

## ERPC STATEMENT

### Roma Education at a Glance 2012: Europe's failure is Europe's shame

**Brussels, 11 September 2012** – “Roma children across Europe continue to be denied equal access to quality education, and continue to face racial discrimination and segregation. In terms of access and achievement the gap between Roma children and their peers is simply unacceptable. The failure to remedy this is not just an abuse of human rights, but in policy terms a calamity that will cost Europe dearly in the future,” stated ERPC’s Chair Ivan Ivanov following today’s launch by the OECD and the European Commission of the annual report *Education at a Glance 2012*. As the World Bank has found<sup>1</sup>, long-term investment in education will benefit not only the Roma but national economies and societies in general.

These annual reports enable policy-makers in OECD countries to compare how they deliver education and training, and to draw conclusions for future policy. When it comes to delivery to Roma children, policy makers have failed abysmally. Their failures are long-standing and evident; as are their failures to draw just and sustainable conclusions for future policy.

Five years after the European Court of Human Rights condemned as illegal the Czech Republic’s<sup>2</sup> disproportionate assignment of Roma to special schools - schools for children with special needs with simpler curricula than mainstream schools - little has changed. Overrepresentation of Roma in all forms of special education continues. In June this year a report issued by the Czech Public Defender of Rights found that, although Roma in the Czech Republic constitute between 1.4% and 2.8% of the population, Romani children comprise 32% of pupils attending “practical elementary” schools (former “special schools”) nationwide. In short, Roma remain more than ten times more likely to be assigned to inferior educational facilities than others.

In neighbouring Slovakia according to a recent World Bank report<sup>3</sup> “special school attendance in Slovakia is on the increase and so is school segregation” (2012: 27). Over one third (36%) of Roma children are reported to be in all or mostly Roma classes, and 12% of Roma pupils are reported to be in special schools. The most alarming trend is that things are actually worsening: it is estimated that in the space of a generation, the attendance rate of Roma at special schools has more or less doubled in Slovakia.

Inequality starts early in life and it is especially alarming that only 28% of Roma children aged 3-6 attend preschool in Slovakia. Early childhood interventions are crucial<sup>4</sup> to success in primary and secondary education. Such abject policy failures are not beyond remedy. There is no shortage of precise policy recommendations backed by authoritative research. By now, it is clear what needs to be done; it is also clear that what is lacking is political will to deliver equity in education for Roma right across Europe.

The Commission, in its May Communication on the National Roma Integration Strategies, stated that stronger efforts are needed to address education as part of an integrated approach which includes coordinated efforts in the fields of health, social affairs and employment. Member States were strongly urged to address school and pre-school segregation; fully enforce compulsory education; and promote

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<sup>1</sup> World Bank (2010) *Economic Cost of Roma Exclusion*

<sup>2</sup> D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic (2007), Sampanis v. Greece (2008) and Orsus and Others v. Croatia (2010)

<sup>3</sup> World Bank (2012) *Toward An Equal Start: Closing the Early Learning Gap for Roma Children in Eastern Europe*

<sup>4</sup> Open Society Foundations, Roma Education Fund and UNICEF (2010) *National Roma Early Childhood Inclusion Report (RECI)*

vocational training. From these Commission urgings, it is clear that Member States have failed to adopt an integrated approach to inclusive education and to address the basics to ensure Roma children full and equal access to quality integrated education by 2020.

Too many European governments continue to fail their youngest and most disadvantaged Roma citizens; they continue to fail to deliver on the fundamental human right to a good education, a right that should be protected under any circumstance. All talk and policies of social inclusion and integration is meaningless as long as Roma children do not have access to quality pre-school, are educated in inferior segregated settings<sup>5</sup> or sent to special schools. Continuing these practices not only denies Roma children the opportunity to a good education, but deprives them of future employment opportunities in highly competitive labour markets. To achieve the EU 2020 Strategy aim to reduce school drop-out rates below 10% and to increase the number of 30-34 year-olds completing third level education to at least 40%, Member States must reduce the barriers that keep Roma children away from school. Member States must re-integrate segregated schoolchildren. Teachers, social workers and educational psychologists must also be trained to be sensitised in this regard.

The EU 2020 Strategy highlights the importance of the involvement of the members of marginalised, vulnerable groups in mainstream society where education is seen as a crucial tool. DG Education and Culture of the European Commission should establish and coordinate a Roma education network to expedite progress, invest in enhanced collaboration and Roma participation, and set clear achievable goals for Roma education across Europe by 2020.

It is obvious that investment in fully inclusive quality education is vital to break the vicious cycle that many Roma find themselves in and the intergenerational transmission of poverty and exclusion. Governments must make a firm and unambiguous commitment to end school segregation and address the deeply embedded institutional discrimination and racism that obstructs reform, exacerbates inequalities, and denies Roma children and young people hope and opportunity for the future.

**For interviews or further comment, please contact:**

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*The ERPC is an informal gathering of Roma and pro-Roma organisations at EU level. Its members are Amnesty International, the European Roma Rights Centre, the European Roma Information Office, the Open Society Foundations, European Network Against Racism, Minority Rights Group International, the European Roma Grassroots Organizations Network, Policy Center for Roma and Minorities, the Roma Education Fund, and Fundación Secretariado Gitano. From June until November 2012, the rotating chairmanship of the ERPC is held by the European Roma Information Office, in close cooperation with ENAR and ERRC.*

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**Winner of Campaign of the Year: ERPC Campaign for an EU Roma Strategy,  
European Public Affairs Awards 2011**

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<sup>5</sup> School segregation of Roma has been well documented in Central and Eastern Europe but there is evidence which demonstrates this phenomena also in Western Europe: Santiago, C. and Ostalinda, M. (2012) *School Segregation of Romani Students in Spain*. Kamira Federation of Romani Women's Associations, Panyabi Women's Association and the Mario Maya Foundation