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Romania

Situation of Roma minority not satisfying by far

The hitherto existing results of the „Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015“ („Roma Decade“) leaves a lot to be desired for the Roma of Romania, where they currently form the second largest minority with 535,250 people. According to a census in 2002, Romania has a total population of 21.6 million inhabitants.

Two years after the start of the „Roma Decade“ the initiative „Decade Watch“¹ took a first stock of the situation. It concluded that in almost all involved countries (with the exception of Macedonia) there had been noticeable changes in 2005 and 2006, but further actions were urgently needed. In many cases, the measures which had been taken lacked sustainability. One of the biggest deficits was the institutional cooperation among the relevant offices – for example, the communication between the capital and the provinces, or at an interstate level. Despite the fact that the governments of the participating (south-) eastern European countries and the EU are aware of the „Decade Action Plans“ (DAP) but its implementation on a regional level is deficient. Some of the regional offices and municipalities do not even know about the rules and guidelines of the „Roma Decade“ or they simply ignore them. For example, Society for Threatened Peoples' research has shown that quite contrary to the guidelines of the DAP Roma families have been evicted without being offered alternative, social housing. Therefore, in the process of the DAP implementation the role of the municipalities and local authorities need to be emphasized. Furthermore, better communication and more control of the realization of the reforms on a local level are also necessary.

Education

With regards to education Roma have remained discriminated. In comparison to children of the same age of the majority population Roma children have considerably higher rates of illiteracy. On average they also attend school for much fewer years and in many cases they are automatically sent to schools with higher Roma rates. Several studies (among others from UNPD, UNICEF, Open Society Institute and Roma Education Fund)² show that there is a „de facto segregation“ in the education system. This is the main reason for the deficits in education. In Romania schools are considered „segregated schools“ if more than have of them are Roma. According to UNICEF this is currently the case in about 12 per cent of all Romanian schools. These schools are usually overcrowded and badly equipped (i.e. libraries, less qualified teachers etc.).

In rural areas segregation is more widespread. Due to this segregation system Roma children are strongly disadvantaged in terms of their chances for social integration and advancement. In general, Roma have a rather young population. 47.3 per cent of them are under 19 years old. According to the 2002 census, this is only the case for 25.2 per cent of the total Romanian population.

¹ „Decade Watch“, eine durch das Open Society Institute und die Weltbank unterstützte Gruppe von Roma-Aktivisten verschiedener zivilgesellschaftlicher Gruppierungen und Wissenschaftler, die die Umsetzung der nationalen „Decade Action Plans“ überwacht

² United Nations Procurement Division, ([http:// un.org/Depts/ptd/](http://un.org/Depts/ptd/)), /UNICEF, Zur Lage der Roma-Kinder in Süd-Ost-Europa, Studie 2007, (www.unicef.de), Open Society Institute: Equal access to quality education for Roma, 2007, (<http://www.soros.org>), Roma Education Fund, ([http:// romaeducationfund.hu/](http://romaeducationfund.hu/))

Despite school attendance, the reading and writing skills of many Roma children are extremely weak. The „Research Centre for Quality of Life“ in Romania found that 36 per cent of the Roma children leave elementary school after four years, and that a third of the children who leave school after six years can hardly read or write. 30 per cent of all Roma in Romania are illiterate. According to UNICEF 20 to 40 per cent of the Roma children never even go to school.

Another problem is the overrepresentation of Roma children in special schools. Speakers of the Roma lament that too many Roma children are being sent to these schools instead of normal schools. This practice needs to be deplored and the reasons have to be found. It is not unusual that Roma are forced to live there where land is free and no one else wants to live. In many cases Roma families were driven away from their homes (mostly in the city centers) and had to live near waste disposal sites or closed mines. So far there have been no EU, UN or NGO reports on the causes of the high rates of mental diseases among many Roma. Roma speakers are of the opinion that this is another form of discrimination while anti-Roma activists believe that Roma in general are less intelligent than the majority population. Therefore, environmental aspects need to gain a more important role in reports on the education of Roma.

According to findings of Society for Threatened Peoples, the reasons for Roma children not attending school are diverse, as well. It must be considered that some Roma families are not able to afford the school costs (i.e. for books etc.). Others believe that education will not help them to find better jobs. Some Roma do not consider school necessary if their daughters are supposed to become housewives at age 15. We are convinced that the only way to resolve this issue is to show the Roma that education opens up job opportunities. But as long as the authorities isolate Roma through separation or there is a lack of the concerning institutions and services many Roma will not attend school. Solange es Behörden jedoch dabei belassen, Roma durch räumliche Trennung zu isolieren oder ein Mangel an Versorgungseinrichtungen und Dienstleistungen besteht, werden die Roma nicht zur Schule gehen.

