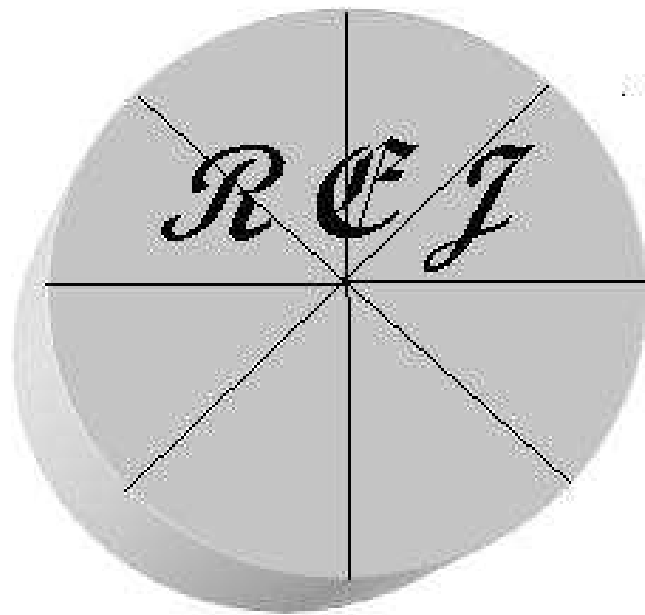


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Editorial and Summary of Contributions

In this issue of Romani E Journal we cover the topic of Romani education and how antiziganism plays a role within this social arena. The first article comes in from Ronald Lee, and his article presents an overall account on the situation of Romani education via a historical perspective. This article present general background information and does not focus on a particular country or situation within Romani education but rather provides an overview of the situation. When one reads the article one needs to consider its scope and those situations within the subject matter will differ depending on circumstance. The article however does nicely provide us with background information that assists us in better understanding the two articles that follow.

The next article is a personal piece from Gregor Dufunia Kwiek and provides with the experiences he had when it comes to training courses for Romani adults towards employment in Sweden. This article is followed by an article on Romani segregation in schools. The article has already appeared on the ROMEDIA FOUNDATION'S website and is written by Galya Stoyanova. The article is written through Romani eyes, as the author puts it, and because it presents such a perspective, both ROMEDIA and Romani E Journal thought it deserved to reach a broader audience and for this reason it appears in Romani E Journal as well.

Roma and Education

by

Ronald Lee

Historical Background

Until this century, Roma were basically an illiterate people. Except for a small number of individuals, most Roma and Sinti in the many countries where they lived were unable to read and write. Some did learn basic reading and writing skills but contributed next to nothing in the way of literature about Roma by Roma except for a mere handful of individuals,. In the latter 19th century and especially after The First World War, a small Romani intelligentsia appeared in some of the countries of Eastern Europe and newspapers were published in Romani. In the former Soviet Union, under Communism, there was an attempt to integrate Roma into the educational system and a considerable but unknown number of Roma were educated. Others, living in the villages and the hinterlands remained illiterate. Mass education among Roma really dates from the end of the Second World War with the Communist governments in the former Soviet Bloc Countries.

Education of Roma Under Communism

By the late 1940s, the former Communist governments of Eastern Europe began to take an interest in Roma and Romani illiteracy. This stemmed from the assimilation plans inaugurated by the Communists to break up Romani settlements in the rural areas where the Roma lived and to resettle the smaller number of Roma who were still nomadic or semi-nomadic following a traditional lifestyle of commercial nomadism. Unlike Western European countries who brought in guest workers from less-developed countries to perform the numerous menial tasks required in the workplace, the Communists used their Romani citizens. Roma are far more numerous in the former Communist countries than they are in Western Europe. There are an estimated three hundred thousand Roma in the Slovakian region of the former

Czechoslovakia and around 250,000 in the Czech Republic another two million or more, in Rumania, at least two million in the former Yugoslavia and up to ten percent or more of the populations in other former Soviet Bloc countries.

The Communist Assimilation Plans resulted in large numbers of Roma being brought into the urbanized areas where the children were sent to the state schools. The aims of these policies were to break up the large Romani communities, resettle the Roma among the general population as members of a new urban-sub-proletariat, educate the children and hopefully assimilate the Roma into the general population. The former economic base of the Roma was thus destroyed, old trades forbidden and forgotten by the children. Roma now became dependant upon the communist system for their basic needs much like Native Peoples in Canada. In most Communist countries, a new generation of Romani children appeared who were literate and while most followed their parents into the urbanized sub-proletariat, a fair number went on to higher education depending on the country. In the Soviet Union, the Czech Republic, Hungary and the former Yugoslavia, many Roma became doctors, engineers, teachers, nurses, members of the Communist Party and civic officials. Romani spokespeople and Romani leaders appeared, especially in the area of culture. The Communists, however, were opposed to Romani activism and self-determination at the political or ethnic level. Attempts to establish national Romani organizations and attempts to have the Romani language and culture taught in the school systems where there were large numbers of Romani children were in general, frustrated by the Communist governments. In some countries such as Hungary and the former Yugoslavia under Communism, the Romani language was taught in a few schools, especially in Macedonia and Bosnia. However, despite the attempts of the former Communist governments to introduce mass education among Roma, a considerable number of Roma now arriving in Canada as Convention-refugee claimants from Hungary, Rumania and elsewhere have been found to be totally or functionally illiterate while most are at least able to read a newspaper in whatever language they speak other than Romani.

