children are prepared to go to elementary school. The law sanctions teaching assistants who do not register that parents have, without reasonable excuse, failed to register children in the Preschool preparatory program, or if a child is absent without justification. Affirmative measures of enrolment introduced in secondary and higher education provide support to Roma in their exercise of affirmative action rights, and also in relation to financing the enrolment of Roma students from the state budget based on affirmative action. A legal basis was created for the definition of the status, recruitment, training, and funding of teaching assistants, which allowed for their introduction into the educational system. Their work has largely contributed to the increase in the number of Roma children in primary and secondary schools in Serbia. Still, despite the fact that these teaching assistants are considered the most important measure of support for Roma children in education, their status within schools has still not been clearly defined, and neither has their role and opportunity for career advancement. Minorities in Serbia have the right to “exercise, cultivate, develop and publicly express their individual national, ethnic, cultural, and religious characteristics” and “use their language and alphabet,” and “receive education in their language in state-founded institutions.” According to a survey, about 8,600 parents expressed a desire for their children to attend the “Romani language with elements of Roma culture” course, but only a small number of students have been given the opportunity to do so. Over the past few years, the system has defined the basis for the solution of the problem of early school leaving, but actual practice in schools and Centres for Social Work is still often not sufficiently effective, both when it comes to preventing and when it comes to responding to early school leaving (The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period from 2016 to 2025, 2016).¹⁶

The government decided on introducing a compulsory one year of preschool education in **Slovakia**. The government utilizes European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) to support educational efforts. Through ESF-funded projects, the government provides extra assistance and staff to schools in which the proportion of Roma children is above 20%. The European Fund for Regional Development (ERDF) is used to construct and expand kindergartens (since 2016, 49 projects) and is designed to

16 The Strategy of Social Inclusion of Roma for the Period from 2016 to 2025 (2016) <https://www.rcc.int/romaintegration2020/docs/5/strategy-of-social-inclusion-of-roma-for-the-period-from-2016-to-2025--serbia-rn>

ensure that at least 30% of the children enrolled are Roma. The Government Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities targets 150 municipalities with the most marginalised Roma communities (although actually only 52 localities have projects running) and provides support for employing teachers and assistants in kindergartens to increase the enrolment of Roma children. The two-year vocational training system for jobs in administration, construction, food industry, and textile production is well funded and has potential. The use of EU funds to support developments in education is sub-optimal, and a systematic evaluation of projects that can guide further policy action and funding is needed. Investment in teacher training is also weak. The evaluation of the first action plan (2018-2019) of the 2018-2027 national reform programme for education and upbringing (Ministry of Education, 2018) and the development of the second are pending (Comparative analysis of data from all 27 Member States: Education, 2019:3).

The countries examined here embrace more or less similarly structured societies that allow for similar patterns of inequalities to emerge – forged by interethnic relations and intersecting forces of social status and ethnicity. Across these countries, educational service providers encounter similar problems related to improving the participation of Roma students in education. These problems arise from the traditions and institutionalizations of citizenship and consequential access to schooling. In all the analysed countries, Roma communities are divided by their socio-economic status and cultural traditions among and within themselves, further differentiating the needs and claims for equity, equality, and recognition. These states run their education systems within a complexity of forms of potential and limitations that are informed, on the one hand, by traditions and deeply internalised values of schooling, and on the other hand, by prevailing administrative, political, cultural, and financial choices and constraints (Zentai, 2011).

From the late 1970s, the European Union developed very strong human rights and antidiscrimination provisions and softer objectives and mechanisms to ensure inclusion in socio-economic terms. By the 1990s, European anti-discrimination policymaking had taken important steps towards specifying the types of acts that are considered incompatible with European norms related to the fair treatment of individuals based on ethnic (racial) belonging. The most important embodiments of this progress are the Race Directive (2000/43EC)¹⁷ and the Employment Directive (2000/78EC)¹⁸ that compelled Member States to transpose key anti-discrimination principles into their domestic laws, to stipulate implementation measures, and to establish monitoring institutions. The European Union accession process put the issue of the inclusion of Roma high on the political agenda. It also implanted the language of anti-discrimination into critical, legal, and policy discourses. At the same time, there were cleavages between two major positions regarding framing the problem of the social exclusion of the Roma. One uses the notion of ethnic discrimination and minority rights, while the other refers to socio-economic (class) deprivation and welfare or anti-poverty principles. However, the two axes are inseparably intertwined in processes of exclusion, and thus policy interventions should combine a dual approach. Despite the recognition of intertwined ethnic and socio-economic distinctions as grounds of action, the framing strategies in policy implementation are often reproduced along a single axis (Zentai, 2011).

The gap between policy intentions at national and EU levels and actual implementation in the form of equal participation and success of Roma students in education is obvious. However, it is important to establish and maintain Roma inclusion as a political priority, to make inclusion part of the

17 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/43/oj>

18 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/dir/2000/78/oj>

accepted normative discourse for governments for integration into national political norms, and also to regulate the use of regional EU funds and to monitor their spending by national and local governments (the problematic nature of governance and regulatory requirements are far too ‘soft’ to be effective, relying on ambiguous goals and often voluntary participation). The very openness and softness of the early governance instruments that have institutionalised the Roma inclusion discourse in policies, funding projects and programs are seen as the main weaknesses when it comes to the effectiveness of implementation. This is a critique that applies to EU coordinating policy instruments in general, but it also proves the limits of subsidiarity. The nature of EU governance in the field of education and inclusion means that policy reform needs to be pursued as a joint commitment, with national governments having the primary responsibility for implementation (Alexiadou 2017). However, all five governments have shown a lack of political will to implement equality policies in full, and often have long histories of institutionalised discrimination practices against Roma (ERRC 2017; European Commission 2017 cited by Alexiadou, 2019).