Language of instruction and jobs

More than 40 per cent of the Roma speak Romanes as their first language. In the classrooms this is a problem. The Open Society Institute's report on education therefore recommends teaching classes in Romanes. However, Society for Threatened Peoples shares the fear of several experts that this would lead to an even greater isolation of the Roma as for the majority of jobs they have to be able to speak Romanian.

Concerning the education situation of the Roma training opportunities for Roma such as welding and auto mechanics have been recommended. Once trained in a profession, though, Roma have a very hard time finding a job. The integration of Roma into the job market is the key problem of the Roma in Romania and other Eastern European countries: Independent of their education Roma have serious problems to find a job.

Housing

Another problem are the precarious housing conditions many Roma live in. Often they live in isolated settlements and communities – also in order to avoid discrimination or because they received the housing space from authorities. According to UNICEF, almost a third (29 per cent) of the Roma lives in homogenous Roma settlements. Furthermore, the Roma tend (often of necessity) to live in informal or illegal settlements.

According to the latest data published by the Open Society Foundation (Inclusion Barometer, 2007), 11 per cent of the Roma (and 0 per cent of the total population) live in vacant or improvised houses. Of these 11 per cent, 8 per cent live in cities and 3 per cent in rural areas. Due to this situation they lose their rights for national assistance (for example, social housing). Additionally, municipalities often reject to make up roads in Roma settlements or to build water supply and sewage systems. An estimated 70 per cent of all Roma households in Romania live without water supply, 12 per cent are unaligned with the electricity network (UNICEF, 2007). In rural areas the situation is usually worse. For example, in some Romanian communities Roma students and teachers have to walk several kilometres in order to get to the next bus stop. Especially due to this geographical separation many Roma are isolated from the majority population.

The widespread poverty among Roma also makes it harder for them to get out of the state-sponsored housing spaces and the often inhumane living conditions in these places. In October 2007 the average income in Romania (370 ROL / about 103 €) was more than twice as high as that of the Roma (150 ROL / about 42 €).

Missing Documents

Many Roma do not possess documents which prove that they own the land they live on. Therefore they lack the basis for pursuing their property rights in a legal process. Thus they are at the mercy of the arbitrary resettlement policies of the local authorities. Society for Threatened Peoples believes it should be one of the priorities of the EU to ensure that Roma will receive adequate documents for their property. At the moment local authorities in Romania and other Eastern European states refuse to hand out such documents or complicate the process so much that the Roma give up their legal rights requests.

Poverty

Material poverty is both cause and effect of social and economic exclusion. The poverty rate of the Roma in north-eastern Romania is up to 50 per cent higher than that of the average rate. According to the World Bank (2003) Roma make up only 2.5 per cent of Romania's total population. However, 7 per cent of the poor, and 12.5 per cent of the extremely poor in the country are Roma.

The Open Society Institute's report also claims that only 12 per cent of the Roma in Romania are happy with their lives while 87 per cent are discontented. The causes for the Roma's poverty, however, cannot only be sought in their education. The aspect of discrimination – for example in the case of the application for a job – is a crucial one and needs to be considered, as well.

According to estimates, the unemployment among Roma is twice as high as among Romanians or Hungarians – who form the other big minority in Romania (World Bank, 2003). According to a UNICEF report the chances for Roma women to find a job are even worse than for Roma men. Due to their limited access to education (because of early marriages, child care and other reasons), to the health system, to housing space and the limited participation in the political and social life Roma women are in an especially bad situation.

Registration

According to the Open Society Institute (2007) 20 to 30 per cent of the Roma do not possess birth certificates or identification cards. It is probable that the real number of Roma without official registration is much higher. There are several reasons for the lack of registration: The Romanian authorities often do not attempt to register the Roma in order to prevent them from asserting claims to social services and medical care. (Only 34 per cent of the Roma in extreme poverty receive assistance by the state.) They also accuse the Roma of refusing the registration of their children. At this point it needs to be kept in mind that 30 per cent of the Roma are illiterate, live in desperate poverty and usually in great distance to the concerning offices. A reason not to register their children – especially the sons – is to avoid the conscription order from the military. Another problem is the discrimination Roma have to face in the local offices. According to reports from many Roma both the authorities and co-inhabitants consider it normal to serve the “white” majority population first.

Another important aspect regarding integration is the social distance between the majority population and the Roma. 75 per cent of the Romanians know at least one Rom but only 14 per cent have ever visited a Rom. More than 40 per cent of the Romanians say they avoid the Roma. It is likely that the social distance between the two groups is encouraged by municipalities by refusing to physically connect Roma villages with other cities and villages.

The lack of reliable data on the situation of the Roma in the fields of education, health, job market and housing is another deficit. Without exact information the success of the reforms can hardly be verified and measured.