

From segregation to inclusion

*Roma pupils in the UK
Roma Education Fund/Equality pilot study*

Mgr. Lucie Fremlová



Objectives

- To show the benefits (or disadvantages) of UK mainstream education for Roma pupils/students;
- To use the findings to demonstrate to all levels of government in the Czech Republic and Slovakia that Roma pupils are no different to other students and that it is economically unviable and socially detrimental to educate Roma pupils in a separate (de facto segregated) or special educational stream; and
- To identify models of good practice regarding the inclusion of Roma pupils into mainstream schooling in the UK. The study argues that these models can be disseminated and replicated elsewhere in the UK, as well as in the respective countries of origin of the Roma.



Methodology

- Between June and August 2011
- Focus group discussions with Roma pupils and separately with Roma parents
- Semi-structured interviews with education staff and other individuals
 - 61 Roma primary and secondary school students
 - 28 Roma parents
 - 25 school and other education staff
- Eight locations in England: Leicester, Chatham, Rotherham, Wolverhampton, Southend-on-Sea, Peterborough, London and Derby

Key findings

- 85% of all the Roma pupils had been previously placed in a special school/ class, 'practical school', a de facto segregated (i.e., Roma-only) school or a predominantly Roma kindergarten in the Czech Republic or Slovakia.
- 12 of the 17 respondents who had been placed in a special school in Slovakia or the Czech Republic reported having been sent there after they underwent a psychological test during Year 1 or Year 2 (ages 7 and 8).

Key findings

- The average attainment of Roma pupils (ages 9-15) in numeracy, literacy, and science reported by the primary and secondary school respondents was average or just below average.
- 89 percent spoke fluent or almost fluent English. The younger the respondents were when they first came to the UK, the more quickly they were able to speak English fluently.
- Only a small percentage of the overall cohort of Roma pupils (2 to 4 percent) at the UK schools surveyed were regarded as requiring special education needs (SEN) because of learning difficulties or disabilities. For these Roma pupils, this extra or different help is given within the mainstream school.

Key findings

- In the UK, none of the students have had a statutory assessment for special education needs (SEN), a more detailed analysis that is required when a mainstream school cannot provide all the help a child needs.
- A high percentage of recently arrived Roma pupils (90 percent) received English as an Additional Language (EAL) support, as did their recently arrived non-Roma peers of different national or ethnic backgrounds for whom English was not their first language.

Key findings

- A large majority of Roma students said they had experienced racist bullying or verbal abuse by their non-Roma peers at Czech and Slovak schools, as well as discriminatory or unequal treatment by their teachers, who were alleged to have punished them physically in a number of cases.
- They said they preferred school in the UK because of equal opportunities and the absence of racism and discrimination at UK schools.
- Roma students in 7 out of the 8 locations were not experiencing any form of racism in UK schools and they believed that the teachers were kind and helpful and were willing to give them time on an individual basis.

Key findings

- All the parents valued the overall atmosphere at school, their children's feeling of being welcome there and their experience of equal treatment, equal opportunities, and the absence of anti-Roma sentiments and racism expressed by their children's non-Roma peers and teachers.
- They all said the prospect of their children's education and employment was one of the most powerful driving forces behind their decision to move to the UK. Many of them thought it would take generations to change these practices and attitudes in Slovakia and the Czech Republic and some doubted whether they would ever change. All of them believed their children's chances to succeed later on in life were much better in Britain than in Slovakia and the Czech Republic.

Recommendations

- Use the research findings to dispel the myth that placing Roma pupils in special schools or Roma only/de facto segregated schools in the Czech Republic and Slovakia (and other countries that have similar policies) is in the best interests of Roma. An array of opportunities should be identified to use the research to influence the debate in these countries.
- Use the learning, good and less-effective practice identified in the research to engage education decision-makers, opinion-makers (including news and specialist media), and practitioners at national and local levels in the Czech Republic and Slovakia in a discussion about what policies and practices have been proven to improve the academic attainment of Roma pupils.

Recommendations

- The benefits from employing Roma liaison staff or 'mediators' working with schools and Roma families should be promoted to schools and local authorities, using examples from this pilot research as well as other examples from a wider range of schools.
- The UK Department for Education should consider how it can help disseminate good practice that increases attendance levels and the academic attainment of Roma pupils.
- The UK government should consider the long-term impact of spending reductions on services that help increase attendance and attainment of Roma pupils, in particular Roma mediators working with schools and local authorities and the TESS and EMAS services.

Recommendations

- The Council of Europe and European Commission should consider extending their Roma mediators programme to include the UK.
- EU national governments and the European Commission should consider the introduction of a universal EU-wide educational 'record' or 'passport' for all children, containing information about the child's educational history and contact information for their previous and/or current school.

“There is no legitimate discriminatory reason by means of which it would be possible to justify the disproportionately high percentage of Roma children who are, in these circumstances, recommended for practical elementary schools. (...) The fact that Roma children represent a third of all the children who have been diagnosed as having a mental disability is discriminatory.”

Czech Defender of Rights

April 2010