The Roma-specific and related educational policy documents that acknowledge the lower educational achievement of Roma children, the barriers to Roma access to quality education, forms of segregated education for Roma, and the incompatibility and weaknesses of certain educational models, aim to define the integration of Roma into the educational systems, improve the educational status of Roma, and improve the multicultural competences of teachers and other educationalists. “A common problem with these policy documents is the fact that structurally and financially the measures on the education of Roma are not part of mainstream educational policies. It could be argued that the educational programs for Roma are seen by the authorities as an ‘additional burden’ and not as a response of the system to their educational needs” (Taba - Ryder, 2012:29). Many educational policies for Roma are piloted or implemented through very specific projects, rather than included in national policies, often leaving deep systematic inequalities unchallenged. In only a few instances have Roma-specific educational measures been incorporated into the general educational policy framework and funding secured through state budgets (typical examples are the different types of scholarships). The financing of such measures is in many cases project based (see PHARE or EU grants programs) and lacks sustainability. Furthermore, the impact of the measures envisaged in these policy documents is impossible to assess due to a lack of specific targets and quantifiable indicators about the state of the education of Roma. A lack of reliable data on education disaggregated by ethnicity makes the problem of monitoring and assessment even more complicated. Also, the lack of clear responsibilities and sanctions by the responsible bodies for desegregation has contributed to weakening the impact of desegregation measures (Taba – Ryder, 2012).

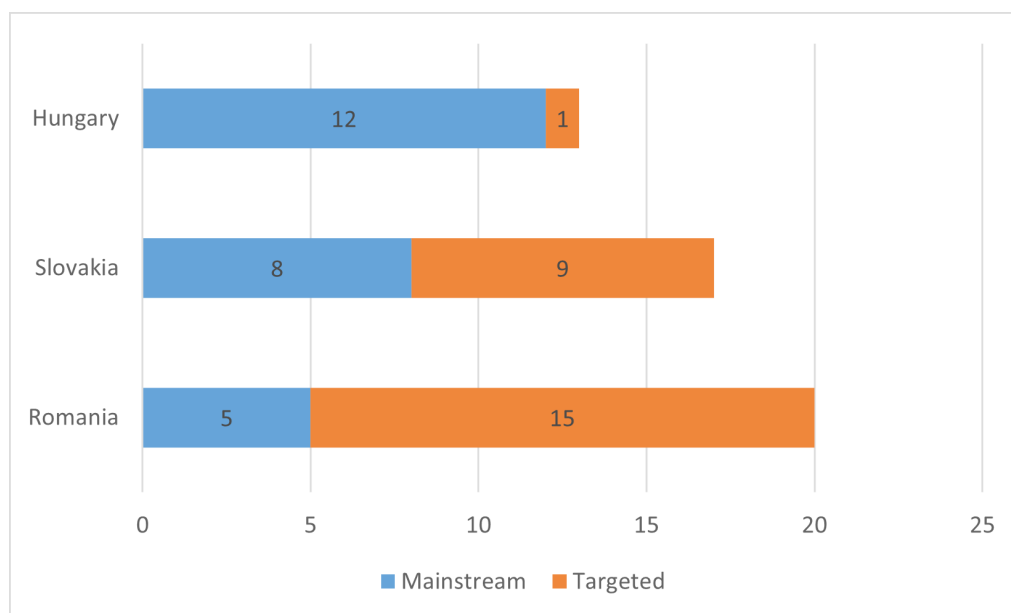
The results of educational policies for Roma children provide evidence that government strategies to improve their education in most cases have not worked, or in some cases, have even been counterproductive (Liegeois, 2007). According to Fullan, promoting the shared meaning of both strategies and their goals is necessary for changes to be successful. Fullan proposed that, in education, policy-makers and local practitioners come from two different worlds: “to the extent that each side is ignorant of the subjective world of the other, reform will fail – and the extent is great” (Fullan, 2007:99) Fullan also proposes that parents have an important role to play, concluding that “educational reform requires the conjoint efforts of families and schools” (Fullan, 2007:205). Even if governments have looked for ideas from international bodies (the EU, World Bank, transnational organizations, etc.), from whom they could also obtain help with funding reforms, the perceptions and practices of

other stakeholders at a local level have been affected by deeply rooted former practices. According to Radó, the distinction between “action aiming at capturing or influencing power and action aimed at changing or influencing the behaviour of individuals or institutions is not obvious” (Radó, 2001:35) in the examined countries (Drown, 2019). Radó suggested that a difference in conceptions about the word policy is the missing link between determining goals and making strategic decisions, which are the first two stages of the policy model (1. determining goals, 2. choosing a course of action, 3. implementing the course(s) of action, 4. evaluating the results, 5. modifying the policy), referring to this as connecting “expected and desirable outcomes with strategic issues” (Radó, 2001:38).

In summary, policy measures targeting Roma pupils are the least common part of mainstream education policy measures. Colour-blind mainstream measures that would strengthen the inclusive feature of the system are not typical of these countries. Roma children are much more likely to be reached through supplementary policies, which are most often linked to EU grant programs, and are very often implemented by civil or church organizations. The use of Roma mentors, as identified in almost all countries analysed here, is one of the most common types of supplementary measures specifically aimed at enrolling and retaining Roma pupils in schools. The capacity of countries to foster inclusion in the education system is minimal and ubiquitous segregation proves that mainstream policy does not really address the structural problems that could affect the inclusiveness of the education system. As no country is doing almost anything at the systemic level to address inequality, supplementary interventions remain a form of firefighting that may reduce symptoms but does not represent a meaningful solution to the inclusion of Roma children in education.

