

# One School for All?

Access to Quality Education for Roma Children  
- Research report -

Gelu Duminică  
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## Introduction

The idea for this research came after having realised that in Romania many talked about Roma participation in education, but few data were actually available to back up their statements. From the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport to the civil society and Roma activists, the same words pop up again and again in speeches concerning Roma education: “We don’t have actual data”. We wanted to take the first step in filling this information void, in drawing the picture of the education to which Roma children have access, and raising the alarm that needed to be raised hoping it would be heard by political decision makers.

This report comes out in a critical time for the Romanian education system getting ready for a new reform. We would like to make a positive contribution to the provisions of the new Education Act, to turn the Romanian school into a friendlier, more equitable institution, a real model for all children, including Roma children. For this, we think some measures are needed in order to reverse the social inequity replication mechanisms to which, unfortunately, the school still hangs on. Our research report will describe these mechanisms, thereby putting the finger on a deep open wound in need of first aid: the quality deficit in the education delivered to Roma children.

The report is structured on several chapters representing as many steps in our demonstration. The first chapter defines research concepts, looking over the sociological theories in the area of education. The second chapter sketches the research methodology, presenting the methods, techniques and tools that went into this research, while also describing the limitations of the research. The third chapter reveals the quantitative, statistical and qualitative outcomes of the analysis, adding respondents’ testimonials to the numbers. Finally, the fourth chapter outlines a few successful initiatives identified during our research work, with a focus on the measures that we believe should be scaled up. In the end, our conclusions will also include specific recommendations for measures

which in our opinion are crucial and urgent, as we hope to prove in this report.

To make the reading of these chapters easier, at the end of each section, we will briefly summarize the conclusions drawn from this research.

## Chapter 1: Theoretical Concepts

### 1.1. The Sociology of Education: Broad Theoretical Framework

Since the establishment of sociology as a self-standing science, education – as a process aiming at an individual’s socialization within the society – has been one of sociology’s favourite topics.<sup>1</sup> Durkheim defined education as “the methodical socialization of the young generation”, whose purpose is to make every individual a social being.<sup>2</sup> Consequently, education is a *social fact*, intended as a way of acting, fixed or not, outside the individual, capable of exercising on him/her an external constraint. Pressure comes from the need to shape the individual so as to meet the requisites of the society.<sup>3</sup>

Beyond Durkheim’s concept of social fact, functionalism sees education as a *total social fact*, to cite the concept of Mauss<sup>4</sup>: a phenomenon engaging the social system as a whole, with the whole range of social institutions. The upshot of this approach is the analysis of the social fact in relation to the system.

Later on, a series of sociological theories argued against functionalism that the educational process was covering up a system replicating social inequity and imposing the values of the majority. This comes out from the Marxist and Weberian theories, which perceived endless tensions between the diverging interests of different social groups competing for power, resources, and status. The groups that emerge as winners from the struggle for power are dominant and impose themselves on the others especially through education, which teaches their culture and thereby favours the

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<sup>1</sup> For more information on the theories relating to the sociology of education, see Hatos, A., *Sociologia educației*, Iași, Editura Polirom, 2006, p. 175-199.

<sup>2</sup> Durkheim, E., *Regulile metodei sociologice*, Bucuresti, Editura Cultura Națională, 1924, p. 18.

<sup>3</sup> Idem.

<sup>4</sup> Mauss, M., *Eseu despre dar*, Iași, Institutul European, 1993 (1925).

status of students from the dominant group while marginalizing the others.<sup>5</sup>

This theoretical paradigm, often called “the conflict theory”, was highly prolific in the sociology of education, especially in neo-Marxist and neo-Weberian trends. In these trends, Bourdieu’s writings stand out, reinforcing the thesis that the hidden mission of education is in fact to favour the success of dominant class children, thus replicating the power relationships within the society.<sup>6</sup> Restricting access to higher education through linguistic codes and dominant class-specific symbolic capital unshared with subordinate groups, the equation contributes to the discrimination of the marginalized and to social order perpetuation. Bernstein, too, looked at cultural replication and disguised discrimination systems from the perspective of social class-differentiated linguistic codes, which children possess before they enter the education system.<sup>7</sup> The cultural speech and linguistic codes thereby become criteria for the discrimination and marginalization of subordinate social classes.

Yet, functional and conflict theories handle education in macro-sociological terms, losing sight of the individual and the interactions between individuals, whilst conceptualising the social system as a rigid and determined structure. As a reaction to these shortcomings, the interactionist and constructivist trend focuses on the way in which social reality constantly builds upon negotiations between individuals and social groups – with the social action being placed between a more or less rigid structure provided by the social system and the individual equipped with certain power to influence the system.<sup>8</sup> Constructivists believe that education aims at helping students acquire interpretative tools they later apply to social realities in order to creatively assign them significations.

The current educational research paradigm, based on the constructivist-interactionist trend, lays the emphasis on the

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<sup>5</sup> Weber, M., *The “Rationalization” of Education and Training*, in *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, London, Routledge, 2001 (1948), p. 240-244.

<sup>6</sup> Bourdieu, P. et Passeron, J.C., *La reproduction. Éléments pour une théorie du système d’enseignement*, Paris, Editions de Minuit, 1970.

<sup>7</sup> Bernstein, B., *Class, Codes and Control, Vol. I*, London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971 and Bernstein, B., *Studii de sociologie a educației*, București, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, 1978.

<sup>8</sup> See in particular Cicourel’s theory in Cicourel, A.V., *Cognitive Sociology: Language and Meaning in Social Interaction*, London, Penguin, Free Press, 1974.

*environment* in which the education and the interactions between participants (teachers, students) take place. Thus, Perrenoud, Chauveau and Rogovas study determinants of academic success and school failure-inducing mechanisms.<sup>9</sup> The environment that these theories focus on is generally the school viewed as an institution, somehow detached from the outer social environment and from the power the latter may exercise on it. In our opinion, this is actually the greatest shortfall of the interactionist theories studied.

This research falls into the interactionist trend, but it also seeks to include in its perspective the social environment that the school is a part of and from which it cannot be conceptually or practically detached. For this reason, besides the research themes specific to the educational establishment (teacher-student relationship, learning conditions, teaching approaches...), we also have a look at school within its community/multiple communities, while bringing into our study the parents of the children who are enrolled or not in school.

## 1.2. Research Concepts: Operational Definitions

The subtitle of this research report – *Access to Quality Education for Roma Children* – requires a clearer definition. When we talk about Roma children’s *access to quality* education, the terms “access” and “quality” are not matter-of-course and unequivocal.

First of all, *access* – commonly defined as “the possibility to get in, the right to reach a place or a person”<sup>10</sup> – calls for the analysis of the structural barriers impeding Roma children to take part in education the same way as the other children. While recent research has chosen a “human rights”-based approach to education<sup>11</sup>, this study keeps away from the human rights perspective in order to advance a socio-economic approach

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<sup>9</sup> Perrenoud, P., *La fabrication de l'excellence scolaire : du curriculum aux pratiques d'évaluation. Vers une analyse de la réussite, de l'échec et des inégalités comme réalités construites par le système scolaire*, Geneva, Droz, 1995 (1984), Chauveau, G., Rogovas-Chauveau, E., *A l'école des banlieues*, Paris, ESF, 1995.

<sup>10</sup> <http://dexonline.ro>, accessed in May 2009.

<sup>11</sup> Marc, A., *The Case for Integrated Education for Roma in Europe*, in *REF Magazine*, No 1, Budapest, 2007, p. 18.

explaining the undesirable phenomena related to Roma school participation in Romania. Thus, we will focus on structural and systematic barriers based on socio-economic and cultural features hindering Roma children's participation in education.

Second of all, education needs to meet minimum *quality* standards for Roma's access to education to be equivalent, in terms of equal opportunities, to the majority group's. This ignites a broader discussion because, beyond the complexity of the whole concept of education quality, the attempts to find a conceptual definition of the term have not yet resulted in a consensus among theorists. We shall have a look at some of the main theoretical trends<sup>12</sup>.

The first thing to be pointed out is that the concept of quality itself is highly normative as well as relative: something is 'of quality' when the characteristics deriving from such a state are *perceived as desirable by a certain group*. Therefore, quality acquires different meanings in different cultural settings, which may give rise to methodological difficulties for the educational practitioners who set the standards in education. The conclusion reached by numerous experts is that "*there is not and there cannot be a one-size-fits-all concept of quality, but only general principles*"<sup>13</sup>.

We would like to briefly exemplify how the definition of education quality is often based on vague and relative concepts. The Declaration of Principles adopted by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-College Education (hereinafter named RAQAPCE) features the principle according to which the concept of education quality should be built on "the national culture, traditions and values", as if they were unitary and in perfect harmony and as if there were general consensus about them; the Declaration continues: "Any education reform and change should start from and be based on what is *good, valuable and useful* in the current education system"<sup>14</sup>, thus engaging relative and vague concepts that may be questioned by diverging groups.

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<sup>12</sup> To find out more about the concept of education quality, see: Iosifescu, Ș., *Calitatea educației: concept, principii, metodologii*, București, Educația 2000+, 2008.

<sup>13</sup> Iosifescu, Ș., *Calitatea educației: concept, principii, metodologii*, București, Educația 2000+, 2008, p. 44.

<sup>14</sup> The document may be accessed at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/4928> (accessed in May 2009). Some words were italicized by us.

Another institution, the Institute of Education Sciences, suggested in 2005 a series of principles and values adapted to the Romanian context, among which: individual autonomy and freedom; individual and institutional responsibility; integration and inclusiveness; multiculturalism.<sup>15</sup>

At European level also, where it is even more difficult to talk about a unitary “European culture”, defining the concept of education quality – an issue that emerged only in the last decade – was the battlefield of intense negotiations.<sup>16</sup> An outcome of the European efforts to define an education quality standard is the set of 16 indicators formulated in 2000 by the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission.<sup>17</sup> These fall into four categories that we shall briefly discuss.

The first category, **indicators on attainment**, is comprised of the results reached by students in 6 subject matters taught in schools (mathematics, reading, science, foreign languages, ICT and civics), plus “learning to learn” skills.<sup>18</sup> Consequently, the quality of an education system could be defined in relation to the results reached by students at the above-mentioned indicators.