Post-Communist Education

After the end of Communism, the education of Roma deteriorated in most former Communist countries. In the former Czechoslovakia, now the Czech Republic, and in Hungary a new policy of sending large numbers of Roma children to special schools for the mentally-challenged was gradually introduced. Since many Romani children spoke the Romani

language as their first language and others spoke a substandard form of the national language, teachers found that their lack of fluency in the national language was a handicap to their education and a negative factor on the education of the class in general which was composed of a majority of non-Roma children and a minority of Roma children. Rather than devote extra time to the Roma children in these schools, and to take steps to combat the bullying of Romani children by non-Romani children, too many teachers simply shunted the Roma off to the special schools for the mentally-challenged. It is difficult for people in North America to contemplate that too many teachers even up to University level believe that Roma are too stupid by heredity to be educated beyond basic work skills. With only one exception, children of Czech-Romani refugees now in Canada who were tested by competent authorities in the Greater Toronto School Board were found to be of normal intelligence and well able to be included in the general school system in Canada despite having been consigned to special schools in the Czech Republic.

It is also suspected that this policy in the Czech Republic and in Hungary is an assimilationist ploy to induce the parents not to teach their children Romani so they will be fluent in Czech or Hungarian. Refugees in Canada from the Czech Republic and Hungary have admitted this is the reason why many of their children do not speak Romani. Furthermore, some schools in Hungary that were teaching the Romani language at the basic level have now had these courses discontinued by the post-Communist governments.

Testimony from Romani students, now refugees in Canada, has indicated that it is very difficult for Romani students to gain access to higher education in the former Communist countries, even if they manage to complete the equivalent of Canadian High school to reach university- entrance level. In many cases, their applications were simply not accepted. Some have stated that the local school authorities do not want Roma to excel in higher education and prefer that they remain as an urbanized sub-proletariat condemned to menial blue-collar work. Too many non-Roma fear that the falling birth rate among non-Roma and the continuing high birth rate among Roma will result in educated Roma entering politics and possibly becoming a threat to the status quo.

The post-communism phenomenon of Romaphobia or rampant prejudice and overt persecution of Roma in these former Communist countries by skinheads, neo-Fascists and ultra-nationalist is also hampering Romani education. Those in elementary and high schools

are afraid to go to school and actually prefer to be in the special schools for the mentally-challenged because there they are not beaten by teachers and fellow students and are not made to feel unwelcome because of discrimination by their peers. All former Romani students now in Canada describe rampant prejudice, discrimination and overt persecution in the school systems at all levels. Special scholarship programs run by Soros Foundation grants have enabled some Romani students to go on to higher education in the Czech Republic, Hungary and elsewhere but for Romani students in general, the prospects for higher education are becoming more and more limited.

Roma in Western Europe

The education of Roma in Western Europe has followed no general pattern like that in Eastern Europe. Most Western-European countries have laws which make it mandatory for all children to attend school. Since native-born Roma are citizens of these countries, they are entitled to the same general education as any other citizen. However, because a large number of Roma are nomadic in Western Europe, this has created a special problem in education. With families constantly travelling around as they follow their traditional lifestyle of commercial nomadism, children are always attending different schools. It is almost impossible for the authorities to keep track of them to prove school attendance, and not always convenient for the children to get from the official campsite (often near a municipal garbage dump) to the nearest school. Discrimination also hampers the education of those who manage to get to school. “ In Britain, in 2009, recent polls have shown that “Gypsies” are at the bottom of the non-Anglo-Saxon totem poll of who the average white citizen would want as a neighbor, way below Africans, Muslims and Jews.

In Spain, where the long-established Calés or Spanish-Romani population is sedentary, large numbers have received at least a basic education. Some have gone on to higher education. Where Roma are sedentary in other countries of Western Europe, Romani children also receive a basic education. In Britain, privately-sponsored caravan schools have been established which traveled around to Romani campsites to teach basic literary skills at the elementary level. They are not numerous, however.

The Western-European situation has now been complicated by the arrival of large numbers of Romani refugees fleeing persecution in the former Communist countries. They constitute a

serious issue for the authorities in Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Sweden, Belgium, the U.K., the Republic of Ireland and elsewhere. These children of Romani refugees are not fluent in the local languages, the parents are awaiting deportation or going through some process in which they hope to gain residency, citizenship or work permits, and their status in the country is in limbo. In effect, most of these children are not receiving education within the national school systems but some are attending special schools run by various organizations dedicated to helping Romani refugees and asylum seekers in these countries. Since these refugees are sedentary Roma, those who have been accepted as citizens or work permits are able to send place their children in the national school systems.

Even among Roma who were born in Western-European countries, the rate of literacy is not high compared to Romani literacy in the former Communist countries. Large numbers of adults are still illiterate and others barely able to sign their names, read the newspapers, fill out forms or able to pass a driving test .The situation is improving among the younger generation, but mass literacy among Roma in Western Europe is still far from becoming a reality.

Other Countries

Education of Roma in less-economically developed countries where large numbers of non-Roma are totally illiterate can only be imagined. The majority of Roma are nomadic or live in rural settlements where they receive next to no education. In Northern Portugal, Roma still travel with carts drawn by donkeys and horses and camp outdoors. In Greece, large numbers of Roma are nomadic or live in rural settlements and villages and earn a living by agricultural labor, middlemen occupations and artisan skills. In Turkey, Roma are travelling entertainers and seasonal laborers. In many ways, these Roma are still following the Romani lifestyle like it was before the Second World War and the later Communist governments of Eastern Europe. Education is sporadic at best.

Canada and the U.S.