Romania, and Slovakia address their education measures for Roma primarily through targeted measures.¹⁹

6. Figure: Number of measures implemented in area of education by type of measure (mainstream or targeted)



Source: EC (2018), NRCPs’ reporting on Roma integration measures implemented in 2017 (COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Roma inclusion measures, 2019).

19 I do not have data on Poland and Serbia.

As Table 1 shows, all three countries – Hungary, Romania, and Slovakia – have chosen to invest most in measures aimed at reducing early school leaving. The next most commonly implemented measure is increasing access to, and quality of, early-childhood education and care. Romania stands out for having chosen to invest more into measures than the other two countries (44 measures), compared to Hungary (13), and Slovakia (26).

1. Table: Distribution of measures of relevance according to the respective sub-areas of the Council Recommendation

	Hungary	Romania	Slovakia
a) eliminate any school segregation		4	1
b) put an end to any inappropriate placement of Roma pupils in special-needs schools		1	1
c) reduce early school-leaving	2	9	5
d) increase the access to, and quality of, early-childhood education and care	5	6	5
e) consider the needs of individual pupils in close cooperation with their families	2	7	
f) use inclusive and tailor-made teaching and learning methods		1	3
g) fight illiteracy	1	1	
h) promote the availability and use of extracurricular activities		2	1
i) encourage greater parental involvement		2	2
j) improve teacher training		4	1
k) encourage Roma participation in and completion of secondary and tertiary education	2	4	2
l) widen access to second-chance education and adult learning			
m) provide support for the transition between educational levels	1	2	1
n) provide support for the acquisition of skills that are adapted to the needs of the labour market		1	2
o) other			2
Total	13	44	26

Source: EC (2018), NRCPs' reporting on Roma integration measures implemented in 2017 (COMMISSION STAFF WORKING DOCUMENT Roma inclusion measures, 2019).

The education of Roma (measured through enrolment in early-childhood education, enrolment in compulsory education, and prevention of early school-leaving) has improved in the areas in which they have invested into measures. However, it appears to be a challenge to employ explicit safeguards for securing equal access to education for Roma in mainstream measures, and thus preventing indirect discrimination. Most mainstream measures do not include such safeguards; and in most of the measures that do, the safeguards are not explicit (Commission Staff Working Document Roma inclusion measures, 2019).

4. EDUCATIONAL OUTCOME GAPS BETWEEN ROMA AND NON-ROMA PUPILS

Equity in education can be examined by looking at a range of student outcomes. First, access to schooling can be seen as a precondition for children to benefit from education. Access is chiefly reflected in school enrolment rates (as discussed in the previous chapter): more equitable and inclusive systems succeed in minimizing the share of school-age youth who are not enrolled or are significantly delayed in their progression through school (PISA 2015). According to a publication of the OECD entitled *Excellence and Equity in Education* (2016), the correlation between school performance and socioeconomic background is weaker in countries that operate more heterogeneous schools.

In the course of the past decade, increasing evidence has been accumulated in large-scale surveys about the disadvantages in educational performance and advancement that young people from ethnic minority backgrounds face across Europe. While the facts are generally acknowledged by now, the causes for them are widely debated. Some argue that disparities recorded according to ethnicity are nothing but new manifestations of age-old divisions in social status; others identify the insensitivity of schools as the source of majority cultural domination, which marginalizes ethnic minority students by its very nature; still others apply a human rights perspective and reveal the various manifestations of discrimination as the major source of the difficulties that ethnic minority students experience in education (Szalai, 2011). Additionally, Kertesi and Kézdi (2013) argue that the achievement gap – measured by secondary school completion rates – is in large part due to social factors, as opposed to ethnic characteristics. The test score gap²⁰ is almost entirely explained by social differences in income, wealth, and parental education, and ethnic factors do not play a significant role. Kertesi and Kézdi identified two major mechanisms by which the social disadvantages of Roma students lead to lower skills: the home environment, and schools. The home environment and parenting practices explain one-third to two-thirds of the test score gap, and the gap between Roma and non-Roma students in the same school and same classroom is 60 per cent less than the national gap. Ethnic differences in the home environment are fully explained by social differences, and ethnicity seems to play no additional role. On the other hand, while access to higher quality schools is strongly related to social differences, Roma students seem to face additional disadvantages. Social differences and the weaker access to good schools of the latter in the course of their education play a decisive role in turning Roma students' social disadvantages into school deficits. Despite significant inequalities in socio-economic circumstances, high- and low-income families generally do not differ greatly in their capacity to provide emotional security to their children. Ethnicity does not play a role either in cognitive stimulation or in emotional security: Roma families provide their children with the same level of emotional support as non-Roma families living in similar circumstances. Despite long-term poverty and an unemployment crisis that

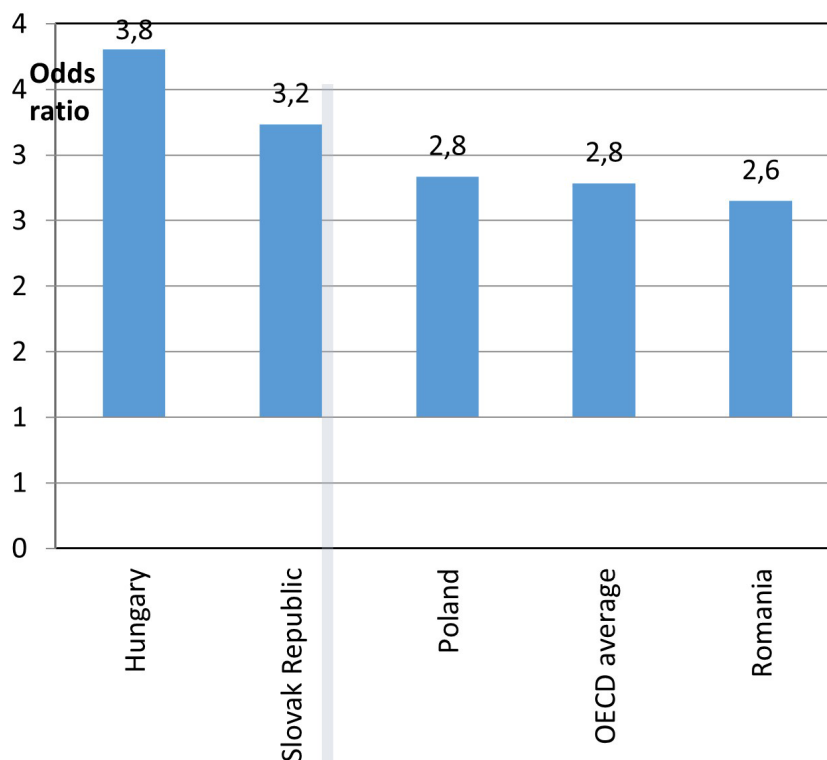
20 The study focuses on the gap in standardized tests in Hungary, where there are substantially more detailed data than in the other countries.