The second category of indicators from the European Report comprises the **indicators on success and transition** from one educational stage to another: dropout, completion of upper secondary education and participation in tertiary education. Our research pays special attention to the dropout concept, as we spotted significant shortcomings with regard to the definition of this phenomenon given by different actors (the Ministry of Education, on the one hand, and educational establishments, on the other). Among indicators on success, we have also included indicators on grade promotion and absenteeism.

As for the other two indicators, namely completion of upper secondary education and participation in tertiary education, due to objective reasons, we could not include them into our assessment of

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<sup>15</sup> Institutul de Științe ale Educației, *Managementul și cultura calității la nivelul unității școlare*, București, ISE, 2005.

<sup>16</sup> Iosifescu, Ș., op. cit., p. 22.

<sup>17</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, *European Report on the Quality of School Education*, 2001, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/indic/rapinen.pdf> (accessed in May 2009).

<sup>18</sup> “Learning to learn”, idem, p. 29.

the education quality in the researched schools but to a smaller extent because, on the one hand, the student population studied was predominantly composed of children up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and, on the other hand, the number of high schools in our study was very small.<sup>19</sup> Participation in tertiary education did not make the topic of this research.

The third category of **indicators**, on **monitoring of education**, concerns the evaluation and steering of school education and parent participation in school. This research includes the parent participation indicator, seeking to clarify what the European Report also tries to determine: what are the most efficient forms of parent participation in the consultative process, in the decision-making of the educational establishments and in the school activity as a whole.<sup>20</sup> The European Report does not clearly define the terms of parent participation and involvement as, at that time, the Working Committee on Quality Indicators thought that more research had to be carried out in this department before deciding on a final definition of the most desirable type of parent participation. It is very likely that this definition is and should be contextual and flexible. A definition of parent participation would have fenced in the creative forms of parent involvement that each school may bring into play. Beyond these considerations, parent participation may be defined as formal (in the Parent Committee or in the Board of Trustees) or informal – volunteer work, participation in parent-teacher conferences or in the activities planned by the school.

Finally, the fourth category of **indicators** refers to the **resources** and the **structures** involved in the educational process, encompassing lifelong learning and training of teachers, participation in pre-primary education, number of students per computer and educational expenditure per student. The European Report focuses on the teachers' initial education and training indicator and does not mention professional lifelong learning at all. In Romania, given the shift from a totalitarian regime to an open society, the lifelong learning of teachers – especially of those who specialized before the

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<sup>19</sup> According to Graph 2, page 24.

<sup>20</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture, *European Report on the Quality of School Education*, 2001, p. 45, available at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/indic/rapinen.pdf> (accessed in May 2009).

90's<sup>21</sup> – is yet another issue, and the related reports and research point to the idea that in Romania the teachers' initial education is far from ideal in some departments, such as intercultural education or inclusive education.<sup>22</sup>

The European Report outlines an initial frame for defining and operationalising the concept of the quality of school education, but the list is not exhaustive, and the categories do not follow the logic of the educational *process*.

Another series of indicators on education quality was suggested in the document *Defining Quality in Education*, presented by UNICEF at the meeting of the International Working Group on Education in 2000.<sup>23</sup> The document proposed five categories of indicators, as follows:

- Learners who are healthy, well-nourished and ready to participate and to learn, and supported in learning by their families;
- The environment in which education takes place (which, not very clearly defined, may be interpreted as community environment, not as school environment). These indicators concern safety, child protection, gender sensitivity, provision of adequate resources and facilities;
- Academic content, reflected in the curricula and materials for the acquisition of basic skills;
- Processes through which trained teachers, using child-centred teaching approaches, facilitate learning and reduce disparities;
- Outcomes which encompass knowledge, skills and competences and are linked to national goals for positive participation in society.

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<sup>21</sup> As well as the training of the following generations because the changes in the education system did not occur all of a sudden and, by virtue of inertia, many traditional teaching practices acquired in the teacher training system from the previous regime lived on. The trainers of teachers themselves had to change their teaching approaches before the system became permeable to structural changes.

<sup>22</sup> Open Society Institute, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma: Overview, Monitoring Report*, EUMAP, OSI, 2007, p. 31 and especially p. 43.

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF, *Defining Quality in Education*, a paper presented by UNICEF at the meeting of the International Working Group on Education, Florence, Italy, June 2000, p. 4, available at <http://www.unicef.org/girlseducation/files/QualityEducation.PDF> (accessed in May 2009).

Inspired by this structure, we grouped the indicators on students, teachers and school environment in one category, called education inputs. From this point of view, we are getting closer to the typology of the indicators on the education quality proposed by OSI's monitoring report, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma: Overview, Monitoring Report* from 2007. The document notes a more or less general consensus on the definition of quality education as regards three basic dimensions: education inputs, outputs and processes.<sup>24</sup> It is important to say that the indicators proposed by OSI are an attempt to coin a definition: "*in the efforts of finding which elements of these three dimensions stand for quality education, a definition may result*".<sup>25</sup>

Our study starts from the typology above, but we preferred to group process indicators with input indicators because, for example, an indicator like the use of interactive teaching (process indicator) cannot be separated from the indicator on teachers (input indicator). We have thus reached the following typology:

## **I. Input indicators**

### **1. Indicators on students:**

- 1.1. Background (socioeconomic status, type of family, parents' education);
- 1.2. Participation in education (schooling rate, absenteeism and dropout, parent participation);
- 1.3. Attitudes and perceptions towards education (satisfaction with classroom setting – assigned place, teachers' and classmates' behaviour – perception of negative or positive aspects, perception of academic attainment);
- 1.4. Projections (self-perception, self-esteem, occupational perspectives, having a role model).

### **2. Indicators on teachers:**

- 2.1. Training of teachers (initial training and lifelong learning, knowledge on inclusive and intercultural education, a vision regarding their own training needs);

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<sup>24</sup> Open Society Institute, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma: Overview, Monitoring Report*, EUMAP, OSI, 2007, p. 25.

<sup>25</sup> Idem, p. 24.

- 2.2. Teaching methods (knowledge on interactive teaching approaches<sup>26</sup>, use of classroom space, use of educational resources regarding minorities in Romania, interaction with students, methods of getting parents involved);
  - 2.3. Attitudes and perceptions (expectations regarding student attainment, satisfaction with school and the teaching activity, perception of school's problems, aspirations related to the educational establishment, attitude towards students from minority groups, perception of segregation/desegregation).
3. Indicators on **material resources**:
- 3.1. General state of the building, infrastructure and furniture (operating permit, modular furniture, year of the last purchased equipment, school budget);
  - 3.2. Facilities (library, number of books, student access to books, subject matter-specialised labs and the frequency of their use, number of computers to which students have direct access, Internet connection, gym or athletic field, transportation for students from remote communities).
4. School **management** issues:
- 4.1. Decision-making structures (Student Boards, Parent Committees, Roma students' and parents' involvement in these structures, gender distribution in representative councils, support staff and school mediators);
  - 4.2. Involvement of parents, of the community and the outer environment (frequency of contacts, situations where the communication with parents is considered needed, partnerships with other institutions, projects and programmes initiated by the school or implemented in partnership, adult education offer);

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<sup>26</sup> For a broader discussion on the practical application of these approaches and on the valid conclusions that we could draw from the data, see the section on research limitations in Chapter 2.

- 4.3. Application of inclusive education principles (the situation and perception of ethnic segregation/desegregation and discrimination, existence of segregated classes/groups, knowledge of the MERI Order No 1540 banning school segregation, desegregation plan and teacher and parent participation in its formulation, adequate implementation of the measures set out in the plan);
- 4.4. The policy concerning students in need (means to provide material and learning support, remedial education, actions targeting absenteeism and attainment monitoring, dropout prevention and learner attainment improvement, concern for raising attainment).

## **II. Output indicators**

1. Student progress (grade promotion rate, transition to the next educational stage, progress made in the educational establishment, cross-cutting gender issues in progress indicators);
2. Status of the educational establishment (the symbolic capital of the establishment: articles in the media on the achievements of the school, teacher satisfaction);
3. Dropout.

Some theoretical explanations are needed here.

First of all, the scheme above is not exhaustive. When designing our research framework, we left out issues like school-decided curriculum, alternative textbook selection, assistance to personal development, school failure, learner attainment measured by ratings or grades and the findings of external evaluations carried out in the educational establishments (via school inspections). There is an objective or theoretical rationale for each of these omissions (lack of time and of enough resources to enter into this kind of details). Theoretical reasons mainly concern the measured learner attainment and the findings of external evaluations carried out in the educational establishments.

The main shortcoming of learner attainment indicator is that it ignores student performance appraisal, thereby assuming that the grading system is uniform and comparable between countries, schools, teachers and students. Or, student appraisal cannot be unitary: as long as it is done by social beings with a specific cultural background: value judgement, subjectivism and multifaceted socio-psychological factors influence student grading, which is impossible to pretend is always fair.<sup>27</sup> For example, some research looking into the relationship between student appraisal and ethnicity have shown that, as teachers tend to have lower expectations from minority students, ethnicity can influence these students' grades.<sup>28</sup> For these reasons, as concerns the evaluation of schools, we deliberately chose to rule out student attainment-related issues from this research.

Second of all, for time and space reasons, we decided to focus differently on the indicators included in our scheme. We preferred to touch on what we believed was essential and not get lost in details of secondary importance that could shift the attention from the logical thread we were trying to follow.

Third of all, the scheme of indicators reveals that dropout is considered at the same time an input factor (operationalised in I.1.2, Participation in Education), and a self-standing output indicator (II.3). We chose this interpretation strategy in the light of Hatos' empirical analysis confirming that dropout is strongly correlated with the educational process and education quality<sup>29</sup>. We will go into details with this illustrative model in paragraph 3.1.

Finally, we think it is important to say that input and output indicators must be regarded from a dynamic perspective. By

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<sup>27</sup> See also Voiculescu, E., *Factorii subiectivi ai evaluării*, Editura Didactică și Pedagogică, București, 2001.

