

GOVERNMENT OF ROMANIA



National Agency for Roma

Speech of Mr. Ilie DINCĂ,

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Government of Romania

**“Desegregating Education in Central and Eastern Europe:
Inclusive Approach – Good Practices and the Way
Forward“**

International conference

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

Distinguish guests,

I highly appreciate the opportunity to address you at this important event.

Reducing the differences in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma is one of our common goals, it is the thing that could offer a better life to our children, increasing in the same time the social inclusion.

I would like to present you few information about the Government commitments to desegregating education in Romania.

In April 2004, the Ministry of Education issued Notification 29323/2004 on School Segregation. Although Article 6 of the Romanian Constitution had long since guaranteed the right to nondiscrimination in law, it had emerged, over the course of the earlier projects and programs implemented that many school inspectorates and school managers did not understand school segregation to be discriminatory and so a number of segregation cases were identified in Romanian schools.

The Notification mentioned above provided clarification and clear guidelines as follows:

“Segregation is a very serious form of discrimination (...), segregation in education involves the intentional or unintentional physical separation of Roma from the other children in schools, classes, buildings and other facilities, such that the number of Roma children is disproportionately higher than that of non-Roma compared to the ratio of Roma school-aged children.” The Notification also required School Inspectorates to: “...review the situation in all schools where the number of Roma children is disproportionately higher than that of non-Roma compared with the ratio of school-aged Roma children in the total school-aged population in the area and initiate an action plan aimed at eliminating segregation.”

Nevertheless, problems and misunderstandings continued even after the Notification was issued. Some County School Inspectorates did not submit review documents and action plans, despite

the fact that the Notification had specifically requested this. Others responded with a short note to the effect that there was no segregation in their Counties, but provided no evidence to back this assertion. Also, it was revealed that information about the Notification had not always been passed from Inspectorates to schools and that many teachers were unaware of it. Segregated classes continued to exist and Roma parents seeking to enroll their children in ethnically mixed schools continued to be directed back to their segregated neighborhoods schools.

In the light of these continuing problems, school desegregation was included as a priority among the actions to be undertaken within the Phare phase of the “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” project.

Also, in 2007 the Ministry of Education issued the Order nr. 1540 prohibiting school segregation of Roma children, order accompanied by a methodology of putting into practice the process of segregation. According to methodology county school inspectorates should develop action plans in order to operationalize the process of desegregation.

The Guidelines that should have been followed in order to elaborate the action plan included:

- setting up of mixed classes of students at all levels of education
- to transport Roma children to other schools that have another ethnic majority,
- shared use of school facilities and existing facilities,
- training and employment of Roma school mediators;
- providing additional hours of recovery for children who have difficulty in learning
- promoting the Roma ethnic identity in mixed schools,
- cooperation of Roma teachers in schools to provide teaching specific curriculum (Romani language and Roma history)
- inclusive education training for all teachers in order to ensure an appropriate multiethnic educational environment
- facilitating the transfer of students in cases that aims to balance the proportion between Roma and non Roma students in a school;
- to information Roma communities about the quality of education in mixed schools

- to inform all parents about the benefits of inclusive education, in order to discourage those seeking to incorporate their children in classes without Roma pupils or holding separate classes for Roma.
- increasing of Roma parents' involvement in school decisions

Also, within the Phare project, “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” where school desegregation was included as a priority, the participation of Inspectorate teams and staff from schools in the project’s Institution Building activities was a requirement for grant recipients. A key component of Institution Building activity was to provide training and support for initiatives that would end the segregation and unequal treatment of Roma children where this was occurring in pilot schools.

During the period the Ministry Order was circulated among the school inspectorates, various practices that had led to segregation in the past were reported, including:

- The channelling of Roma children into segregated all-Roma schools within, or close to Roma neighborhoods. Often, even if there was another school within walking distance of the neighborhood, parents seeking to enroll their children at the alternative school they were turned away by school managers with the explanation that Roma children should go to “their” (Roma only) school;
- The deliberate placement of Roma students in separate all-Roma or mainly-Roma classes in mixed schools, due to the fact that school managers expected at least some non-Roma parents to object to ethnically mixed classes;
- “Well-intentioned” segregation, most often seen in situations where schools had very traditional Roma families and where school managers perceived Roma parents to have concerns about their children adopting behaviour or forming relationships that would be inappropriate to family customs and traditions if they were allowed to mix with non-Roma children;
- “Unintentionally” segregated classes arising from practices such as placing all late-enrolling children in the same class (often the children of Roma occupational travellers), or keeping all-

Roma class groups intact when students transferred from an all-Roma kindergarten or primary school into an ethnically mixed school.

A number of schools were both residentially segregated and isolated, being in or close to a “compact” Roma neighbourhood, but with no alternative nonsegregated school within walking distance or easy reach by public transport.

But, in the light of the Phare program and the Ministry Order the process of desegregation started. Various situations emerged from the process:

1. The easier desegregations

Some of the schools that were involved in desegregation initiatives had ethnically segregated classes or segregated sites (where a school had more than one building), but abolished segregation entirely at the beginning of the 2008 school year and reported that they had experienced few problems in doing this. The students at these schools were redistributed across classes within grades, across schoolsites, or Roma children were moved out of a segregated setting and into an ethnically-mixed setting at another school.

2. Desegregations that were opposed – but went ahead

Some schools faced situations where a number of non-Roma parents transferred or threatened to transfer their children to another school if desegregation went ahead. These schools nevertheless proceeded with desegregation and the number of transferred non Roma children was a small one.

3. Schools that opted for “phased desegregation”

A number of schools are even now after all these years in the midst of a phased desegregation, however, all of these schools have a clear plan to end segregation completely .

4. A few number of schools where segregation still exists

In some communities, desegregation has not yet been possible due to a combination of poverty-related barriers, parents having a strong preference for their children to attend a school that is close to home, and the fact that there is no means of transport for children to get to and from an alternative school.

Factors contributing to successful desegregation

1. Competent and committed school management

2. The Ministry of education Order

3. Inter-community solidarity

In neighbourhoods where living conditions were not too dissimilar for Roma and non-Roma households, a degree of inter-community solidarity was evident.

4. Improvement of school-community relations

Another factor that appeared to operate in the more successful desegregation initiatives was willingness on the part of school staff to get involved in outreach work and activities involving parents and other community members.

5. Absence of logistical barriers

In most cases, desegregation initiatives were able to proceed only if sufficient thought and planning had been devoted to resolving logistical problems. Transport to an alternative school was often an important factor, especially when Roma neighbourhoods were isolated from public transport networks

6. Roma parents to be convinced of the benefits of the desegregation

7. Non-Roma parents to be convinced of the benefits of the desegregation

Thank you for your attention!