The Romani populations of Canada and the US are composed of 5th and 6th generation descendants of Vlach-Roma who migrated to North America between the 1880s and the early 20th century. Canadian and American Vlach-Roma form one community in language, culture and clan identities. In the US there are an estimated one million Vlach-Roma, and in Canada,

about 50 thousand. Vlach-Roma are Romani clans who lived for centuries in Wallachia, Moldavia and Transylvania and whose Romani dialects have been heavily influenced by loan words from Rumanian. In Canada and the US, education of Roma is a fairly recent phenomenon. In the 1960s, illiteracy was high among the adult generation. It has now somewhat improved and older adults especially men, have basic reading and writing skills. Education is improving among the younger generation and teenagers and young adults are rapidly becoming computer literate, creating their own chat lines, list servers, web sites and blogs. The Vlach-Roma are the most traditional of all Romani groups in the Americas and follow the older Romani beliefs of purity and pollution. They also have the tradition of self-employment and in general, parents see little need for education beyond the acquisition of basic literary skills. Since the parents are successful in traditional middleman occupations and self-employment, they see little need for their children to go on to higher education. Individuals, however, have gone on to University and some have entered the arts such as film making. But for the most part, once boys reach 15 or so, they start to work with their fathers, and girls of this age are kept home because of the strict rules of morality, fear of pollution, potential drug abuse and promiscuity among non-Roma classmates and other factors.

There are also an estimated 20 thousand or more Romanichels, or Roma whose ancestors came to Canada from the U.K and more in the US. They have a higher degree of literacy than the Vlach-Roma, but also follow a traditional Romani lifestyle and are mostly self-employed in many conventional occupations such as small businessmen, middle men and as sedentary or itinerant tradesmen. Many individuals have advanced to higher education and work as professionals. Other groups such as Ludari, Sinti and Karpati Roma also exist on the US and again, their general level of education is quite high.

A large number of Romani immigrants have also come to Canada and the US since the end of the Second World War. Many of them had been educated by the Communists and have entered mainstream professions and become businessmen in Canada. Their children are attending elementary, high school and university. Many have graduated in the professions. Others have become skilled trades people and business people. During the Communist regimes, Roma simply entered Canada along with non-Roma nationals of their former countries as refugees from Communism. Since their Romani ethnicity was not the basis of their refugee claims, their arrival went unnoticed by Immigration Canada , the media and the

public. For this and other reasons, the immigrant Romani population of Canada cannot be estimated. It is, however, considerable.

A growing number of Roma are now entering Canada seeking Convention refugee status as they flee persecution in the former Communist countries of Eastern Europe where they have been scapegoated and targeted by skinheads, neo-Fascists and other racist bottom-feeders. The largest group to arrive was the Czech-Roma influx beginning in August, 1997. These Czech Roma had been educated under the Communist system and want their children to be educated in Canada. Despite the fact that many of the children had been placed in schools for the mentally-challenged in the Czech Republic, most of them have fitted into the Canadian school system without any problems other than lack of interpreters in the school, system for those recently arrived. There are also many older Czech-Romani students who wish to go attend University in Canada.

As of October, 2008, when Canada removed its visa requirement for Czech nationals, which had been hastily re-imposed in October 1997 after the “First Gypsy Invasion” of August and September 1997, a new wave of Czech Roma and Hungarian Roma began arriving from this new EU member countries, new refugees from democracy fleeing the rise of neo-fascisms in the EU-member countries of Europe. This is resulting in large numbers of new Romani children entering the school systems in Canada and has created the need for interpreters and other services. Whether the current Conservative Harper government will once again apply Canada’s Doomsday Weapon and re-instate the visa requirement thus ending the flow like it did in 2007 when Canada’s immigration policy towards Roma appeared to any thinking person to be “None Is Too Many:” is a moot question.

Roma in Latin America

The Roma of Latin America, like those of English-speaking America, are usually left out of any discussion of the “world’s Roma” despite the fact that collectively, they number at least three to four million exclusive of the 8 million or so claimed for Europe. Since little has been written in English about Roma in Latin America other than a few now outdated articles in the old Journal of the Gypsy Lore Society, for modern sources, such as they are, one must resort to material in Spanish and Portuguese. Educated Roma have emerged on chat lines who are educated and living in Brazil, Argentina and other countries and many Romani children are

attending school. On the other hand, Romani visitors to Latin America have encountered nomadic Roma still traveling with horses and living in tents in Colombia as well as sedentary Roma in the cities driving the latest automobiles with cell phones and computers and educated Roma working in academia. In Argentina, Romani is recognized as an official minority language. There is no an association called SKOKRA, the Union of Romani Organizations in the Americas working towards the integration of and acceptance of Roma as an official minority group in the Latin-American countries.

Education in Romani for Roma

Today, Romani linguists in many countries are working towards the creation of a Romani literary language so that Romani children can be educated in Romani and taught their own history and culture. A growing body of literature in Romani is emerging in many countries and there are now Romani authors, poets and journalists among the growing Romani intelligentsia. It is important for young Romani students to be able to learn about their own history and culture. The learning tools they need can only be created by fellow Roma and preferably in the Romani language. This is being accomplished by the growing number of educated Roma. There are also Romani web sites, chat lines, list servers and news servers where Romani is used in bulletins and in personal messages while Roma are writing to one another in Romani. What is urgently needed is a standard alphabet and phonetic system that is computer friendly. Any system that relies on a phonetic system requiring diacritical marks above or below individual letters or symbols not on a standard computer keyboard such as Greek theta or epsilon will simply be self-defeating and unusable by the average Romani teenager in high school. What is needed is not a phonetic system designed by one academic linguist for other academic linguists but a workable, computer friendly, system that will facilitate its mass usage by non-academic Roma.