<sup>28</sup> Van Ewijk, Reyn, *Same Work, Lower Grade? Student Ethnicity and Teachers' Subjective Assessments* (April 8, 2009), available at <http://ssrn.com/abstract=1402666> (accessed in May 2009).

See also Diamond, J.B., Randolph A., Spillane J.P., Teachers' Expectations and Sense of Responsibility for Student Learning: The Importance of Race, Class, and Organizational Habitus, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 35(1):75–98, 2004, American Anthropological Association, p. 75-98, p. 75.

<sup>29</sup> Hatos, A., Riscul abandonului școlar la adolescenții din școlile urbane: între constrângeri structurale și climat organizațional, in *Analele Institutului de Istorie „G. Bariț” din Cluj Napoca*, Series Humanistica, Tome VI, 2008, p. 177-192, p. 184.

grouping input and process indicators, the risk is to gain a rigid typology, where education does not seem to be considered a dynamic process, but the sum of inputs. However, we have made sure that, throughout the analysis, we have a dynamic approach to educational processes and that we match the measured statistical indicators with the qualitative analysis of how they influence each other or what happens in school. To give an example: the number of segregated classes/groups in a school is not a sufficient indicator, but needs to be backed up by a dynamic and qualitative approach regarding the manner in which teachers and school management see the segregation phenomenon, and regarding the formulation and application of the desegregation plan. The teachers' and management's willingness to implement desegregation measures and their conviction that desegregation is a must, a positive and ethical thing to do, will directly affect the way in which the existence of segregated classes is interpreted.

This observation touches on the theoretical dimension of the interdependency between education quality indicators. The theory abounds of illustrative examples of undesirable educational phenomena that we will tackle in the next paragraph.

### 1.3. Illustrative Examples of Undesirable Phenomena

By undesirable phenomena we mean absenteeism, dropout, correlated with school failure (phenomena that concern **participation** in education and academic **success or failure**), segregation and discrimination (processes related to the concepts of **equal opportunities** and **inclusive education**), and – more generically – the **quality deficit** in school education. In the following lines, we will sketch out the theoretical framework of some illustrative examples of such phenomena, as well as the theoretical paradigm of this research study.

Because this research focuses on the Roma minority, we will mostly mention theories concerning the links between education and ethnicity and the socio-economic features of the Roma population in Romania.

### **1.3.1. Participation in Education and Academic Success or Failure**

Theories related to academic failure tended to be highly ideological. The U.S., Western Europe and Central and Eastern Europe travelled very dissimilar pathways as regards the emergence of sociological theories on education correlated with the ethnical dimension due to their different history of immigration, multiculturalism and political attitude towards ethnic groups. We will next look solely at the international theories that marked major paradigm changes in the Western sociology of education as regards minority groups, while trying to point out the specific features in the Romanian sociology.

With regard to poor educational attainment and academic failure, the Coleman Report, published in 1966 in the U.S.,<sup>30</sup> takes note of something that was later labelled the “Coleman effect”, according to which the student’s family background provides an adequate explanation to academic failure. The student’s socioeconomic background is considered a determinant of academic failure in recent Romanian sociology, too. Hence, in the case of Roma population, it has been found that there is a positive interdependency between the family’s socioeconomic status and school participation.<sup>31</sup> Apparently, Roma’s academic failure is the result of (self-) marginalization processes rather than the effect of discriminatory practices. The interdependency between the standard of living and non-participation in school or school failure is also confirmed by the research study “*Sărac lipit, caut altă viață*” [*Poor as a Church Mouse in Search of a New Life*],<sup>32</sup> which also brings up the educational capital disparities between urban and rural areas.

Research on Roma participation in education has indicated numerous causes for non-participation/dropout. Among socioeconomic factors, we could name lack of identity papers (although this tendency is continuously decreasing), insufficient

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<sup>30</sup> Coleman, J. S., *Equality of Educational Opportunity*, Washington, U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, Office of Education, 1966.

<sup>31</sup> Zamfir, E., Zamfir, C. (coord.), *Țiganii între ignorare și îngrijorare*, București, Editura Alternative, 1993, p. 98.

<sup>32</sup> Stănculescu, M.S., Berevoescu, I., *Sărac lipit, caut altă viață*, București, Editura Nemira, 2004.

financial resources to cover the hidden costs of education and the boys' early entrance into the labour market.<sup>33</sup> According to the same authors, another systemic cause of non-participation in education is the inadequate academic content which does not match labour market demands, thereby making education purposeless and degrees useless. Discrimination, noticeable in the student's ranking among the last in the class, continues to be the core argument that explains non-participation in education, while socio-cultural factors feature early marriages among girls in traditional communities, academic content inadequate to specificities of Roma culture, and lack of education-based success stories in the communities.

In this respect, it is interesting to mention that, in the United States, Ogbu and Simons draw a distinction between voluntary minorities (immigrants) and involuntary minorities (colonised, conquered or enslaved populations). The latter relate more to the typology of athletes or performers (singers, actors) whose success does not depend on the education acquired, but on talent and physical strength.<sup>34</sup> This may be explained by the history of minorities and of the strategies adopted to fit into the majority's culture. At the same time, as concerns the groups with a higher socioeconomic level, there is some discrepancy between the asserted belief<sup>35</sup> that education can lead to success and the community's real life experience, which gives rise to bipolar attitudes towards education.

Parents' level of education has an influence on children's school participation and attainment, but various studies identify differently the parents' decisive gender. Hence, in their research from 1993, Zamfir and Zamfir highlight the influence of the mother's education, while Hatos takes note of the positive influence of the father's education, explaining that the dominant parent's education should be the one to be considered, and in the Romanian society that parent is often the father.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> Dobrică, P., Jderu, G. (coord.), *Educația școlară a copiilor romi: determinări socioculturale*, București, Vanemonde, 2005, p. 38-39.

<sup>34</sup> Ogbu, J.U., Simons, H.D., *Voluntary and Involuntary Minorities: A Cultural-Ecological Theory of School Performance with Some Implications for Education*, *Anthropology & Education Quarterly*, 29(2), p. 155-188, 1998, American Anthropological Association, p. 173.

<sup>35</sup> For Ogbu and Simons this belief is "abstract".

<sup>36</sup> Hatos, A., *Impactul segregării și diferențierii asupra performanțelor școlare ale elevilor din*

Dropout, considered the main form of exclusion from compulsory schooling<sup>37</sup>, also generates social exclusion<sup>38</sup>. Jigău and Surdu associate Roma children's dropout with the grades received immediately prior to the effective dropout.<sup>39</sup> International studies have shown that the school's institutional setting can also lead to dropout, which is also confirmed by recent data in Romania.<sup>40</sup> Dropping out is perceived as being only the tip of the iceberg in the psychological evolution of the student who is gradually detaching from school. The dropout phenomenon is influenced by a set of objective factors (socioeconomic status, gender, background and Roma ethnicity<sup>41</sup>), as well as by subjective factors, such as satisfaction with school. This is determined by in-school processes: teachers' attitude, relationship with classmates, teaching approaches and the adequacy of academic content to the student's cultural expectations. In this respect, the alienation of the school from the students' cultural background has been proved to be a predictor of academic failure.<sup>42</sup>

It is interesting that Coleman's theory on the decisive influence of the family background has been proven wrong in less developed countries, where the major predictor of academic success seems to be teacher and school characteristics (also called the Heyneman-Loxley effect in sociology).<sup>43</sup> The shift in paradigm from the

clasele 10-12. O analiză multinivel, *Calitatea vieții*, XIX, No 1–2, 2008, p. 141–158, p. 148.

<sup>37</sup> Hatos, A., Educație și excluziune socială în România, in *Cultură, dezvoltare, identitate. Perspective actuale, 10 ani de la înființarea secțiilor de psihologie și sociologie la Universitatea din Oradea*, București, Editura Expert, 2007.

<sup>38</sup> Chișea, F., Abandonul școlar-sursă a marginalizării sociale, in *Cultură, dezvoltare, identitate. Perspective actuale, 10 ani de la înființarea secțiilor de psihologie și sociologie la Universitatea din Oradea*, București, Editura Expert, 2007.

<sup>39</sup> Jigău, M., Surdu, M. (coord.), Participarea la educație a copiilor romi. Probleme, soluții, actori, MEC, ISE, ICCV, București, Editura MarLink, 2002, p. 101.

<sup>40</sup> Hatos, A., Riscul abandonului școlar la adolescenții din școlile urbane: între constrângeri structurale și climat organizațional, *Analele Institutului de Istorie „G. Bariț” din Cluj Napoca*, Series Humanistica, Tome VI, 2008, p. 177-192.

<sup>41</sup> Jigău, M. (coord.), Învățământul rural din România condiții, probleme și strategii de dezvoltare, București, The Ministry of Education and Research, The Institute of Education Sciences, 2000. The author correlates the male gender and rural area with high dropout risks.

<sup>42</sup> Govinda, R., Towards inclusive schools and enhanced learning. A synthesis of case-study findings from different countries, Paris, UNESCO, 2009, p. 24, available at <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0018/001860/186030e.pdf>, accessed in May 2009.

<sup>43</sup> Heyneman and Loxley, quoted in Tufiș, P.A., Predictors of School Success in Romania. Family Background, School Factors, Community Factors, *Calitatea vieții*, XIX, No 3–4,

socioeconomic status to in-school processes is also found in Rivière's paper<sup>44</sup>, which suggests a series of institutional determinants of academic failure: the type of appraisal-aiming cognitive requirements, the rigidity of the learning pace and the uniform approach to students, emotional disruptions caused by transfers, change of a teacher, number of students in class and the overall attainment in the respective school. In Romania, recent data have confirmed the Coleman effect (the decisive influence of the family background on academic success), refuting thus the Heyneman-Loxley thesis.<sup>45</sup> Recently, the Institute of Education Sciences has run a research study on the influence of the cultural background on academic success in Romania.<sup>46</sup>

A positive correlation between learning in one's mother tongue and dropout reduction has also been demonstrated.<sup>47</sup> Moreover, it has been proven that positive effects can be reached through a trusting relationship between teachers and parents feeding into partnerships and services delivered to parents (counselling, second-chance education programmes), which makes school a trusting environment to which the community turns in case of need.<sup>48</sup>

### **1.3.2. Combating Discrimination and Segregation through Inclusive Education**

The term 'inclusive education' was coined in the 90's with the intention to integrate children with disabilities into school, and later extended to the inclusion of vulnerable groups. The principles of inclusive education target mainly the fight against **discrimination**, including one of its physically manifested acute forms – **segregation**.

