

CONCEPT NOTE

Segregated education of Roma remains a prevalent feature of the educational systems in many countries in the region. This situation has been repeatedly condemned by human rights bodies supervising state's compliance with international human rights laws as well as by public institutions at national level which monitor human and minority rights. Within a year, the European Court of Human Rights ruled in two cases against the Czech Republic and Greece that the segregation of Romani children in inferior schools and classes is illegal and that European governments must take responsibility for this.

In particular, the Court noted that the Czech Republic is not alone - discriminatory barriers to education for Roma children are present in a number of European countries.

Roma-specific actions in the field of education are rarely related to general educational policies; these are often stand-alone initiatives without strategic focus or systematic implementation. Due to the absence of reliable ethnically disaggregated data, there is no clear evidence what is the effect of these measures on the educational achievement of Romani children. It is likely, however, that any positive results will be short-lived as long as improvement of educational achievement is sought within the segregated settings. Three years after the entering into force of the 2005 School Law in the Czech Republic, Romani children continue to dominate the composition of practical primary schools and follow a special curriculum for mentally disabled pupils. The educational potential for these children has not improved in any significant way from the years prior to January 2005.

Existing legal and policy tools, including targeted actions on Roma education are not effective in challenging ingrained patterns of school segregation. Although by the transposition of the EU Race Equality Directive, Member States of the EU enhanced protection against discrimination, the current legal framework in the Czech Republic is not sufficient to challenge systemic discrimination and/or segregation of Roma in education.

To address this systemic problem, it is not enough to bring to court a school or a school maintainer or even a Ministry of Education. A change requires proactive and long-term engagement of educational institutions at all levels to eliminate the physical separation of Roma and non-Roma; to revise educational policies, establish clear benchmarks and consistently monitor their impact in order to exclude the possibility of segregation in the future.

In the recent year, inequalities facing Roma in education, including segregated education, have been given attention by the Czech Governments as a result of which a number of policy documents on Roma education have been developed.

With the introduction of the Framework Education Programme, the curriculum taught in Czech schools was modified beginning in the 2007/2008 school year. These modifications, however, do not bring the special curriculum taught in practical primary schools in line with the curriculum taught in standard primary schools, and therefore will not contribute meaningfully to the integration of Romani children in standard schools.

This Conference aims to:

- Further develop and foster the dialogue about the need for reform in the education system and implications of the recent Court ruling amongst all relevant stakeholders;

- Continue the dialogue with the Czech relevant authorities on the implementation of the decision;
- Provide an overview of the Czech Government efforts and steps undertaken in order to address the education of Romani children;
- Mainstreaming the implications of the judgment into domestic policy, the domestic discourse on education, and the international discourse on access to education;
- Discuss positive practices from other countries in policy and legislative reform aimed at ending segregation of Roma in education;
- Discuss and agree on a list of Recommendations;