

PRESS RELEASE

Open Society Institute Decries Discrimination Against Roma Children

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Despite years of governmental promises, Roma children in many European countries remain excluded from quality education, according to a report released today by the Open Society Institute. Segregated into Roma-only classes or schools, wrongly shunted into special schools for children with intellectual disabilities, crowded into decrepit classrooms and let down by teachers' low expectations, Roma children face serious challenges to complete even basic education. Roma are Europe's largest minority and a key part of its future. Unless European leaders live up to their promises, Europe will pay dearly for losing another generation of Roma children to discrimination and neglect.

The situation of Roma children in education is detailed in the series of monitoring reports *Equal access to quality education for Roma*. The volume includes a Europe-wide overview and individual country reports on Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro and Slovakia. OSI released country reports in the same series on Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania and Serbia in April this year. The reports give an in-depth perspective and highlight policy actions necessary to address an alarming situation.

MEP Viktória Mohácsi said, 'The OSI reports confirm that segregation of Roma children is not only based on the colour of their skin, but also provides lower quality education for our children. Europe should not accept such serious discrimination. Hungary was the first country to create a legal basis for desegregation. At least a dozen EU Member States should follow these steps.'

Segregation of Roma in schools, recently condemned by the European Court of Human Rights in the case *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*, is pervasive but unacknowledged in Slovakia, Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro. There are credible reports of segregation in education are available, yet Governments continue to deny that Roma children are placed in separate schools and classes and taught according to lower standards.

In all monitored countries, there are also significant gaps between the official data and data collected by NGOs or research initiatives. In Macedonia, unofficial data puts the Roma population in the country at almost three times the number indicated by the national census. In Slovakia, schools do not even report when students drop out. Education policies cannot be effectively targeted without this basic data, nor can they be assessed on the basis of such fragmented and incomplete information.

Governments must also attend to fundamental inadequacies in national school systems. In Montenegro, there is a shortage of places in pre-schools and children whose parents are both working are given priority placement. As unemployment is high among Roma families, many Roma children thus miss the chance to attend pre-school. In Croatia, school costs present a major obstacle to Roma families, and while some municipalities find resources to help meet these costs, there is no programme in place to ensure all children have the appropriate materials and supplies.

Teachers in the monitored region must receive better support. Teachers in schools with a majority of Roma students rarely have access to training preparing them to work with a diverse classroom; inflexible curricula further limit their ability to tailor lessons to meet students' needs.

The reports released today also give examples of noteworthy progress achieved in the countries monitored, often with EU support. These include the Roma Education Initiative in Montenegro and the NGO community's outreach programmes in Macedonia, which have helped forge connections with Roma families. In a significant step, each of the countries monitored has also joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, an international initiative establishing a coordinated approach to improving the situation of Roma in Europe. However, positive examples and commitments alone are insufficient to ensure meaningful improvement.

The Open Society Institute calls upon Governments and the European Union to bring about meaningful change: where they have not done so, Governments must acknowledge and prohibit segregation in education. At the European level, education policies must address racial segregation and the unequal and inadequate level of provision for Roma. To fulfil existing commitments to equality for all, the EU must articulate a clear and comprehensive framework for progress, enacting policies that can effectively promote the social inclusion of Roma communities across Europe.

Notes to Editors

The monitoring of *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma* is a project of the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), carried out in cooperation with OSI's Education Support Program (ESP) and Roma Participation Program (RPP). The full text of the report is available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on OSI is available at <http://www.soros.org>.