Training Towards Employment for Roma in Sweden

by

Gregor Dufunia Kwiek

Background

At the turn of the century, numerous educational programs had been started in Sweden that had the objective of helping Roma to enter into the employment sector. An extremely large majority of these have not gone onto to having any form of employment after their education was completed but rather many ended becoming dependent on the state. The courses themselves did meet the goals and objectives laid before them as far as the training and educational aspects of the courses were concerned, and yet most of the students that graduated from these courses were not able to land a job related to their training. It is without a question that there always is room for improvement in all projects and programs. Thus this article does not seek to examine what may have been ineffective as far as the training within these programs is concerned. This article rather will focus its efforts on the structures of employment and educational programs that may contribute to this dilemma.

Target Groups

Because the Roma were excluded from schooling and housing up until the late 1960's in Sweden, the Roma lacked a tradition within the educational system. The first children that began going to school in the late 1960's and early 1970's, had parents who had no concept of how the educational system worked. In some cases, some of these parents did not know how to tell time. In many cases, parents for example who did metal work to survive would teach this trade to their children and those children would end their schooling early in order to contribute to the family economy. Simply because laws changed and allowed Roma to enter into the educational system, this did not mean that school seats began filling up with Romani children. As I myself, who also began my schooling in the 1970's, many of the Roma in

Sweden had a sporadic education. Meaning that one would at times miss several months of schooling and their childhood education ended prior to hitting puberty.

As time progressed, things did not get better. Social workers and teachers too often took the approach of assimilating Roma children. This had set a blaze fears within the community and some Roma began withdrawing their children from school. One could have argued about the relevance of education over and over again, but it had little impact since most did not understand the educational system.

Several decades later things began to change. The Roma became recognized as national minority in Sweden and more and more Roma began completing their high school education, but still, the numbers were not a majority. To this purpose, Sundbyberg's Folkhögskola (folk high school) began various training programs for Roma at their schools, where the Roma would receive a degree within the educational sector. The training courses had great success when it came to getting the students involved and social integration. The downfall of the project was that once the internship of these students that went to the various schools where they had their internships was completed, the schools did not go on to hire them, whether they needed them or not.

One of the major causes that have contributed to this problem are other employment programs that are state sponsored and target young people. These programs commonly cover salary costs for companies that hire young people, so that in this way such young people can gain some work experience and add this employment into their resume for future prospective employment. Naturally, organizations that can use such a labor force do see the advantage of hiring young people within these programs. It is often schools that typically need extra people to play sports with children during recess, to assist children in various subjects, and to assist teachers with copying, arranging equipment, and other assistive matters. One most certainly does not need to have a teacher's degree to carry out such tasks, and as young people are able to complete these functions, it only makes sense for the schools to take advantage of these programs.

The problem with the training program for the Roma was that most of them were not able to meet the criteria of this program, since they were too old, and it makes more sense for schools

to hire untrained youth that they don't have to pay than to hire Roma who are trained but need to be paid by the school.

At another school, called Skarpnäck's Folkhögskola another program was started for Roma which was a motivational program towards furthering ones education. The problem with this program was that its focus was on Roma under the age of twenty five, while the majority of those who wanted to take the course were well into their forties.

In order to understand why there are so few Roma youths in these programs and why a majority consists of those that are middle aged, one needs to look at the historical circumstances of these various age groups. Roma that are between the ages of thirty five to fifty belong to the same age group as myself. As stated before, many of us had a sporadic education, and in many cases, when they opportunity came to continue where one left off in his/her education, one commonly took advantage of the situation. It is this age group that has seen what difficulties one faces in the modern world without a proper education. And those that have been successful in completing or continuing their education from this age group now have children that are on their way entering into high school, are in it or have completed it. In other cases where young Roma do not go to high school or do not have any intentions doing so in the near future, rarely have had the experience themselves to understand how hard life is in the modern world without a proper education. Thus, largely it is those in the age group from thirty five to fifty that are motivated to participate in these training programs and there is yet to be an employment program that is focused on this group once their education is completed.

The Trickle Down Effect

One of the better large scale projects that I have had the pleasure to work with goes by the title of "Romane Buca". The main objective of Romane Buca is to prepare Romani participants within the project for the labor market. The project is a large scale project because it geographically spread into four different Swedish counties, and its objective is implemented via educational institutions within these four counties. Prior to being involved in the project, I had read about its objective and found the objective to be different from educational projects that targeted Roma in the past. Commonly educational projects for Roma

attempted to train their students into a particular field such as a youth leader. The problem with such projects is that because they target Roma many Roma try to enter the program whether they have an interest in the program or not because so few other opportunities exist for them. This project on the other hand does not focus on any particular trade but rather allows the teaching institutions to form and shape the program in accordance with what the project requires be the results of the program. In other words, the project does not demand that the educational institutions use any particular method to implement the results that are sought for achievement within the project. Below I provide a rough translation of some of the activities that are to be included within these various educational institutions for the project.

- Self employment
- Household budget
- Gender balance
- Debt settlement
- Structures of society
- Social enterprise
- Health and wellbeing
- Individual council
- Orientation classes

These various activities are to be included within the educational structure of the program in order to prepare students within the program for the labor market. Many of the individuals participating in the course are long term unemployed or have never had employment. When looking at these activities one needs to consider the history of the Romani people in Sweden and what effect exclusion has had on them. The fact of the matter is that there are Roma that have qualities which can be converted into a self run business, but most do not know what steps one needs to take to start such a business. In other cases, there are those who do not know the difference between a state run institution and local government. And in some cases there are those that are well aware of how some of these structures do work but are weaker in other areas. It is for this very reason that the project included individual council amongst its activities. However, in order to understand what purpose these activities serve one needs to understand what the overall aims are of the project and for this reason some of these aims are provided below.