has lasted over twenty years, Roma family cohesion is still comparable to that of non-Roma families living in much better circumstances. Another key factor in the test score gap between Roma and non-Roma students, in addition to the disadvantages of the home environment, is Roma students' lack of access to good schools. This lack of access is due to residential disadvantages and school system selection mechanisms. The majority of Roma students are taught in a classroom context in which the total quantity of unresolved pedagogical problems makes it very difficult to teach well. Roma students are 40% more likely to end up in classes that are highly segregated by ability and thus difficult to teach – classes in which it is almost impossible for teachers to provide high quality instruction due to the excessive workload and the adverse student body composition. As a result, the majority of good teachers avoid these classes, especially as there is no compensation for the higher workload (Kertesi – Kézdi, 2013:36).

The observed countries do not collect ethnically disaggregated data that reveals the academic performance of Romani pupils, so only limited data and information are available about the outcome gaps between Roma and non-Roma students.

In PISA, a student's socioeconomic background is estimated by the PISA index of economic, social, and cultural status (ESCS), which is based on information about students' home and background.

7. Figure: Likelihood of low performance among disadvantaged students relative to non-disadvantaged students

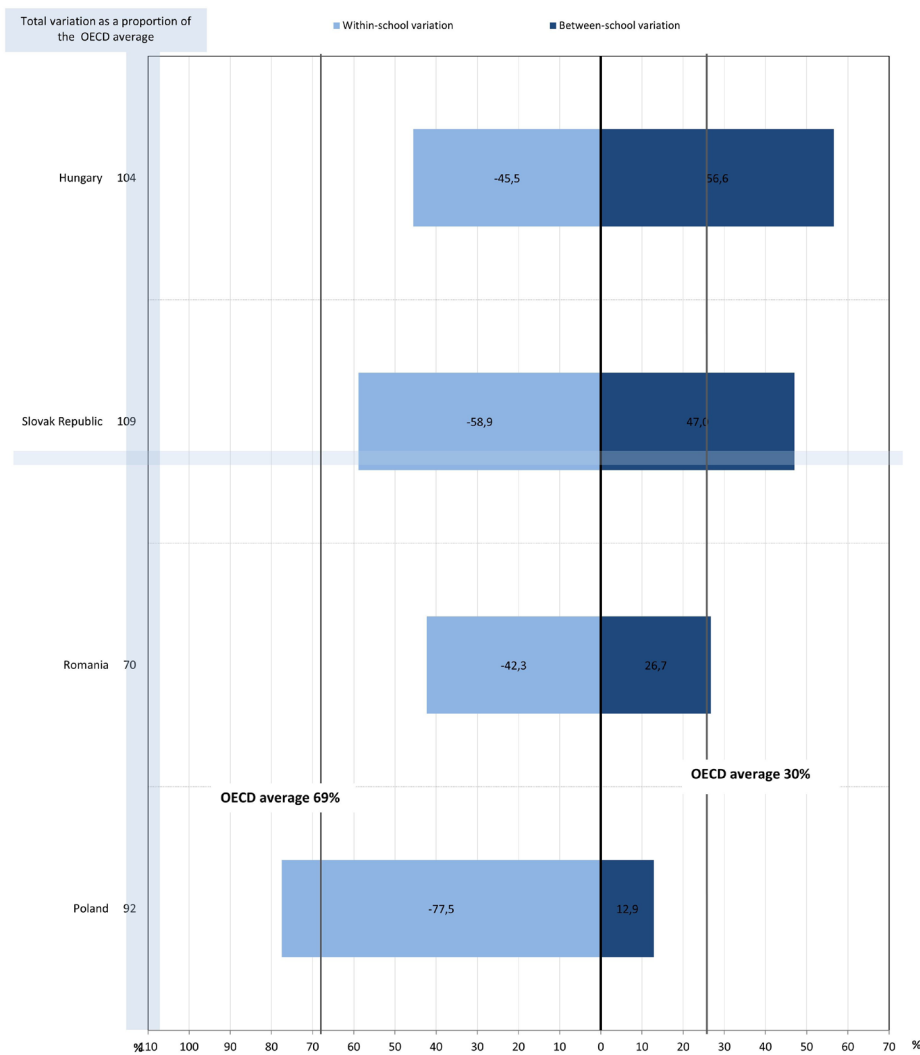


Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table I.6.6a.

In the countries under analysis, segregation based on ethnic background often translates into disparities in the quantity and quality of resources. Performance-related differences among schools are connected to the design of school systems and system-level education policies, such as differences in policies that emphasize greater competition for students among schools, and greater school choice.