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2008, p. 389–405, p. 390.

<sup>44</sup> Rivière, R., *L'échec scolaire est-il une fatalité?*, Paris, Hatier, 1991.

<sup>45</sup> Tufiș, P.A., Predictors of School Success in Romania. Family Background, School Factors, Community Factors, *Calitatea vieții*, XIX, nr. 3–4, 2008, p. 389–405, p. 400.

<sup>46</sup> Institutul de Științe ale Educației, *Influența capitalului cultural al familiei asupra reușitei școlare*, ISE, București, 2008.

<sup>47</sup> Govinda, R., *Towards inclusive schools and enhanced learning. A synthesis of case-study findings from different countries*, Paris, UNESCO, 2009, p. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Idem, p. 32. As regards the school-community relationship, see also: Rădulescu, E., Tîrcă, A., *Școală și comunitate – Ghid pentru profesori*, București, Humanitas Educațional, 2002, and Agabrian, M., Millea, V., *Parteneriate școală-familie-comunitate*, București, Institutul european, 2005.

**Discrimination** is defined in the Romanian legislation as “any differentiation, exclusion, restriction or preference, based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social group, convictions, gender, sexual orientation, age, disability, non-contagious chronic disease, HIV positive status, disadvantaged group, as well as on any other criterion with the aim or the effect of restricting or eliminating the universal recognition, use or exercise of human rights or fundamental freedoms or the rights prescribed by laws”.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, any “apparently neutral” practice impairing certain persons based on the above-mentioned criteria is considered discriminatory.

The definition of **segregation** which we have adopted in our analysis is the one laid down in MERY Order No 1540/2007, namely “the physical separation of Roma students into groups/classes/buildings/schools/other facilities making the share of Roma students in the total student population in school/class/group disproportionate to the share of school-aged Roma children in the total school-aged population in that territorial-administrative unit.”<sup>50</sup>

In Romania, Roma segregation is the most widespread phenomenon of ethnic segregation. There are two types of ethnic segregation: *de iure* segregation – the consequence of a local or national government decision, also called *non-residential segregation* in our analysis, and *de facto* segregation (*residential segregation* resulting from the demographic concentration of an ethnic group in an geographical area). Residential segregation may be due to the so-called “white flight” trend wherein families with high socioeconomic status flee an impoverishing area, thereby the learners from a low socioeconomic background become overrepresented.<sup>51</sup> We need to say that, in this trend, the socioeconomic status is often linked to a specific ethnicity. Surdu’s explanation for the phenomenon of segregated schools is distance, intended not as geographical distance, but as social distance between the Roma minority and the majority.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Government Ordinance No 137/2000 on prevention of and application of sanctions for all forms of discrimination. The document is available at [http://www.cncd.org.ro/new/files/file/ORDONANTA\\_137.pdf](http://www.cncd.org.ro/new/files/file/ORDONANTA_137.pdf), accessed in May 2009.

<sup>50</sup> MERY Order No 1540/2007. The document is available at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/8318>, accessed in May 2009.

<sup>51</sup> Stănculescu, M.S., Berevoescu, I., op. cit., p. 307.

<sup>52</sup> Surdu, M., *Segregarea romilor în educație – Distanță fizică sau socială?*, București, Editura Arves, 2003.

In 1966, Coleman showed how the social make-up of schools influenced learner educational attainment,<sup>53</sup> while the conclusions of the PISA study from 2001<sup>54</sup> confirmed, almost four decades later, the link between socioeconomic status-based segregation and school performance.

A third type of school segregation, based on academic attainment, is sometimes practiced and it consists in separating “good” students or students who have attended early childhood education from the other children. From the theories presented in section 1.3.1., we can draw the conclusion that the risk of accruing multiple vulnerabilities (minority group, low socioeconomic level, abridged cultural capital) is quite high for the Roma, which means that this type of segregation may in fact overlap with ethnic segregation.

The previously mentioned sociological theories showed the impact of segregation on the quality of school education, an idea that informed the MERY Order No1540/2007. According to this, segregation has a negative influence on, among other things, school participation rates, dropout rates, and the capacity to attract or retain qualified teachers, while perpetuating Roma-oriented prejudices and stereotypes.<sup>55</sup>

### ***1.3.3. Instead of a Conclusion: Education Quality Deficit***

The previous paragraphs show that the ethnicity variable (sometimes represented by the socioeconomic status) is generally associated with undesirable educational trends: non-participation, dropout, underachievement, school segregation and discrimination.

In the sociology of education, most studies tried to see if there is any correlation between academic success and socio-economic features, on the one hand, or academic success and the

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<sup>53</sup> Hatos, A., Impactul segregării și diferențierii asupra performanțelor școlare ale elevilor din clasele 10-12. O analiză multinivel, *Calitatea vieții*, XIX, No 1–2, 2008, p. 141–158.

<sup>54</sup> PISA, *Knowledge and skills for life: first results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, 2000, (No. 9264196714), Paris, Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2001. An executive summary of the paper is available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/32/33691620.pdf>, accessed in May 2009.

<sup>55</sup> MERY Order No 1540/2007. The document is available at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/8318>, accessed in May 2009.

institutional characteristics of schools, on the other. Nonetheless, according to more recent theories, the socioeconomic background, *correlated* with the institutional background of the schools in the community, should be taken into account when explaining variations in the quality of education outputs.<sup>56</sup>

This research tries to scan the quality of education to which Roma children have access. We start from the hypothesis that there is a deficit in the quality of the education benefiting the Roma. Throughout our analysis, the concept of “quality deficit” will be operationalised and broken down on different tiers: material resources, human resources and certain elements of organisational culture, as input phenomena, as well as the output dimension, measured through undesirable trends such as dropout, non-participation in education, grade retention or absenteeism. The analysis indicators will be correlated with the percentage of Roma students in schools in order to underline education quality discrepancies between the schools that have different percentages of Roma children.

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<sup>56</sup> Tufiş, P.A., Predictors of School Success in Romania. Family background, school factors, and community factors, in *Calitatea vieţii*, XIX, No 3–4, 2008, p. 389–405, p. 391.



## Chapter 2: Research Methodology

### 2.1. Research Rationale and Background

Although previous studies have shown that access to quality education is far from being a reality for the Roma minority in Romania, there is insufficient research in this field<sup>57</sup>. Debates on this topic suffer from a lack of reliable data and from a predominantly human rights-based approach to the detriment of an integrated socio-economic approach<sup>58</sup>. As a result, public education policies were designed and implemented in the midst of an information void<sup>59</sup> which couldn't have led but to total or partial failure<sup>60</sup>. (Attempts were made to tweak undesirable phenomena such as the segregation of Roma children, for example through MERY Order 1540/2007, but the efficient application of this Order is often questionable<sup>61</sup>. The need is recognised for the rigorous assessment of the application of the measures prescribed in the Order.)

We believe that the importance of quality education for Roma children cannot be overrated, given that over 40% of Roma are under 18<sup>62</sup>, and the link between restricted access to quality education and social exclusion has been confirmed by numerous studies. In order to step out of the vicious circle of Roma social exclusion, quality education for all children should be a top priority on the Romanian political agenda. We also think that in the absence

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<sup>57</sup> The data used in most studies come from over ten years ago as presented in M. Jigău, M. Surdu (ed.), *Participarea la educație a copiilor romi – probleme, soluții, actori*, Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, Institutul de Științe ale Educației, Institutul de Cercetare a Calității Vieții, UNICEF, Editura MarLink, București, 2002.

<sup>58</sup> A. Marc, *The Case for Integrated Education for Roma in Europe*, in *REF Magazine*, No 1, Budapest, 2007, p. 18.

<sup>59</sup> This information void is also due to a policy ignoring the ethnic criterion in the correlation of nationwide statistical data.

<sup>60</sup> To support this viewpoint, Chapter 3 of this report takes a quick critical glance at the public educational policies in Romania.

<sup>61</sup> DecadeWatch, *Roma Activists Assess the Progress of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, 2007 Update*, 2007, p. 37 ([www.decadewatch.org](http://www.decadewatch.org) , accessed in April 2009).

<sup>62</sup> Open Society Institute, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program, *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, 2007 Report*, Budapest, 2007, p. 345.

of empirical data one cannot draw up or implement effective public policies, and that actual data and the perspective of Roma NGO's must be considered for the design of future educational policies.

This study is intended as a contribution of the Roma nongovernmental sector to educational concerns in Romania, both as regards empirical data and the idea that fair and effective policies cannot be designed without Roma participation. Without claiming to reinvent the wheel, we wanted to focus on some issues that had featured less in prior research, such as Roma parent participation in education at local level, Roma parents' attitude towards school and its role in shaping a future for children, conditions for proactive involvement and positive attitude towards education. We adopted a practical approach with the aim to unfold the areas where sustainable solutions can develop for Roma children's education.

With this study, we would like not only to help highlight empirical data essential for formulating effective measures that promote social inclusion, but also to stir up debates on the Romanian education system through the eyes of the Roma minority.

In this research, "Împreună" Agency for Community Development made the most of the resources available in the project "*Empowering Roma Communities to Influence and Monitor Local Agendas in Romania*", financed by the Japanese Social Development Fund through the World Bank, which was run from July 2008 to March 2010 in 75 Roma communities from 25 counties across the country. The Agency's presence on-site, via its associates and partners, resulted, among other things, in a set of data on these 75 communities, allowing for a deeper understanding of local social realities. Between July-August 2008 and June-July 2009, project community profiles were made up and updated with data concerning the socio-economic levels of the communities (as resulted from the population's occupational patterns, housing and infrastructure, access to healthcare and education), Roma representatives' public participation in local decision-making, collaboration of the communities with local government, successful projects and programmes in the communities, functional implementing bodies of the National Strategy for the Improvement of the Roma Situation, and other aspects rounding out the big picture of the realities facing

the poorest Roma communities in Romania<sup>63</sup>.

