

PRESS RELEASE

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## Make the moment count for Romania's Roma children

Bucharest and Budapest, 5 June 2007 – The Open Society Institute launches in Bucharest the volume “Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma in Romania”. The volume, produced within the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program of the Open Society Institute, is a comprehensive analysis of basic educational indicators, as well as of the major barriers and constraints that prevent the Roma from Romania from equal access to quality education. In 2007, the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, most Roma children in Romania continue to face discrimination, isolation or exclusion from education. Although the Romanian Government has adopted a number of strategies and anti-discrimination laws aimed at changing this situation, the policies and programs remain partly fulfilled – concludes the 150-page monitoring report.

The report paints an alarming picture of exclusion. Although the number of Roma enrolling in schools has been increasing steadily (from 138,000 in 1990 to 250,000 in 2007), there are still significant differences in education. According to the data presented in the Barometer of Roma Inclusion (Open Society Foundation Romania, 2007), 23% of Roma have no schooling (as compared to only 2% of non-Roma), 27% of Roma have completed only four years of education (as compared to 11% of non-Roma), and 33% have completed only eight years of education (as compared to 24% of non-Roma). While 95% of Roma have not completed secondary education, 60% of non-Roma share the same situation. The data of the 2002 Census indicate that 25.6% of Roma cannot read and write, as compared to only 2.6% of the total population over 10 years of age. All these seriously compromise the Roma population's job opportunities in the future.

The report also highlights the direct and indirect discrimination taking place within the school system. Although segregation in education is expressly forbidden, some Roma children are still segregated from other Romanian children, with over 13% studying in separate schools or classes. “A desegregation process that not only addresses the physical separation of students, but also the negative perceptions and fears that accompany integration of both sides, still hasn't been undertaken”, says Florin Moisa from the Resource Centre for Roma Communities, one of the report's authors.

Poverty is another factor that contributes to the Roma children's limited chances. Many Roma parents struggle to meet the underlying costs of education, such as books, supplies and clothing. For financial reasons, other parents choose to send their children to special schools, where they know they will receive food and accommodation.

The report also highlights the importance of teacher preparation to work with pupils from a range of backgrounds, and to create a tolerant environment. According to Catalina Ulrich, a lecturer at the University of Bucharest, Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, and also an author of the report, “Teachers now have access to many different training opportunities, where they can

*learn the latest methods and approaches. But once they return to the classroom, there is little support to help them with these methodologies to work with their students.”*

Among the positive achievements recorded in Romania is the work of the informal network of the Inspectors for Roma Education and the multiannual PHARE programs implemented by the Ministry of Education and Research, which aim at improving access to education for disadvantaged groups. Another success story is that of the NGO-initiated Roma Classroom Teaching Assistant Project. However, without the support of the local authorities, which are expected to now come from the local authorities, the good results obtained so far may be wasted.

The report calls on the Romanian Government to continue with this positive project and also support several other successful projects initiated by competent and committed grassroots NGOs. Seventy policy recommendations included in the report address in detail how the Government can improve the ability of central and local structures to implement vital strategies. Several of these stress the importance of data collection to ensure informed policy-making. Currently, even official estimates of the proportion of Roma in Romania are widely held to be unreliable. With no mechanism in place to consistently monitor the proportion of Roma who attend school, and track their result against the average of majority population, the policies adopted are unlikely to make any headway.

2007 is the European Year for Equal Opportunities for All. Yet, this initiative will remain another empty promise as long as national governments only haltingly address one of the most blatant forms of inequality in Europe – segregated, low quality education for Roma. Action in support of today’s children will ensure that future Roma adults are given the tools they need to access employment, and actively and constructively participate in Romania’s society.

#### Notes to the editors

The monitoring of *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma* is a multi country project covering the nine countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. The monitoring is carried out by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), in cooperation with OSI’s Education Support Program (ESP) and Roma Participation Program (RPP). Local partner NGOs and experts conduct the research in each country. The full text of the reports in English and in translation is available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on OSI is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

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