With the exception of Poland, our examined countries, which are trying to meet the different needs of students by creating different tracks or pathways through education, and inviting students to choose among them at an earlier or later age, tend to show larger between-school variation and a greater impact of social background on learning outcomes. Figure 3 shows the variation in student performance in science between and within schools. The overall length of the bar represents the total variation in that country as a proportion of the OECD average level of variation in performance. The dark part of the bar represents the proportion of that difference that is observed between schools, and the light part of the bar represents the proportion observed within schools. In Poland, between-school differences account for between 10% and 15% of the variance. Poland also manages to achieve higher-than-average mean performance in science, thus no matter which school their children attend, they are likely to achieve at high levels. In contrast, in Hungary the differences between schools account for more than 50% of the total variation in the country's performance. How the variation in performance is distributed between and within schools is often related to the degree of socioeconomic diversity across schools. In Slovakia, 47% of the variation in students' socio-economic status can be found between schools, whereas in Romania less than 15% of the variation is between schools.

8. Figure: Variation in performance in science between and within schools



Source: OECD, PISA 2015 Database, Table I.6.9.

Socio-economic equity between schools is greater in countries with greater equity in outcomes, in general, as measured by the strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status and the proportion of variation in performance observed between rather than within schools. Socio-economic disparities are closely associated with performance differences in Hungary, where more than 75% of the between-school variation in performance is explained by the socio-economic profile of students and schools. Generally, the higher the level of variation in performance, either between or within schools, the higher the share of that variation that is accounted for by socio-economic status.

Socioeconomically disadvantaged children are less likely to participate and progress in education in Serbia. Participation in compulsory education in Serbia is virtually universal for students from all socio-economic backgrounds. However, disadvantaged students are much less likely to participate in non-compulsory levels. Disadvantaged students are also less likely to be enrolled in upper secondary education (74% of those from the poorest quintile), compared to nearly all students from the richest income quintile (97%), and they are also less likely to complete upper secondary education. Students from the lowest-income groups are three times less likely to enrol in gymnasia compared to the average Serbian student. This is true even among the highest-performing students. The share of top performers with the weakest socio-economic background is 29 percentage points lower than average, whereas it is 16 percentage points higher than average for those from the wealthiest backgrounds. This is of concern, since the majority of students in Serbia's vocational schools do not continue their studies after upper secondary education. A likely reason for this is that poorer students are unable to afford to do so, in particular in the light of high tuition fees and limited financial support in higher education; therefore, they tend to choose the path that allows faster access to the labour market. Students from disadvantaged backgrounds in Serbia performed around two years behind their peers from wealthier families (73 score point difference) in the reading domain of PISA 2018. This gap is not as large as the one found across OECD countries (89 score point difference). However, students in Serbia from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be considered "resilient" (that is, as students who are able to beat the odds and perform well on PISA) than students in OECD countries on average: 13.2% of students in Serbia are classified as resilient, compared to 11.3% in OECD countries (Maghnouj et al., 2020).

In summarizing the PISA equity results in the examined countries, I found that only Poland performs above the OECD average in science, and Romania has the lowest score. In all the countries involved in our study, more than 90% of the national population of 15-year-olds (except for Romania with 89%) in this age group are enrolled in grade 7 or above in school. In Poland, the proportion of students performing below proficiency Level 2 in science is below the OECD average, which means that Poland also achieves a high level of inclusion as it succeeds in ensuring high levels of participation, *and* in reducing the number of students who perform poorly. The smallest proportion of students performing below proficiency Level 2 in science is found in Romania, then Slovakia, and then Hungary. In Poland and Romania, the strength of the relationship between performance and socio-economic status is not significantly different from average, while in the other two countries – Hungary and Slovakia – this relationship is stronger than the OECD average. In Romania, students who face the greatest disadvantages (i.e. those in the bottom decile of the distribution of the ESCS index internationally) have the lowest scores – below 500 points in the science assessment. Large differences in performance can also be observed within Hungary and Slovakia. In Hungary, disadvantaged students are 3.8 times more likely than more advantaged students not to attain the baseline level of proficiency in science than

in Romania, where this proportion is 2.6. In Poland, between-school differences account for between 10% and 15% of the variance, which means that families can expect that, no matter which school their children attend, they are likely to achieve at high levels. By contrast, in Hungary differences between schools account for more than 50% of the total variation in the country's performance. How the variation in performance is distributed between and within schools is often related to the degree of socioeconomic diversity across schools. In Slovakia, 47% of the variation in students' socio-economic status occurs between schools, whereas in Romania it is less than 15%. In Hungary, more than 75% of the between-school variation in performance is explained by the socio-economic profile of students and schools. Generally, the higher the level of variation in performance, either between or within schools, the greater the proportion of that variation that is accounted for by socio-economic status.

5. ATTITUDES TOWARDS THE EDUCATION OF ROMA PUPILS

In this chapter, we will examine the perception of the participants of the educational system toward Roma children, since this deeply influences the former's attitudes toward them in the classroom. Because only limited material about this is available in English, I could not obtain relevant information from every country, but based on the similarities regarding the education of Roma children in this region, the information still clearly illustrates the general attitudes of school actors in the different countries.

Teachers' attitudes influence pupils' outcomes and can constitute obstacles to successful teaching in diverse or homogenous classrooms (Gay, 2010). Despite working in increasingly diverse classrooms, teachers tend to harbour negative attitudes towards students with a diverse linguistic, cultural, and/or religious background. Teachers tend to have lower expectations about pupils with a Roma background, and may implement discriminatory grading methods towards them (Preparing Teachers for Diversity, 2017).