## 2.2. Research Objectives

This study seeks to run a scan of an education system segment – schools with Roma ethnics – with a view to underline the existing correlations between students’ ethnicity and the quality of the education delivered in a school. Our work stemmed from a desire to exemplify, using measurable indicators and clear statistical data, the quality deficit of education in these schools, to measure, wherever possible, the scale of discrepancies between the schools with various shares of Roma children, and raise the alarm on issues that should be targeted in public policies on Roma education and social inclusion.

## 2.3. Units of Observation and Analysis

Considering that the institution of school cannot be conceptually separated from the social environment where it is located, we opted for an integrated approach to the Roma communities selected for the research. Thus, the core units of observation and analysis are the schools, which, conceptually speaking, we placed within the broader social context of Roma communities.

Therefore, the analysis was centred on a complex object, encompassing:

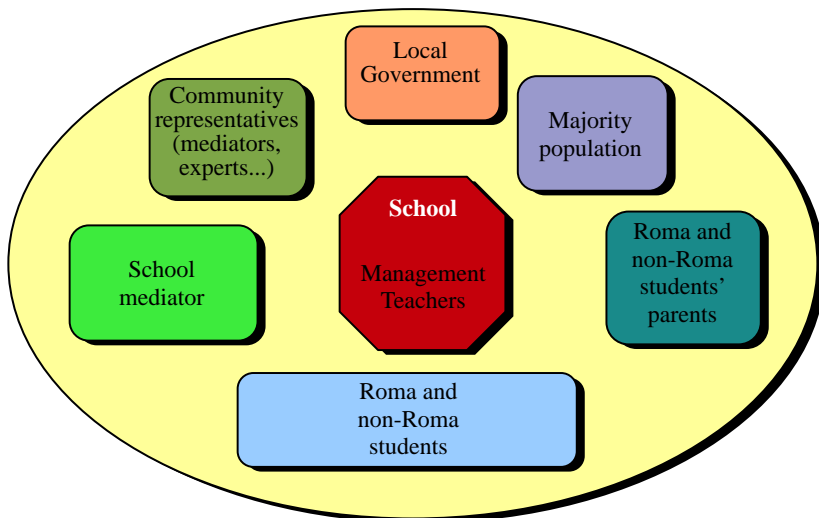
- The educational establishment, whose material and human resources influence education;
- Principals and teachers from the schools attended by Roma children;
- School mediators active in Roma communities;

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<sup>63</sup> We should say that these communities were selected based on a study conducted by D. Sandu, *Roma Communities Social Mapping*, World Bank, 2005; therefore, they are communities for which the Romanian Government has taken on the responsibility to improve the situation of Roma, a principle embraced by Romania during its pre-accession to the European Union.

- Parents of school-aged Roma children (enrolled or not in compulsory education);
- School-aged Roma children (enrolled or not in education);
- Representatives of Roma communities in local decision-making bodies.

The graph below illustrates the complex object of study.



**Graph 1. Complex object of study**

Thus, the analysis included data from:

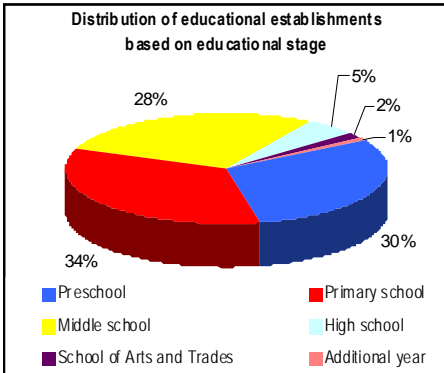
- 100 educational establishments<sup>64</sup> attended by Roma children, from 70 communities (77 schools and 23 kindergartens).
- 85 interviews with school principals (or their delegated staff) and 104 interviews with teachers<sup>65</sup>;
- 25 school mediators identified in the researched communities;

<sup>64</sup> By this we mean the actual educational establishments, with legal personality, as well as the structures without legal personality subordinate to the former. For a more simplified phrasing, in the report we will refer only to “educational establishments”, encompassing both types of institutions.

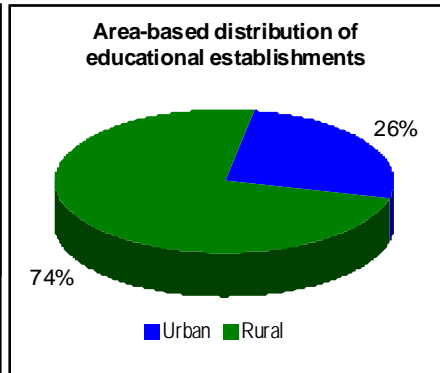
<sup>65</sup> We preferred to interview Roma teachers, wherever possible. When that was impossible, we talked to the staff member delegated by the school principal for the interview.

- 772 parents of school-aged children;
- 763 school-aged children.

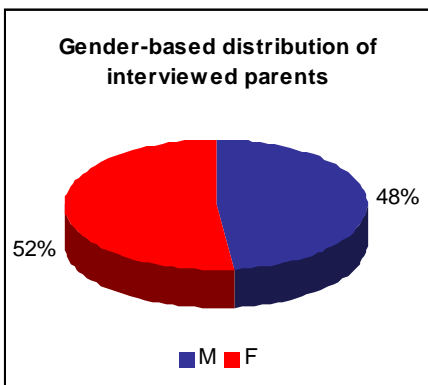
The characteristics of the researched population are presented in the following graphs:



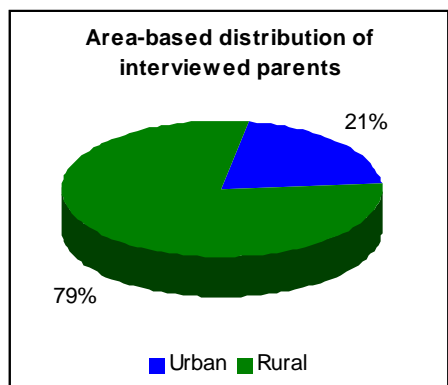
**Graph 2. Distribution of educational establishments based on educational stage**



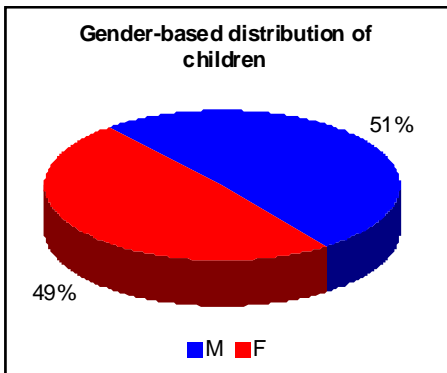
**Graph 3. Distribution of educational establishments based on area (urban/rural)**



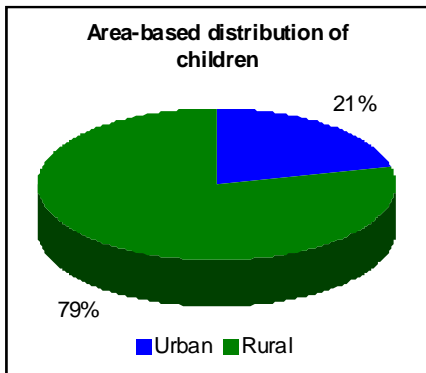
**Graph 4. Gender-based distribution of interviewed parents**



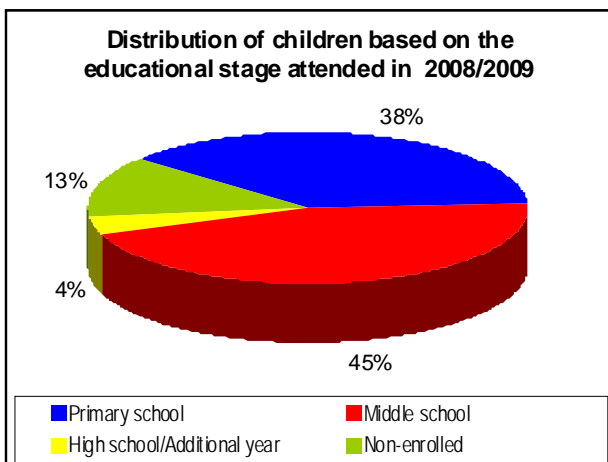
**Graph 5. Area-based distribution of interviewed parents (urban/rural area)**



**Graph 6. Gender-based distribution of interviewed children**



**Graph 7. Area-based distribution of interviewed children (urban/rural area)**



**Graph 8. Distribution of interviewed children based on the educational stage attended in the 2008/09 school year**

## 2.4. Selection of Units of Analysis

The educational establishments were selected based on their geographical location within the range of the localities where 70 compact Roma communities with low socio-economic levels had been identified. Thus, we selected the establishments attended by the children of these communities, as well as all the educational establishments within 2 km<sup>66</sup> of the Roma communities, regardless whether they were attended by a high number of Roma children. The researched educational establishments are thereby not a national representative sample and they are representative only for compact Roma communities with low socio-economic levels.<sup>67</sup> In addition, the freedom of selection was strongly hindered by the fact that, for this research, we used the resources of the project *“Empowering Roma Communities to Influence and Monitor Local Agendas in Romania”*, which made it impossible to select other educational establishments that could have matched the criterion of being attended by Roma children coming from compact communities with low socio-economic levels.

The respondent population from the educational establishments comprised the principals and Roma and non-Roma teachers appointed by the principals for the interviews. Due to insufficient time and resources, the interviewed teachers could not be subjected to probability sampling<sup>68</sup>.

The object of study also comprised the school mediators active in those 70 Roma communities included in the research. Thus, we interviewed 25 school mediators working in the selected schools.

The population of school-aged children’s parents and that of school-aged children were subjected to non-random sampling with

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<sup>66</sup> We chose a maximum range of 2 km after working out, at an adult’s average walking speed of approximately 4.5 km per hour, a travel time of an hour per day from the community to school and back. It goes without saying that this is just an approximation as the child’s age influences the walking speed, which age could not be taken into account in the construction of an exact index because of the wide age distribution among the interviewed children.

