



ombudsman

Public Defender of Rights

Inclusive Education of Roma and non-Roma Children

Ombudsman's Research and Recommendation 2018
Summary in English



There are approximately 4,000 primary schools in the Czech Republic. In 136 of these, Roma make up a third or more of pupils. Twelve such schools are attended exclusively by Roma children. This situation carries a number of negative implications. Ethnic segregation in education:

- reduces the chances of the segregated pupils to attain higher education;
- strengthens social exclusion and prevents individuals from lifting themselves out of poverty;
- lays disproportionate demands on pedagogical work and creates a risk of teacher burnout;
- leads to lower economic activity of the graduates of such schools, which represents a significant loss for the Czech GDP;
- increases the economic burden on the school's founder due to the need to provide additional funding from municipal budgets.

Segregation in education is unlawful. Headteachers are not allowed to segregate pupils according to their ethnicity. Similarly, a municipality may not reserve one of its schools exclusively for Roma children nor designate school districts to achieve this goal. Such conduct would constitute direct discrimination in violation of the Anti-Discrimination Act. It is also necessary to avoid situations where a Roma class or school would be created due to the application of a seemingly neutral criterion (e.g. the school readiness test). This could constitute indirect discrimination.

Based on experience from the Czech Republic and abroad, we formulated ten measures to help achieve inclusive education of Roma and non-Roma children:

- (1) good and inclusive pre-school education of Roma and non-Roma children;
- (2) suitable delimitation of school districts;
- (3) suitable transport or accompaniment of pupils to more distant schools (bussing) with the aim of ensuring even representation of Roma and non-Roma pupils in a municipality's schools;
- (4) demonstrating to the school that inclusive education is meaningful and must be declared in its educational programme;
- (5) good preparation of teachers for ethnically diverse classes (further education, sharing best practices among schools, visits, mentoring);
- (6) help provided by additional non-pedagogic staff (teaching assistants, social pedagogues, school assistants, mediators) and support from local external entities;
- (7) creating opportunities for meetings between Roma and non-Roma families to improve community relations;
- (8) tutoring and mentoring of pupils;
- (9) preventing bullying and creating a friendly school environment;
- (10) helping poor families pay the costs of education.

We offer a guideline on how to address segregation in education.

We were especially interested in opinions from the field. Therefore, we contacted headteachers of ten primary schools experienced in educating Roma children, open to inclusive education, or trying to provide good education to all regardless of their ethnicity. The headteachers identified the following causes of segregation:

- segregated neighbourhoods;
- inactivity or inappropriate interference by the founder;
- parent opposition to inclusive education;
- unwillingness of some schools to enrol Roma children;
- concentration of pupils with higher support needs in segregated schools; and
- absence of a systemic solution with a clear political support.

Aside from the ten aforementioned measures, headteachers believed it was necessary to promote good reputation of their schools in order to attract non-Roma children and ensure regular meetings with the stakeholders (other schools, town leaders, municipal police, bodies for social and legal protection of children, non-profit organisations).

"All I can say is that we are trying to desegregate the school. When my deputy and I started here in 2013, we had 80% to 90% Roma pupils, while now it is 44%. Of course, this is quite a challenge. We must prepare events, improve the quality of teaching, offer things not available elsewhere. Our first order of business was to create a Facebook page for the school because the website simply didn't work as a tool for communication with the public. We try to make a name for our school, let others know that we are open – come and see for yourselves."

(Headteacher of a primary school with 35-49% Roma children)

The headteachers generally understand segregated education as a problem, but do not know how to deal with it. Schools often have only limited possibilities for addressing the situation and the municipality as the founder must act proactively.

"We, as a school, can't do anything about the fact we are seen as a 'Roma' school, even though we don't like it. Well, you see, this is how the system works and we have to respect it. We are not having a breakdown because of it, we just made provisions for a situation that has come up here. We are doing all we can to ensure the kids are happy. We do all we can to attract non-Roma kids as well and we've had some limited success."

(Headteacher of a primary school with over 75% Roma children)

"I think that non-inclusive education results in an intolerant society – we see racism on the rise again now, but this doesn't happen with inclusive education."

(Headteacher of a primary school with 35-49% Roma children)

We have thus prepared a practical guideline for municipalities facing segregation in education on how to deal with it. We have also formulated a series of recommendations addressed mainly to the Ministry of Education, Czech Schools Inspectorate, municipalities and schools.

The complete research report is available in Czech at:
www.ochrance.cz/diskriminace/vyzkum/