

News Release

One Europe, two different ways of educating Roma children

28 November 2011



In the Czech Republic, Slovakia and some other new EU Member States, Roma ethnic group children are disproportionately placed in special schools for the mentally disabled or in *de facto* segregated schools. When these same children migrate to the United Kingdom with their parents, they are educated in mainstream schools. Equality, in cooperation with the Roma Education Fund, carried out research to find out what impact mainstream schooling had on Roma children who had previously been streamed into special or *de facto* segregated schools. The findings of this pilot research, '[From Segregation to Inclusion](#)', show that Roma pupils in the United Kingdom quickly catch up with their non-Roma peers to gain an attainment level just below average.

Between March and September 2011, Equality carried out research among Roma of Czech and Slovak nationality who had migrated with their families to Leicester, Chatham, Rotherham, Wolverhampton, Southend-on-Sea, Peterborough, London and Derby in the United Kingdom. It was found that 85% of the pupils interviewed had been previously placed in a special school, *de facto* segregated school or predominantly Roma kindergarten in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. This despite the European Court of Human Rights finding in 2007 in the case of *D.H. and others versus the Czech Republic* that 'the disproportionate assignment of Roma children to special schools without an objective and reasonable justification amounted to unlawful indirect discrimination in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights'.

For years some education practitioners in Eastern European countries have argued that segregated or special education is in the best interests of Roma children. Equality's research on the impact of mainstream education shows this to be untrue: the average attainment of Roma pupils in numeracy, literacy and science was just below average. The research also found that the more the Roma pupils were integrated within classes and schools, the fewer community cohesion problems existed both in and out of school. This contrasts sharply with the view of the majority of Roma students that they had experienced racist bullying and verbal abuse by non-Roma peers, as well as discriminatory treatment by teachers, at Czech and Slovak schools.

All of the Roma parents interviewed valued the absence of discrimination and racism in the school system in the UK. All of them believed their children's chances to succeed later on in life were much better in a mainstream school. One parent, originally from the Czech Republic, said "I was sent to special school. Now I can see that we were not given the same chances as non-Roma children and I want better for my kids who are bright".

Judit Szira, Director of the Roma Education Fund, said "We have clear evidence that closing the gap in education outcomes of Roma students and guaranteeing their place in the labour market is achievable - if supported by a broad consensus of government and society, as well as the Roma themselves".

Alan Anstead, Chief Executive of Equality, said "This pilot research will hopefully kickstart the search for a better, more fairer way of educating Roma children in the Czech Republic and Slovakia, as well as provide a resource for schools in the UK who want to learn from other schools in how to best help Roma pupils who enroll."

Notes for editors

The report 'From Segregation to Inclusion: Roma pupils in the United Kingdom' can be downloaded at: <http://equality.uk.com/Education.html>

For more information contact Alan Anstead at Equality: email alan@equality.uk.com, telephone 01787 371504 or mobile 07704 616909.

Equality is a registered charity that works to uphold and secure the rights of ethnic minority groups in Britain and Europe. It primarily helps Roma who migrated to the UK from the new EU Member States. Equality empowers them to resolve employment, housing, education, healthcare and social welfare issues. It helps by building dialogue, understanding and cooperation between Roma communities, local authorities and service providers. Website: [//equality.uk.com](http://equality.uk.com)

The Roma Education Fund was created in the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in 2005. Its mission and ultimate goal is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, the organisation supports policies and programmes that ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems. Website: <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/>