<sup>67</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in paragraph 8, *Research Limitations*.

<sup>68</sup> This will be discussed in more detail in paragraph 8, *Research Limitations*.

gender-based shares. The operators were instructed to select, based on a pre-established sociometric step<sup>69</sup>, households from the compact Roma communities and apply the questionnaire to the parent of at least one school-aged child, regardless whether the latter attended compulsory education, and to one of the school-aged children from the same household. The household pre-selection was made based on the criterion of having a school-aged child in the family and was carried out with help from school management or the school mediator in that community, or with the help of the community leaders. The field operators had to apply a minimum of 10 questionnaires (at least 5 female subjects and at least 5 male subjects from each category of respondents) in each community they visited. After selecting the valid questionnaires, we had 772 questionnaires applied to parents and 763 to children. In both cases, the random error is of approximately 3.6%, with a 95% confidence interval.

We should also look here into the issue of the respondents identified as belonging to the Roma minority because this usually gives rise to conceptual problems regarding probable errors of inclusion or exclusion<sup>70</sup> of Roma from respondent samples. We have mentioned earlier that this research was conducted in compact Roma communities where individuals strongly identify themselves with the Roma minority<sup>71</sup>. At the same time, in this research, we didn't have to deal with the problem of the field operator's ethnicity influencing the respondents' conscious choice to declare themselves a Roma or not, as the field operators were people known in the

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<sup>69</sup> Due to the fact that the size of the concerned communities varies to a great extent (from small 15 to 20 household communities to over 300 household communities), the sociometric step was chosen by the field operators (every two households, every ten households, etc.), who later reported their selection and data collection methods to be validated by the research team. The methodological details made the topic of two data collection reports, corresponding to the two field data collection periods.

<sup>70</sup> The inclusion error occurs when an individual identified by others as Roma does not identify himself/herself as such, which leads to his/her wrongful inclusion in the Roma sample; the exclusion error happens when an individual identifies himself/herself as a Roma but s/he is not identified by others as such, which leads to his/her wrongful exclusion from the sample. For more information about these errors, see Fleck, G., Rughiniș, C. (ed.), *Vino mai aproape. Incluziunea și exclușiunea romilor în societatea românească de astăzi*, Human Dynamics, București, 2008, p. 9-12.

<sup>71</sup> This information comes from the community profiles made up during the project "Empowering Roma Communities to Influence and Monitor Local Agendas in Romania" in June 2008 and updated in July 2009.

community, often Roma themselves, who had gained the respondents' trust during the implementation of the project run by "Împreună" Agency for Community Development. For these reasons, the sample in this research study does not show errors with regard to assuming and declaring the Roma ethnicity by the respondents to the questionnaires applied to parents and school-aged children.

## 2.5. Data Collection Methods

For data gathering, we used quantitative methods (sociological enquiry based on questionnaires and interviews) and qualitative methods (document and interview content analysis, secondary analysis of data from other research and sources).

Hence, questionnaires were applied to school-aged children's parents and to school-aged children attending compulsory education or not. In schools, questionnaires were applied to collect statistical data, such as the number of students, of classes, of Roma students, etc., material and human resources available in the researched institutions, as well as semi-structured interviews with school principals and Roma and non-Roma teachers. In the communities, semi-structured interviews were taken from school mediators.

For the purpose of the quantitative analysis, the data from C1 (Questionnaire applied to parents), C2 (Questionnaire applied to children) and C4 (Questionnaire applied in educational establishments)<sup>72</sup> were analysed using the multiple linear regression technique, with the help of SPSS software.

The data from C5 (Guidelines for interviewing school principals) and C6 (Guidelines for interviewing teachers) were analysed from a qualitative standpoint, using the content analysis technique, the same for the data collected using C3 (Guidelines for interviewing school mediators). This technique was also employed to analyse the documents pertaining to educational establishments (desegregation plans, local press articles).

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<sup>72</sup> The data from C3 – Interviews with school mediators were not subjected to statistical analysis because the number of cases was insufficient for a significant analysis (No=25). They were analyzed from a qualitative viewpoint, using the content analysis technique.

The data collection methods used in this research followed the principle of triangulation in order to gather valid multi-source-verifiable data. Thus, the qualitative data are meant to complete and expand on the quantitative data; the information sources are multiple and varied, from questionnaires applied to parents and children to interviews with different institutional players in the schooling process (teachers, school mediators, principals); finally, primary and secondary data complete and validate each other.

## 2.6. Data Collection Tools

Six tools were designed for data collection. The tool-designing process involved, besides the research team, education experts working for MERI or in the education system or with relevant nongovernmental organisations, like Step by Step, Save the Children, Centre Education 2000+, and experts from UNICEF Romania. Thus, with their contribution, the research tools were finalised. These tools are included below in a synoptic table.

Name	Type of tool	Target population	Data collection timeframe	Management method
C1	Structured questionnaire	School-aged Roma children's parents or careers <sup>73</sup>	August-September 2009	Managed by operators
C2	Structured questionnaire	School-aged Roma children	August-September 2009	Managed by operators
C3	Semi-structured interview guidelines	School mediators active in target communities	August-September 2009	Managed by operators, recorded on tape <sup>74</sup>

<sup>73</sup> Carers are people other than biological parents, who, in the absence of parents, take responsibility for looking after the children.

<sup>74</sup> In a few cases, the respondents felt intimidated by the idea of being recorded on tape and insisted on not doing that. Obviously, their wish was granted, and in these cases the operators wrote down the information.

<b>C4</b>	Structured questionnaire	Principals/other staff delegated by principals	October-December 2009	Managed by operators <sup>75</sup>
<b>C5</b>	Semi-structured interview guidelines	Principals from target educational establishments	October – December 2009	Managed by operators, recorded on tape
<b>C6</b>	Semi-structured interview guidelines	Teachers from target educational establishments	October – December 2009	Managed by operators, recorded on tape

**Table 1. Data collection tools**

## 2.7. Methodological Difficulties

The field operators' methodological reports<sup>76</sup> point to a series of difficulties which may have a bearing on the research results; therefore, these shortfalls were taken into account during data analysis.

The first difficulty concerns the social desirability bias, regardless whether the respondents are school-aged children's parents, children, principals or teachers. The field operators' reports highlighted potential areas where increased attention was needed for data interpretation. Box 1 includes some extracts from the field operators' reports exemplifying these methodological difficulties.

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<sup>75</sup> In a few cases, the respondents insisted on managing the questionnaire themselves for reasons related to time. The research methodology allowed for this variation in order to facilitate field operators' work and to eventually gather the data.

<sup>76</sup> These unpublished reports were requested from the field operators after each round of data collection.

*I have the feeling that those who responded most truthfully were the children, although judging on their answers, they all love school, which means that we should have lots of children with good grades who are keen on learning. To some questions, all the subjects gave what they believed was the right and good answer, and not the honest one (...). Briefly: people responded as they thought they ought to answer to look responsible. (Data collection report, August 2009, Covasna County)*

*They answered truthfully because we had talked prior to that and I had tried to ‘speak their language’ and explain to them why we needed an honest answer from them. At the same time, I made sure that whenever I was applying a questionnaire to someone, there was no one else in the room (...) People’s willingness to give a truthful answer to the questions you ask depends on how well they know the interviewer or on the trust they have in the Roma human resource working for them who accompanies you in the community. (Data collection report, August 2009, Galați County)*

*I think I was lucky and got real and truthful answers from teachers because we told them that we were also working in education (a colleague from the organisation and I are school teachers), that we were working with Roma children and so they couldn’t “tell stories” as some principals did to draw attention to positive policies. (Data collection report, December 2009, Argeș County)*

### **Box 1. Social desirability bias and relevant mitigation approaches**

The approach used to mitigate the social desirability bias was to systematically explain the importance of the respondents’ participation in the study. The mitigating factors were: guaranteeing respondents’ anonymity, establishing a trusting relationship with the teachers based on operators’ sharing experiences and data collection by people who already had the trust of the communities. We also believe that this last element is in fact one of the strengths of this research as it helped gather valid data from Roma communities.

As concerns the interviews conducted in educational establishments, the social desirability bias is more persistent than in

the case of parents and children, as the risk faced for “disclosing” some information is high for the teachers who feel threatened of possibly losing their job, especially in a time of downsizing (“*In case of layoffs, we, the Roma, will be the first to get fired*”).<sup>77</sup> As for the difficult access to effective data on undesirable phenomena in educational establishments, another methodological difficulty was the impossibility, for objective reasons, to sample teachers for interviews. The problem was that we believed it would be relevant to interview Roma teachers, wherever possible, but this category of respondents actually thought they were the most vulnerable and they were therefore most reluctant to providing “compromising” information about school policies. Where there were no Roma teachers, the respondent was appointed by the school management to take part in the study; assuming that “trustworthy” teachers were appointed for this, it is very likely that we didn’t access all the information needed for us to get the true picture of the researched phenomena. Anyway, the idea that surfaces is that *regardless the situation emerging from data analysis, we can assume that things are actually worse*. Box 2 features an extract from a data collection report supporting this hypothesis. The field operator is also a member of a Roma nongovernmental organisation with long-standing experience in community development.

*I think that some answers given by the interviewed teachers have nothing to do with the reality in schools. Based on other experiences and activities run in the communities, we believe that the situation regarding dropout, segregation and discrimination of Roma students was “embellished” in these answers. The discussions and the fact that the majority of the interviewed teachers preferred to answer in writing gave the impression that the Roma issues in schools are neither a priority nor very well-known. (Data collection report, December 2009, Botoşani County)*

**Box 2. Embellished data and how the Roma civil society views the situation**

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<sup>77</sup> Interview with a Roma teacher, Maramureş County, October 2009 (for obvious reasons, we will keep the respondents’ anonymity).