1. That at least 60% of the participants shall experience that they have more information about society, the structures of society and that they will have greater opportunity to self sustainability in comparison to their participation prior to the project.
2. That at least 60% of the participants shall have an increase in human capital via studies or employment experience.
3. That at least 80% of the participants shall experience that they have a greater chance at entering the labor market.
4. That at least 80% of the participants shall have a personal plan to come closer to entering the labor market.
5. That 100% of the participants shall experience and increase in empowerment.
6. That 50 of the participants shall either find themselves employed or involved in studies at the end of the project.

Once one carefully examines the aims of the project one understands that the objective of the project is not to provide employment for the participants but rather to prepare them for employment. Thus the activities focus on areas of knowledge and information that are beneficial to the labor market. One can consider how knowledge on health can have an impact on an individual's opportunities within the labor market, but to understand this one needs to consider how an employer may look at a candidate for a job with a poor physical in comparison to a person with a good one. It appears that creators behind this project have carefully strategized and developed this project; the problem however that spring up is when good ideas are put into practice and simply do not work as expected.

On the 16th of February, 2012, the Swedish government decided to begin the implementation of a twenty year strategy towards inclusion for its Romani population. The idea is that a Romani child born in 2012 will have the same opportunities as any other citizen by 2032. In order to achieve this goal, the government has named six social areas that may exclude the Roma more often than other ethnic groups that live in Sweden. These six social areas are:

Education

Employment

Housing

Health and wellbeing

Culture and language

Civil society organizing

When one carefully examines the activities within the project Romane Buca, and compares them to the social areas the Swedish government believes need to be tackled for there to be greater inclusion of Roma within Swedish society, one will notice that the two resemble one another. The Swedish government has selected five counties in Sweden to carry out pilot projects which will then be assessed after a four year (2012-2015) period for effect. The project Romane Buca is put into practice in Swedish counties that have not been selected as pilot project counties. Thus one can say that the project Romane Buca resembles the pilot project counties as far as goals are concerned. The problem however that does come up, as mentioned before, is when it comes to putting these great ideas into practice.

All projects that are large scale have a trickle down effect at the local level. The government believes that one of the areas that need focus as far as inclusion is concerned is health. This particular social problem for the Roma is not identified and is left to interpretation. Other social areas such as employment, education and housing are not difficult to understand, these are largely related to discrimination, but not entirely. Civil organizing for example can be a tool for challenging discrimination in this area, while education and employment go hand in hand and compliment one another. The area of health however is far more vague. When we discuss inclusion, we are discussing a twofold issue, one is that the Roma lack knowledge about mainstream society because of exclusion the other is discrimination that has excluded Roma from mainstream society and continues to do so. I have come across numerous Roma that have complained about the healthcare system in Sweden, believing that Roma are discriminated against when it comes to their healthcare. Some of these have stopped going to

a particular hospital or have stopped going altogether to their local healthcare providers and have begun seeking healthcare elsewhere.

Not all of these complaints are related to discrimination but rather some experience discrimination without an action of discrimination on the behalf of healthcare providers. This again is a problem that has been created through exclusion. Some misinterpret healthcare providers or have difficulty explaining what their discomfort is. In many situations, Roma that are above the age of sixty do not have a good command of Swedish, and typically are provided with translators that speak a non-Romani language that in many cases happens to be a second or third language for such Romani patients. This again is another serious problem because many of those Roma that are in their sixties left countries like Poland and the Czech Republic as youths and may have never had any schooling in those countries to the point that they can actually understand some of the medical implications that are passed onto them via the translator. There are of course some Romani translators in Sweden, but as of yet it is not known if there are any that have some form of training in medicine so that they themselves can first understand what is being told to them before they translate that information to a patient.

Returning to exclusion, one can conclude that exclusion has had an effect on the knowledge level the Roma have of the healthcare system. Thus one interpretation of what is needed for inclusion to come into being in this social area is that knowledge and information needs to be spread into Romani communities that are in Sweden. And in fact, this knowledge is needed but the question is what kind of knowledge is needed. In many cases there are those that assume that the knowledge level of Roma is extremely low when it comes to their wellbeing. In fact, some Roma found it offensive that there are those who believe this. Some participants within the project are well above fifty and are already grandmothers and find it silly that they be taught about the reproductive system. Others expressed that they know that smoking and junk food is bad for them but lacked the needed motivation to change their lifestyle. And that motivation does not exist to an extent because of a lack of knowledge. As an example, I am motivated to quit smoking because I know that in ten years from now I will not have trouble breathing and doing things I do know. However, if I wait another five years, I will add five more years of smoking to my life, and as such, I will have less healing time from the effects of smoking. Thus Roma do not need knowledge and information for their wellbeing, this is not a question, the question however is what kind of knowledge they need.

The way in which it is generally assessed what kind of knowledge and information is needed for provision to the Roma is based on reports, essays and articles. There are reports that have gone to say that Romani foods are high in fat, and indirectly then suggest that it is the culture that promotes bad health among Roma. Too often, the Roma are looked upon differently for doing the same things that others do. After all, German and Hungarians foods are just as fatty! One can go on saying that Romani foods are prepared on rare occasions such as weddings and holidays, Romani foods are not a part of the daily diet, so one cannot peg Romani food as the culprit.