Ideology, pedagogy, and the specific knowledge possessed by teachers about their students' family environment and living conditions seem to be instrumental in formulating their behaviour and expectations. How teachers treat students can be of major importance in relation to shaping bonds of trust between Roma children and the school, while it can also affect pupils' willingness to participate in school activities (Bhopal 2011). School practices, often unintentionally and because of a lack of proper knowledge, can lead to the unfair treatment of pupils of Roma origin (DfES, 2003). Racist teachers can never have a positive influence on children and young people in general, and on Roma pupils' school experience in particular (Zachos, 2017). Teachers who embrace a racist ideology may either ignore specific children or, alternatively, harass them (Smith, 1997) and may "lead" them to drop out of or fail at school.

Teachers may adopt a colour-blind perspective: namely, they may believe that different ethnic categories should be eliminated and all pupils should be treated as individuals. Such teachers may believe that if they "promote" Roma culture, they will enhance any dissimilarity (Bhopal 2011, 476-477). Taking a similar approach, many teachers refuse to raise the issue of pupils' cultural differences, since they consider this to be taboo (Milner, 2010). They also maintain that all pupils should be treated equally and thus deny differences (Padfield, 2005). However, avoiding and hiding the problem and

promoting a feigned picture of an ideally homogeneous society does not help solve such problems. Ignoring social diversity and the reality of social conflict does not support Roma pupils' school performance or social integration. Roma people have suffered discrimination and racism for many years – a fact that obliges international organizations and nation-states to make restitution to “heal the wounds”. Ultimately, teachers who fail to recognize the differences arising from pupils' ethnic background, individual needs, or socio-economic status, and who treat everyone in the same way, nurture injustice (Zachos, 2017).

Adopting a colour-blind policy in schools hides the nature of the prejudices against Roma children when the basis of prejudice is not socio-economic situation but ethnic origin. While segregation and discrimination against Roma children are still ongoing, colour-blind policy can mask ethnic differences. This colour-blind perspective deprives Roma children from the recognition of their identity, while also fails to overcome the prejudices against them (Kende, 2017).

Teachers' expectations about pupils of Roma origin are quite low, but high expectations are a necessary precondition for school success for pupils of Roma origin (Bereményi, 2011). The low expectations of teachers can be attributed to a stereotypical assumption that Roma pupils are disadvantaged because of their cultural background. The softening of teachers' demands from students does not properly enhance students' skills and knowledge, and thus weakens the chances that pupils of Roma origin will achieve upward social mobility by means of education.

Negative assumptions about the intellectual inferiority of Roma children are widespread across the region (Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma). Stereotypes held by teachers lower their expectations and inspire weaker instruction. For example, 47 per cent of teachers in Slovakia believed that Roma children could not succeed in school, and 88 per cent believed that Roma children are less capable than their non-Romani peers (Zelina, 2002). In a survey conducted by the European Roma Rights Centre, children testified that teachers systematically ignore Roma in the educational process (Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma). The verbal and physical castigation of Roma classmates by majority students is not uncommon. According to a survey of Hungarian schoolteachers, Roma are the least preferred students out of all minorities (Bordács, 2001). Under these conditions, it is not surprising that Roma children suffer from lower self-esteem, academic performance, enrolment and retention rates, and a weaker ability to transition between levels of education (UNICEF, 2011).

The education of future and current teachers is embedded in a society in which public discourse abounds with open hatred of the Roma. Student teachers also believe that Roma parents and students are the main causes of the academic underachievement of Roma students, while the causes of this underachievement that are related to teachers and schools are minimized (Macura Milovanović - Peček, 2013). Teachers are often seen as “key institutional agents of change” and as “politically aware and culturally informed citizens [who ensure that] social justice [is available] to a historically marginalised ethnic minority” (Bereményi, 2011:355). Nonetheless, the educational curriculum for teachers addresses inclusion either through a single subject, or does not treat it as a horizontal aspect that permeates all subjects. This approach still reflects the tenets of ‘defectology’ and a medicalized discourse, without paying attention to social justice or the broader political and cultural circumstances that shape the discourse of inclusion (Macura Milovanović et al., 2011).

In Romania, 42.5 per cent of teachers would not want a Roma person as their neighbour. Also, 13.1 per cent of respondent teachers declared their belief that Roma should learn in separate (segregated) classes; when asked why Roma should study separately, most of the teachers (70 per cent) claimed that

they have special educational needs that could be better addressed in segregated classes, and because their behaviour gets in the way of teaching in class. The study identified that it is most probably those teachers who would not want Roma as their neighbours who believe Roma should be taught in separate classes in school (RCM2 – Romania, 2019).

Teachers interviewed in Hungary are generally characterizable as moderately prejudiced, but almost a third are strongly prejudiced. Consistent with this, many prefer segregation or deportation as a solution to the Roma issue, and explain the school failure of Roma children by referring to genetic traits. It clearly follows from this perception that the school failure of Roma children is predestined by teachers (the Pygmalion effect), the latter who do not even have to take responsibility for this, as the matter is genetically decided. Despite the fact that the majority of respondents had already had some contact with Roma children, prejudice and intolerance towards them can be said to be characteristic. The teaching of Roma culture and ethnography was not considered important by the majority of teacher respondents, and it is also thought-provoking that a quarter of teachers stated that they would prefer to teach a class attended exclusively by non-Roma children. This is probably because these educators are reluctant to teach in classes where children «degrade the performance of the school» (Bordács, 2001).

6. SUPPLEMENTARY POLICIES AIMING AT IMPROVING THE EDUCATION OF ROMA PUPILS

The higher the performance of education systems, they more combine equity with quality. An excessive reliance on supplementary programmes may generate overlap with mainstream system and create inefficiencies and a lack of long-term sustainability for schools. Supplementary programmes are often short term, and do not enable schools to engage in sustainable approaches to supporting Roma students. The education systems in the observed countries do not place strong emphasis on teachers' knowledge and skills in the area of inclusive, multicultural, and non-discriminatory education. Despite the fact that the education system would benefit from teachers obtaining additional training in these areas, in many cases, teachers have the responsibility of financing such additional training themselves. Upon completion, many of these training modules do not provide teachers with official diplomas or certificates that can be used to boost their professional profiles and future careers. Predominantly, training modules are developed and implemented by civil society organisations or independently within the curriculum of specific universities' pedagogical programmes (RCM - Synthesis Report, 2019).