Because of the previously mentioned reasons the data gathered via school staff interviews could not be subjected to a relevant statistical analysis, and therefore we preferred the content analysis technique evidencing with greater clarity the respondents' contradicting answers. Moreover, in order to do a triangulation-based checking on some indicators, a series of questions from the interviews with school employees were recurrent and were also asked in the interviews with school mediators.<sup>78</sup>

Another methodological difficulty was the lack of data on students' ethnicity in the documents of the educational establishments. Thus, the statistical data reached using the C4 tool are based on the Roma children's ethnic identification by the school management. At a first glance, this may invalidate some of the statistical data regarding the Roma children from the researched educational establishments. Nonetheless, our reasoning dodges this trap: given that these children are identified by others as Roma in a context where there are segregated classes, discrimination, and high dropout rates, the probability for them to be treated differently by the majority population – regardless if they are Roma ethnics or not – is very high, which makes the fair identification of children as Roma lose relevance. The field operators noticed certain fears in teachers regarding Roma's ethnic identification.<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> It concerns the indicators pertaining to segregation, desegregation processes carried out in school, dropout, discrimination of Roma students, community participation in education and school partnerships with the outer environment.

<sup>79</sup> Given that some of these schools were included in government projects and programmes aiming at improving Roma access to education, the lack of data on students' ethnicity and the principals' reluctance to make a clear and unequivocal statement in this respect raise some questions as to how the programmes targeting Roma children were designed.

*The answers matched the reality, but the statistical answers were given without ever consulting the archives. (...) For the quantitative profile, they couldn't give clear answers because the Roma children were not declared as Roma, thereby their data were nor clearly recorded (Data collection report, December 2009, Prahova County).*

*Quantitative data were a problem because the answer to the questions regarding the Roma was not always known. Most of them don't identify themselves as Roma, and the principals don't take the responsibility for calling them Roma to avoid problems. We had to cut in every time and tell them that the information disclosed would not have repercussions on them (teachers or principals) (Data collection report, December 2009, Sibiu County).*

**Box 3. The issue of students' ethnic identification by others**

## 2.8. Research Limitations

Given the context in which they were collected – using the resources of the project “*Empowering Roma Communities to Influence and Monitor Local Agendas in Romania*” – the research data are not nationally representative. The representativeness of the sample is narrowed down by two issues. First of all, the fact that the units of observation and analysis (Roma communities) were pre-established and could not be subjected to probability sampling reduces the possibility of extending the research conclusions to the national level. At the most, we could say that the “sample” may be representative for the Roma population from compact communities with a low socio-economic level. Second of all, as noticed in Graphs 5 and 7, the rural area prevails, with 79% of the population studied. This rural “*bias*” makes the conclusions of the research less representative at national level. At the same time, we didn't focus on the national representativeness of the sample, but rather on the way in which Roma issues emerged in rural settings, as these are the areas where the problems of the national education system are most urgent and serious and also the department that needs priority interventions regarding education quality assurance<sup>80</sup>.

<sup>80</sup> Jigău, M. (coord.), *Învățământul rural din România: condiții, probleme și strategii de dezvoltare*, Ministerul Educației și Cercetării, Institutul de Științe ale Educației, București, 2000, p. 7.

Another research limitation concerns the sketchy approach of some dimensions and the fact that we left out some aspects essential to education quality assessment. For example, the analysis of the organisational culture promoted in the educational establishments is superficial due to lack of time and resources. It would be desired to interview more teachers from each educational establishment and sample them to achieve valid statistical results. The fact that some field operators did not benefit from initial training in social and human sciences was another obstacle in getting in-depth data, in particular during semi-structured interviews where a series of aspects should have been investigated beyond some respondents' laconic answers. However, for obvious reasons, we preferred to have the data collected by operators holding the key to Roma communities.

Essential concepts were entirely excluded from the research due to lack of time and resources. Thus, student performance appraisal has not been tackled at all, although this process is a student categorisation factor in itself and may consequently generate exclusion. In addition, we didn't pay any attention to the concepts of curriculum, academic performance or use of alternative textbooks. These elements may be researched more thoroughly in a future study.

## Chapter 3: Research Results

The chapter exploring the research results is structured on three sections.

In the first section, we will have a look at the **quality of education** delivered in the schools attended by Roma children, testing *the hypothesis that the schools with a high percentage of Roma children (over 50%) have a lower quality of education than those with a small percentage of Roma children (less than 50%)*. In this section, we will focus on the quality of **material and human resources**, as well as on **aspects regarding the organisational ethos** in these schools. All these are considered educational *inputs*.

In the second section, we will centre our focus on educational *outputs*, namely on aspects relating to **school dropout, non-enrolment, absenteeism and non-promotion**. We will correlate the data gathered on these phenomena with the percentage of Roma children in order to further test *the hypothesis that school dropout, non-enrolment, absenteeism and non-promotion are more widespread in the schools with a high percentage of Roma children than in the schools with a small percentage of Roma children*. These aspects will also be explored from a qualitative point of view, by analysing the interviews with the teachers and the qualitative answers from the questionnaires applied to Roma parents and children. The qualitative analysis will help us to better understand these phenomena and challenge current stereotypes on Roma participation in education.

In the third section, we will reveal **qualitative aspects** relating to the **discrimination** faced by Roma children in the education system. We will focus in particular on one type of discrimination with serious consequences, namely **segregation**, a phenomenon that we will measure with the help of collected statistical data. At the same time, we will highlight successful or unsuccessful desegregation practices which the schools have implemented, from the first regulations in this area to the time of research, and we will identify, through qualitative data analysis, the obstacles to total and irreversible desegregation.

For an easy reading, at the end of each section, we will briefly summarise the conclusions drawn from our data.

### 3.1. Education Quality in Schools Attended by Roma Children

We will next look into the aspects regarding the **quality of education** in the schools attended by Roma children in terms of education inputs.

Previous research has indicated a quality deficit in rural education.<sup>81</sup> However, we have focused on how *ethnicity* affects resource distribution in educational establishments, regardless the area where they are located. We have thus wanted to test the *hypothesis according to which the higher the percentage of Roma children, the fewer quality material and human resources the school*<sup>82</sup> has. Hence, we have focused neither on the way in which the – urban or rural – area affects the quality of education in the researched schools, nor on the distribution of education quality indicators based on the educational stage. These two aspects are only briefly presented in the tables below, and they are also embedded in the linear regression models enclosed in Annex 2 to support our hypotheses.

To facilitate the analysis, we split the schools included in this study into four categories based on the share of Roma students. The number of the schools included in each category is relatively equal, which allows for optimal data comparability:

1. the first category of 21 schools has a percentage of Roma children of **less than 25%**;
2. the second category of 19 schools has a percentage of Roma students of **25-50%**;
3. the third category of 18 schools is attended by Roma students up to **51-75%**; and
4. the last category of 19 schools has **over 75%** of Roma students.

The area-based distribution of these categories is illustrated in Table 2, and the educational stage-based distribution in Table 3.

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<sup>81</sup> Jigău, M. (coord.), *Învățământul rural din România: condiții, probleme și strategii de dezvoltare*, București, 2000.

<sup>82</sup> In this section, we focus on the schools in our sample, thereby excluding the kindergartens to which we should apply a different set of education quality indicators.

Educational establishments grouped by percentage of Roma students					
Area	Roma percentage < 25%	Roma percentage between 25 and 50%	Roma percentage between 50 and 75%	Roma percentage > 75%	Total
Urban	5	6	4	2	17
Rural	16	13	14	17	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>77</b>

**Table 2. School distribution based on area and on the percentage of Roma students**

Educational establishments grouped by percentage of Roma students					
Educational stage	Roma percentage < 25%	Roma percentage between 25 and 50%	Roma percentage between 50 and 75%	Roma percentage > 75%	Total <sup>83</sup>
Primary school	16	17	14	17	64
Middle school	14	16	14	11	55
High school/ School of Arts and Trades/ Additional year	10	2	0	1	13

**Table 3. School distribution based on the educational stage and on the percentage of Roma students**

<sup>83</sup> The column total is bigger than the total number of 77 schools because some schools feature different educational stages.

We will next analyse the education **quality indicators** from four points of view, that is:

a) **Material resources** (specialised labs in place and frequently used, libraries, number of library books per student, gym or athletic field available, computers to which students have access, number of students per computer, operating permit<sup>84</sup>);

b) **Teacher characteristics** (qualification, commuting, turnover, professional lifelong learning, support staff);

c) **Organisational ethos elements** (student board and Roma representatives in the student board and in the parent committee);

After analysing each education quality indicator, we will correlate the outcomes with the percentage of Roma children in schools. We reiterate that the *hypothesis we want to check out is that a higher education quality deficit is more likely to occur in the schools which are preponderantly<sup>85</sup> attended by Roma children than in other schools.*

### **3.1.1. Material Resources**

Material resources are a significant educational factor. Specialised labs, libraries, gyms and athletic fields, computers - all these support, add up to and perfect the educational process. As low-tech teaching methods make more way for active, interactive, real project- and practical application-based approaches, owning such equipment is an indicator of quality education. Moreover, holding a valid operating permit guarantees the adequate state of the material resources in terms of school building sanitation and safety. We will analyse the extent to which the researched schools own such equipment and hold the operating permit, correlating the data with the share of Roma students in these schools.

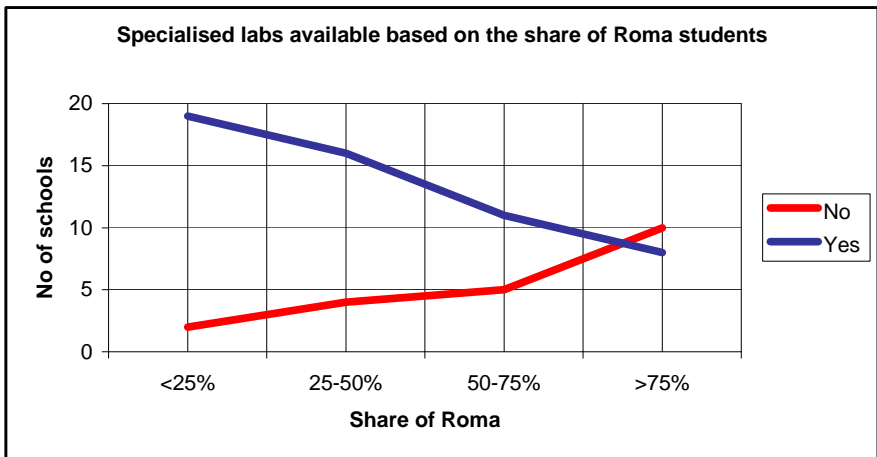
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<sup>84</sup> We also wanted to include in the research the 'expenditure per student' variable, but we believe that unfortunately the high rate of non-response (66%) invalidates our results and makes them less representative. Therefore, we chose to leave out the analysis of this variable from our research.