The problem with the trickle down effect is that it is based on assumptions about Roma and as such activities are then to be implemented for the benefit of the Roma even when the Roma do not need it, hence the benefit is none existent. The idea of bringing healthcare information to Romani participants sparked frustration, and in fact, that frustration turned into protests. Aside the implementation of healthcare information to participants, there were other social areas that were to be addressed within the project, such as gender equality. And this subject also caused outrage amongst participants when the project wanted to bring an outsider to teach them about this when they already had their own women's group that dealt with this issue, and that both of their teachers did study have gender studies at university level. These protests however did not damage the project but rather caused it to reach its very aims. The participants became self empowered and decided how they themselves would take advantage of the project to suit their needs rather than having some outsider doing things for them that they don't want or need. To conclude this section of the article, one can say that a trickle down effect must allow room for self empowerment so that the effect can attain desired outcomes.

Remedies

I began working as a teacher within the project Romane Buca in fall of 2012. The idea at the school which I worked (Skarpnäcks Folkhögskola) was that we would teach the participants for eight months and thereafter they would carry out internships so that they could gain experience in the labor market. Within the very first few months of the course we were able to have four Romani people from the course gain employment and another four were hired to work at local schools with children. These employment opportunities came into being because both the project and the community was in need of people that would carry out particular

tasks. As an example, two young men were hired as youth leaders to deal with troubled youth, another woman that was long term unemployed filled a function at the school taking care of the cafeteria, and the fourth was a middle aged man that was to act as a bridge builder between the municipality of Skarpnäck and its Romani population. It is the latter that faced the most difficulty as there was no clear definition as to the role of what a bridge builder is to do. The bridge builder was given several tasks that for example should not be a part of a bridge builder's job description. As these four persons gained employment, jealousy began springing up in the classroom, and others began to question why just these four. As time progressed, the class began working on several projects, such as cultural projects that had a very positive effect on integration between the Roma and non-Roma. Students began seeing that through collaboration they were able to better their circumstances, and it was then that the women's group was started in Skarpnäck. The major objective of the women's group is to address a particular problem. The child and welfare section had contacted Romani parents in the past about school absence, and related matters. Because the Roma had developed a distrust in non-Romani authority, the Roma commonly thought of the worse when they were contacted by social workers about their children. The idea with the women's group was to gather families and provide them with information so one would avoid any conflict with social workers. In others words, the women's group is a bridge builder. The concept and idea of bridge building is to convey knowledge and information from institutions to a population that either distrusts those institutions or cannot comprehend them. The problems that exist in healthcare, and other areas, need to be addressed by bridge building with training suitable to those areas. The bridge builder that was hired by Skarpnäcks municipality needs to go between the community and the municipality, providing them with knowledge related to the municipality and should not be involved directly in individual cases as a social worker should be. Because of misinterpretation, bridge builders need to have a central office through which bridge builders can have assistance in the work that they do.

Segregation of Roma in Education – through my Roma Eyes

by

Galya Stoyanova (ROMEDIA)

“A Roma Special School is a school for children of the Roma community with a modified curriculum. Often they are merged with the schools for mentally handicapped.”[1]
(Wikipedia’s definition of Roma Special School)

Roma and their position in education is a very broad, multifaceted topic, which could be addressed by a variety of angles. This blog article will not aim at covering fully this issue, but rather, it is inspired by some personal experiences of the past. When I was a student I was part of project which aimed at enrolling Roma children wrongly placed in special schools into mass schools. Scientific literature and policy documents attribute various reasons to the wrong placement of Roma kids in special schools. To put it plainly, while working to end segregation of these Roma children in Bulgaria, I saw an overwhelming amount of discrimination, ignorance and racism on behalf of decision makers and stakeholders. It seemed as if Roma pupils were invisible for the education system and in the moment we started to ask for their rights they become unwelcome everywhere. Although we succeeded in enrolling them, and we made sure to spend time studying with them to guarantee them the same start as the rest of the class, in the end they just became unwelcome “guests” in the classroom, where nobody wanted to see them. Probably as a consequence of the hostility and exclusion they were faced with, some of them “disappeared” shortly after their career in the “integrative school system” started.



Photo:efareport.wordpress.com

The Decade of Roma Inclusion started in 2005 but after these years when integration was officially put on the agenda of European countries, we still read reports and articles about the similar problems we start with. Somehow these problematic issues manage to stay “evergreen” – with the quandary of segregated education being one of them. Roma children are segregated either by being put in schools for children with special needs or mentally disabled, or in “Gypsy” schools and classes. While examining the background of the problem, we need to go a long way back in time and need to focus on several different European countries.

The Open Society Foundation published a document in 1998 which gave a comprehensive overview of the situation of Roma in the education system in Europe. The authors relied also on the European Roma Rights Centre report from the same year when investigating the roots of Roma segregation in education. As they describe, in the 18th century policies were drafted to “Christianize” the Roma and transform them into “new citizens” and “farmers”. To achieve this purpose, Roma children were removed from their families and placed in non-Roma ones. Parallel to them being uprooted from their family, they were also placed in mass schools together with non-Roma kids, where they were supposed to lose their differences – this severely questionable method was aimed at what would be today called assimilation. Policies for assimilation became more prevalent after the Second World War when governments took action forcing traveler Roma communities to settle. The school system for Roma children was created to remove children’s “Romanipe”: in other words, education was aimed to assimilate children in mainstream society, and make them forget about their culture, traditions and language. The justification was that Romani cultural background was a mere social

disadvantage that made children unable to perform properly in mainstream education, and thus it had to be replaced with mainstream traditions.[2]



*Photo: Mundi Romani episode “Ukraine 2008 – School Segregation”
[/http://www.mundiromani.com/videos/?video\[video\]\[item\]=57/](http://www.mundiromani.com/videos/?video[video][item]=57/)*

The same document contains information about the situation until 1998 with the Roma special schools, explaining the result with the language barriers, cultural barriers which are bringing the Roma pupils most of the times in classes or schools not preparing them equally as the non-Roma. Often times they are even considered because of their ethnic identity as mentally handicapped children and they are placed in special schools for that. Sadly the situation today in some European countries is that they are not handling the problem in a different way when we still have the same practice existing.