The most typical practice in the observed countries for increasing the Roma's access to education and improve educational outcomes is the involvement of mediators at multiple education levels. Their roles and names vary across countries, but the main activities consist of facilitating enrolment, as well as establishing constructive communication between families and educational institutions to increase enrolment. The role of mediators is to increase access, and to improve the quality of instruction and retention in the education system. Mediators must meet different expectations in the different countries, hence their quality is also different. Furthermore, the quality and impact of mentoring relies heavily on the level of bias and cultural sensitivity of the mediators (RCM - Synthesis Report, 2019). In the case of Serbia, the Roma Teaching Assistant Program targets the socially excluded Roma minority. Children

exposed to the program attended school more regularly, but it is hard to find any effect on dropout or marks for all grades (Battaglia - Lebedinski, 2015). Slovakia continues to rely merely on national ESF projects to provide extra assistance and staff to schools (teaching assistants, special teachers and others) with a share of Roma children above 20 percent, but such interventions typically cease after project funding ends (RCM2 – Slovakia, 2019).

The other widespread practice employed in the observed countries is awarding scholarships (provided by states or by civil society) to improve Roma students' educational transition, persistence, and outcomes. Some of this includes provision for mentors or tutors. Most of the governmental scholarships do not especially target the Roma population, but rather socially disadvantaged students. Most secondary school scholarships are awarded to support vocational training or second-chance programmes. A noteworthy practice in Romania is the affirmative enrolment policy that ensures places for Roma students in upper secondary schools. According to this policy, in each class facilities and two seats are allocated to Roma youth. However, the most common form of support in upper secondary schools are state-designed, supported, and implemented scholarship programmes. A few of the state scholarship schemes provide additional mentoring and tutoring services. Hungary is an example of a country that provides a wide range of secondary school scholarships for students from socially disadvantaged families. The programme provides average students with scholarship and mentoring services, but it does not target under-performing students. Even though Hungary provides second-chance programmes and training modules organised by job centres, Roma continue to struggle to achieve equity in completing post-compulsory secondary schooling. Therefore, Hungary's example demonstrates that combining different measures, such as scholarships, remedial schools, dual system education, and training programmes, does not suffice to help counterbalance the negative impact of regressive policies, such as the decrease in the maximum age of compulsory education from 18 to 16. In Hungary, the scholarship programme's monthly stipend of approximately 30-40 EUR (9,000-13,000 HUF) is not enough to offset the incentive of entering the labour market. Moreover, scholarship-related support for vocational education is more advantageous and easier to access compared to support provided for general secondary education (RCM - Synthesis Report, 2019). In addition, regarding the scholarships some critics have argued (for example, concerning the situation in Hungary) that while the latter assist students to complete secondary education, the schools in which students supported by these scholarships study are of low quality, do not provide students with the ability to move on to higher education, and generally lack training opportunities that would lead to competitive and rewarding careers (RCM2 – Hungary, 2019).

While grade repetition is a leading predictor of school dropout, and is costly and ineffective at raising educational outcomes, a few countries have introduced specific measures to tackle grade repetition and dropout. The main tool for combatting dropout and early school leaving is a combination of Roma mentors and scholarships for secondary school students. Poland has national secondary school programmes that target Roma students, Romania has a secondary school scholarship programme with a Roma quota, and in Hungary, an Early Warning System (EWS) was introduced in 2015.

After-school programmes and extra-curricular activities are provided by NGOs, churches, or by the state to support Roma children to do homework, learn languages, computer sciences, art, sport, or other activities. In Romania and Slovakia, extra-curricular afternoon programmes tend to be implemented in school buildings; in Hungary, they are delivered in NGO- or church-managed facilities (Study Hall [*Tanoda*] programs).

In Hungary, one of the more unique supplementary programs is the *Biztos Kezdet Gyermekház* (Sure Start Children's Houses) that serve children aged between 0 and 5 from families that face difficult conditions and live in disadvantaged, underprivileged settlements. While early childhood development has a definitive effect on the further development of children, and PISA results also show that the years spent in early childhood education contribute to the achievement of higher scores, the number of children engaged in the program is a fraction of those in need (3,941 children engaged in total, while the number of those children aged 0-5 living in a poor household was nearly 150,000 in 2014) (RCM2 – Hungary). A similar promising practice in Slovakia is related to early childhood education: the Way Out program – an initiative of an NGO –, which targets marginalised Roma children from zero to three years old, which support is entirely missing from state policies. The programme was piloted in 2018 in three communities. The NGO's ambition is to scale up the programme and eventually offer their methods and strategies to state authorities to develop more systemic measures (RCM2 – Slovakia, 2019).

CONCLUSIONS

The way education systems are designed has an impact on student performance. More specifically, some systemic practices, such as early tracking, repetition, certain school choice schemes, or low-quality vocational education and training, tend to amplify social and economic disadvantages and are conducive to school failure. How education systems are designed can exacerbate initial inequities and negatively impact student motivation and engagement, eventually leading to dropout. Improving system-level policies will reinforce equity across the system and in particular benefit disadvantaged students, without hindering other students' progress. Eliminating grade repetition, which is costly and ineffective, avoiding early tracking, and deferring student selection to the upper secondary level, as well as managing school choice to avoid segregation and increasing inequities, making funding strategies responsive to student and school needs, and designing equivalent upper secondary education pathways to ensure completion are the main strategies for developing a more equitable education system in general (Equity and Quality in Education, 2012).²¹

The planning of educational and inclusion policies for Roma has been tailored within the limits of the political will and financial possibilities of the countries analysed here. However, in reality, implementation is hindered by insufficient funding, poor implementation efforts, limited scope, and improper design. Consequently, these factors have even less impact than envisioned in the limited plans. Tackling Roma integration, whether through mainstream programmes or through Roma-targeted programmes, represents an ongoing dilemma. The effectiveness of mainstream programmes in tackling Roma integration depends on the overall effectiveness of policy and would require substantial reform. The country reports do not indicate if the needs of Roma are systematically taken into account when designing mainstream policies, yet the main criticism of NGOs is a lack of monitoring mechanisms regarding mainstream policy outreach and outputs and their impacts on Roma. While state authorities

21 Equity and Quality in Education: Supporting Disadvantaged Students and Schools (2012) OECD Publishing. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264130852-en>

typically view ethnically-based data collection as a violation of data protection legislation, NGOs often argue for gathering anonymised ethnic data to devise effective anti-discrimination and desegregation measures, particularly to assess the contribution of mainstream policies to Roma integration. The reluctance of the public authorities to engage with ethnic data is often viewed as a pretext for avoiding addressing the efficiency of policy interventions. In the updated NRISs, one can hardly find any baseline indicators or provisions for impact assessment based on such indicators. In all countries, Roma integration policies and human rights policies, local development, and Roma civil society largely depend on financing from the ESIF, EEA /Norway Grants, and other external sources (A synthesis report..., 2018).

Summarizing very briefly the situation of Roma students in the observed countries, in **Hungary**, preschool inclusion has been significantly improved, but the situation of Roma in education in all areas is worsening. Gaps are increasing and the proportion of Roma not completing different levels of education is very high. Additionally, school segregation is increasing. In **Poland**, pre-school education has become obligatory and free of charge for children aged six or over, and in areas without facilities, this education is provided by various types of community centres. In recent years, the number of Roma children in special education has been reduced and scholarship schemes for Roma primary school, high school, and university students have been introduced to foster their enrolment and graduation rates. In **Romania**, the situation of Roma in education shows an improving trend and a reduction in the gap between Roma and non-Roma in most areas, but not in secondary and tertiary education, where the trends are negative. In **Serbia**, the situation of the Roma has slightly improved in primary and secondary education, but the gap remains significant. The proportion of Roma completing tertiary education is almost zero. Roma overrepresentation in special education is high. Positive developments can be noted in preschool education and literacy, while segregation does not seem to be much of a problem. In **Slovakia**, the situation of Roma in education has improved in preschool and primary education, and slightly in secondary education. The gap has also been reduced for the latter two. Nevertheless, the proportion of Roma not completing school is large, particularly in relation to secondary education. The gap in tertiary education has remained the same. The placement of Roma in special and segregated schools has worsened since 2005 (Roma Inclusion Index 2015).

The educational situation of Roma pupils, or one can say, the failure thereof, is basically determined by two inseparable phenomena. One is the ability of the educational systems to be inclusive – namely, the extent to which education is able to address children’s differences within the system and, in this context, to what extent education is able to compensate for children’s social status. On the other hand, another critical factor is the relationship of the Roma within the respective societies. The latter is a decisive factor: many analyses and pieces of research have concluded that pervasive anti-Gypsyism is behind the lack of political will for tackling the problem. While the education systems of the countries observed here – with the exception of Poland – are among the less equitable and more selective systems (especially those of Slovakia and Hungary) – and are thus, *sui generis*, less able to compensate for social inequalities –, the inclusion of Roma children is further paralyzed by widespread prejudice. Further analyses would be necessary to accurately interpret the differences between the examined countries. While the PISA results of Hungary – although worse than those of Poland – are better than those of the other three examined countries, the Hungarian system is much more selective and much less equitable than the Romanian or the Serbian systems. While in Hungary segregation continues to increase along with the overwhelming centralization of the education system, domestic regulations

enable early selection among children through different school providers (see the role of church schools in selection). Additionally, differences among high-performing and low-performing students according to social background are the most extreme compared to in the other examined countries, while mandatory preschool from the age of three and the widespread free lunch program (also from the age of three) stand out as unique initiatives. The former is a mainstream measure, and the latter a colour-blind targeted measure, but both are having a positive impact on the enrolment rate of Roma children. Regarding enrolment rates, Hungary stands out: Roma children have been participating in public education for a longer time and at a higher rate than in the other analysed countries, which obviously is due to the historical background, but the analysis of this would be beyond the scope of this study. The education systems in Romania and Serbia are much less selective than the Hungarian one, yet the former are low-performing countries according to PISA, and they have historically performed very poorly in relation to the enrolment of Roma children in their education systems. In both countries, the lack of legal documents, deep poverty, and housing conditions are among the main barriers preventing Roma children from entering the education system. Slovakia is located somewhere between the latter two types of countries: its education system is less selective than the Hungarian one, but the system is characterized by severe segregation, and it is still a typical practice to place Roma children into special schools. While Slovakia's PISA results are lower than those of students in Hungary, they are higher than in the other two countries. Poland is a complete anomaly: on the one hand, its education system is more equitable, and on the other hand, very few Roma live in the country. Hence, many related problems have already disappeared, but because of the inclusiveness of the system, problems that remain can be easily eliminated, even with little effort. However, according to various analyses, the biggest barrier to the education of Roma children is caused by the prejudice of different actors. NGOs play a very important role in these low-performing and less equitable countries in terms of tackling the problems of Roma children in education, but their activities are a drop in the ocean: they have no impact on structural problems, and they have minimal power to mainstream their programs.²²

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²² See some exceptions: the mainstreaming of Study Hall and Sure Start programs in Hungary and the state-funded Roma mediators in Serbia and Slovakia.

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