The OSF article dates the segregation of Roma kids in Hungary back to the since 1960s when the Socialist Workers Party created the category of the “socially deprived” or so called “C-classes”, for children on the lowest (“C”) level of school performance. In 1971 they were announced as predominantly Gypsy. 70 “C”classes started up in 1962, and their number increased to more than 180 by 1971. The concept and practice of the so-called C-classes was (and is, to some extent) adopted in many other European countries, like Czech Republic, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia or Macedonia.[3]

My personal experiences link my knowledge about the issue to Bulgaria primarily. The ERRC published an article in 2000 shading light on the situation of Roma children in the Bulgarian education system. In comparison to Hungary, Bulgarian authorities chose a form of segregation which on the surface appeared to be less discriminatory than the C classes in Hungary. After the 1950s new schools were built in Roma settlements, parallel to the decision of the government to adopt laws to forcibly settle nomadic and semi-nomadic Roma. Since

the 1960s these segregated schools haven't changed much. Until 1999 an estimated 70% of the Romani children in Bulgaria attended such schools, where the quality of education is generally lower than in other non-Romani populated schools. The ERRC document addresses another, even heavier form of segregation in education, namely wrong placement of Roma children in special schools for handicapped or mentally disabled. IN such schools, according to the 1995 investigation, "approximately one out of every three pupils was Romani". In 1999 there were 274 special schools in Bulgaria. The percentage of Roma children in them was 70%. [4]



*Czech and Slovakian children who attend mainstream schools in the UK perform well.
Photo:equality.co.uk*

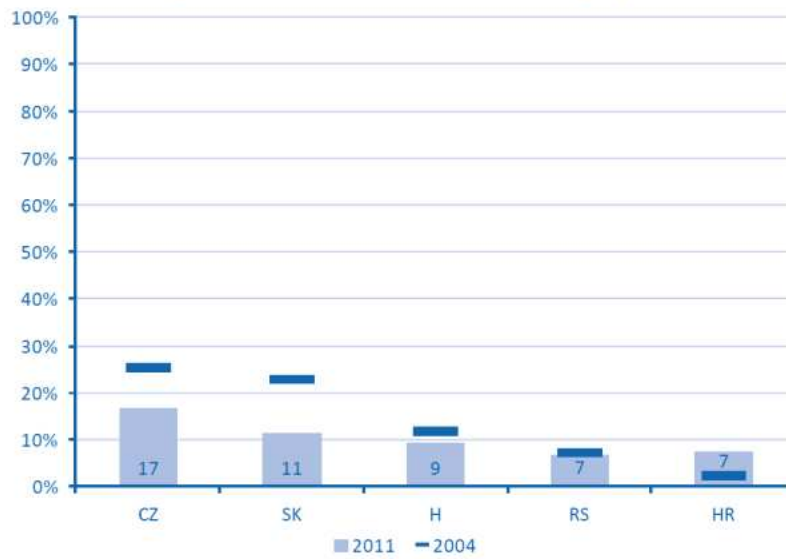
Since 2000 changes occurred in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. We have several steps made by international institutions, NGOs and some "political will" on the governments' side was expressed for solving this problem. The first Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015) gave funding opportunities to a lot of non-governmental organizations, and projects and initiatives were started. However, the result sadly wasn't enough so far. The lack of an overarching change may be due to the fact that the agenda of the Decade was initiated by the civil society and some basic initiatives did not achieve sustainability.

The UNDP, the World Bank and the European Commission released a survey entitled "Roma Education in Comparative Perspective" which presents a large pool of information about the problem from different angles. As we can see below, the figures show that we already have some improvement in both areas of segregation: placement in special schools and segregation openly based on ethnicity. But unfortunately in some of the countries (such as Croatia), the proportion of Roma children in special schools grew. Which shows that we still have long way until we completely solved this problems. [5]

Table 1

Figure 24: Roma in special schools

Share of Roma aged 7 to 15 who attend or have been attending a special school



Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011

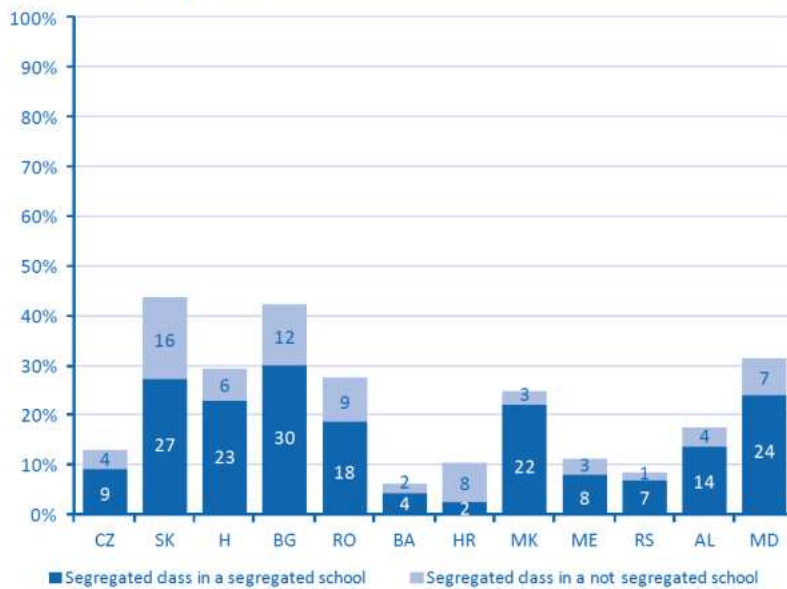
Notes:

- Special classes that are also considered as segregated settings (Luciak 2008, p. 35) are not included.
- Findings from a household survey implemented by UNDP in Slovakia in 2010 found 16% Roma aged 7 to 15 attended special schools (Brüggemann & Skobla 2012, online source).

Table 2

Figure 23: Ethnically segregated classes

Share of Roma aged 7 to 15 who attend regular schools with the majority of classmates being Roma



Source: UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011

Table 1 and 2: ethnically segregated classes and special schools

As a consequence, in 2011 27 Member States were asked to create their national strategies in four key fields of the First European Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies, adopted by the European Union, to enter into force from 2014 on. One of the four areas is education. Recommendations stressed severely by the EU include the removal of segregated schools. As a result 26 national strategies were submitted by the member states. As a result, the European Commission also adopted country specific recommendations.[6]

All these steps reflect the recognition of the problem that Roma face in education. The recognition is present on the international, the governmental and the civil society level as well. However, the solution is still quite controversial. One of the most constructive steps in my opinion was the adoption of the “National Roma Integration Strategies: a first step in the implementation of the EU Framework” in May 2012.[7] The annex attracted is with country specific recommendations and if we look the education area we can easy find conclusions about the Roma education situation in most of the European countries today. Looking at the figure below it is evident that only some of the countries really took time to think about measures tackling the problem of segregation, however, for the majority of them addressing segregation was not among the priorities.

Table 3

Measures to increase the educational attainment of children

| Measures required by the EU Framework | Member States that have addressed them¹⁴ |
|--|--|
| Endorsement of the general goal | BE, BG, CZ, DK, DE, EE, IE, EL, ES, IT, CY, LV, LT, LU, HU, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, UK |
| Concrete goals to reduce education gap | BE, BG, CZ, EL, ES, IT, CY, LU, HU, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, UK |
| Widening access to quality early childhood education and care | CZ, EL, ES, IT, CY, LV, HU, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI |
| Measures to ensure that Roma children complete at least primary school | BE, BG, DE, EE, IE, EL, ES, FR, IT, LV, LU, HU, NL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE, UK |
| Reducing secondary school leaving | BG, CZ, IE, EL, ES, FR, IT, HU, AT, PL, PT, RO, SK, FI, UK |
| Increasing tertiary education | CZ, ES, IT, HU, PT, FI |
| Measures aimed at preventing segregation | CZ, EL, ES, HU, PL, RO, SK |
| Support measures | BE, CZ, EE, IE, ES, IT, CY, LV, LT, HU, AT, PL, PT, RO, SI, SK, FI, SE, UK |

The Framework for National Roma Integration, along with the other strategies and documents show that the segregation and wrong placement of Roma pupils in “special schools” is still an existing problem, and not only in Central and Eastern Europe – however, segregation persists

more heavily in this region. The current situation leads to another important question: what we can expect from the second Decade of Roma Inclusion when it comes to segregation in education? Are we going to find tangible solutions until 2020? Or actions will again mainly pertain to recognizing the problem over and over again? The answers for these questions are not easy to be found.

In some countries the victims of segregation and wrong placement themselves took action against their countries' policies. In the 29th of January 2013 ERRC published an article about a decisive stance the European Court of Human Rights took in connection to the problem. The European Court ruled in favor of two applicants, Horváth and Kiss, against the Hungarian state, stating that their placement in the special school was based on their ethnicity, not for their reasonable need. Their right to education was harmed, which made their integration in society more difficult. In its decision the Court underlined the long history educational segregation of Roma children in Hungary and it stressed that the state should abolish this practice as it's violating the European Convention on Human Rights, read in conjunction with Article 14 (Prohibition of discrimination). The Court also recommended that not only Hungary but all the State Parties should develop positive measures to avoid discrimination.[8]

Similar cases from Greece[9], Czech Republic, and Croatia[10] have been in front of the European Court before the case of Hungary. The case from Czech Republic relates back to 2000 and it was the first case where the victims themselves, 18 students from Ostrava, claimed that they received inferior education based on a diluted curriculum when they were placed in a special school. They even submitted an extensive research indicating that Roma children were systematically assigned to segregated schools based on their ethnic identity and not on their intellectual capacities. In 2006 the decision of the Court stated that although the applicants had raised very strong arguments, they didn't reach to a violation of the Convention and specially Article 2 and 14. But on the Grand Chamber in a landmark there was the decision ruled in favor of the applicants, acknowledging that they suffered from discrimination.[11]



Romani students protest against school segregation in Czech schools. Photo: CTK

Examining the problem from my Roma perspective, starting a desegregation process is still the needed minimum in many countries, but it is not enough. Looking back at my own school years, I didn't face the same problems like many of the Roma in Bulgaria, whose mother tongue was Romanes and have a strong Roma identity. On the contrary, I was "lucky" enough to be part of a family who had been assimilated long ago: my ancestors lost their Roma identity and so there was nobody to really transmit this sense of belonging to me. Still, I felt many things missing during my education. I missed classes where I could have the possibility to learn my Romani language and Roma history as mandatory; I missed knowing my place in the world, because of the educational system that did not address cultural differences in the curriculum and the structure. My example shows that eliminating segregation and wrong placement practices is more than necessary, but without any other action taken, the final result would only lead to assimilation. The educational system should change and create a place for us, Roma in the schools in a way that helps making us part of the society, but not demanding that we lose our Roma identity in the process of making statistics on education look slightly better.

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