<sup>85</sup> By "preponderantly" we mean more than 50%. Thus, the hypothesis applies to 37 schools.

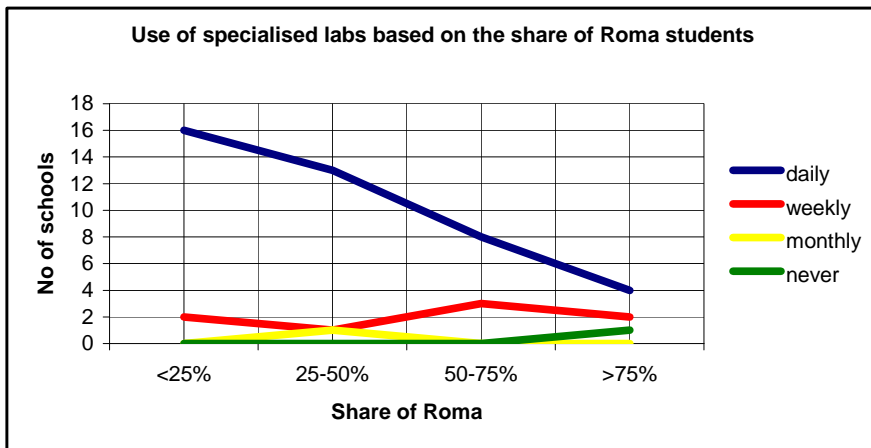
### a) Specialised Labs

26% of the researched schools do not own specialised labs for subject matters like biology, chemistry, physics or computer science. According to the data regarding the schools that have such labs, these facilities are used daily up to 77%, the rest of them being used weekly, monthly or never. Graph 9 shows the school distribution based on specialised labs available and the percentage of Roma students, while Graph 10 shows the frequency of their use also based on the percentage of Roma students. We have noticed that the availability of specialised labs in schools is disproportionate to the percentage of Roma children: **the higher the percentage of Roma students, the less likely for the school to have specialised labs. On the other hand, the higher the percentage of Roma children, the less likely for the existing labs to be used daily.** See the tables corresponding to Graphs 9 and 10 in Annex 2.<sup>86</sup>



**Graph 9. Specialised labs available based on the percentage of Roma students**

<sup>86</sup> Tables I and II. For each hypothesis confirmed, we present two tables in Annex 2 – the first with the data used to make the graphic representation of the charts, and the second one with the multiple linear regression methods statistically confirming our hypotheses.



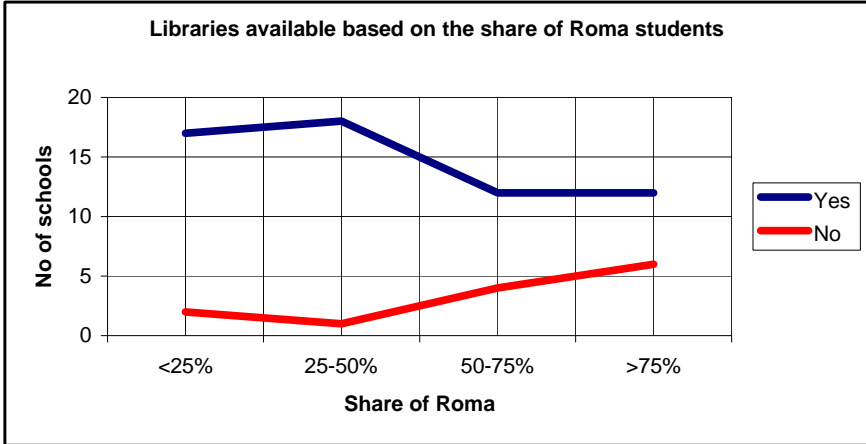
**Graph 10. Use of specialised labs based on the percentage of Roma students**

### **b) Libraries**

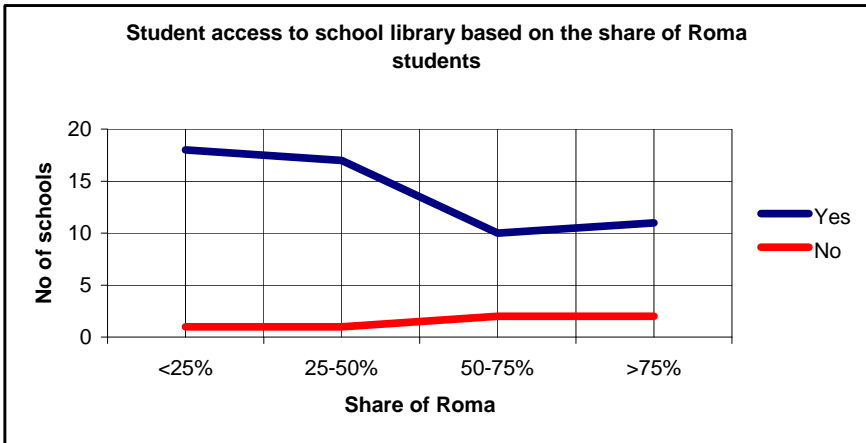
Another indicator on the material resources of the schools is the existence of a library and student access to it. Our data reveal that 18% of the schools don't have a library, and in nearly 10% of those who do have one, students don't have access to books. Although it seems paradoxical for a school to have a library, but restrict student access to books, this is typically encountered in the schools where the library is actually located inside the schools with legal personality (coordinating schools) and not in the subordinate structures/establishments that may be located at a great distance from the coordinating school.

Graphs 11 and 12 show the school distribution based on libraries available and on the percentage of Roma students. We spot the same tendency of a school being less likely to have a library as the percentage of Roma students in the total student population increases. The same way, we notice the less obvious tendency of children being less likely to have access to the school library as the percentage of Roma students increases. Nonetheless, statistical tests do not fully confirm the hypothesis that schools with high numbers of Roma are less likely to have libraries, or that the

students from the schools with a higher percentage of Roma are less likely to have access to library books than those from the schools with a smaller percentage of Roma students.



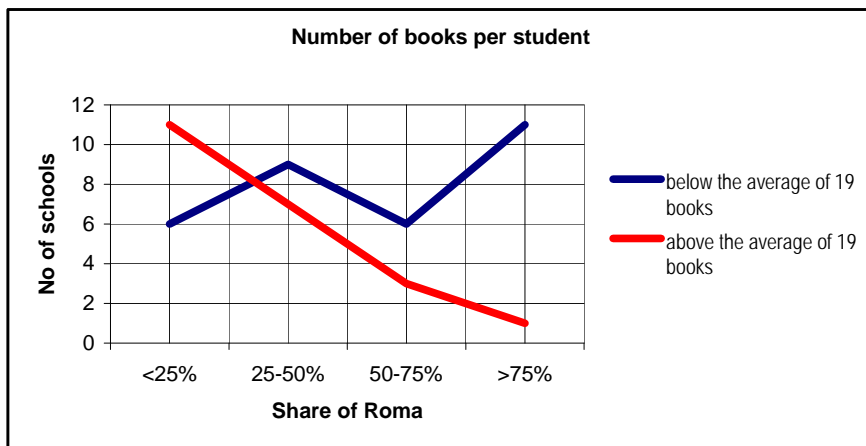
**Graph 11. Libraries available based on the percentage of Roma students**



**Graph 12. Student access to school library based on the percentage of Roma students**

### c) Number of Books in Library

Another quality indicator is the number of books available in the library of each school. Thus, our data reveal that the minimum number of books in the library is 27, and the maximum is 19,000, which means an average of 6,066 books. We notice a highly uneven book distribution, with a huge difference between the lowest and the highest figures. Of course, the number of students (in other words the school size) influences the number of books available in the library. Consequently, a more adequate indicator would be the number of books per student. Calculations show that the minimum number of books per student is 0.19 (or 5 students per book, as reported in a school with 100% Roma students), and the maximum value recorded is 88 books per student in a school where the share of Roma students is 16%. The average number of books per student is 19. Graph 13 shows the school distribution based on the percentage of Roma students and on the number of books per student related to our calculated average value (in other words, we split the schools into two categories: those with values *below* the average of 19, and those with values *above* this average).



**Graph 13. School distribution based on the number of books per student and on the percentage of Roma students**

As seen in the Graph, the higher the percentage of Roma students in a school, the smaller the chances for the number of books per student to be above the average. Tables III and IV from Annex 2 present the statistical data and the linear regression model confirming the hypothesis that the variation in the number of books per student is best explained by the percentage of Roma students in the school. In other words, **the schools with a high percentage of Roma tend to report a smaller number of books per student than the schools with less Roma students.**

#### **d) Computers and Internet Connection**

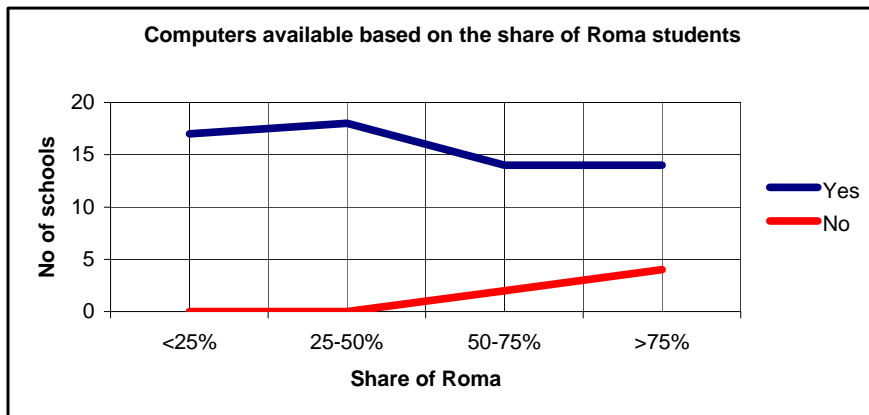
We have also taken into account the computers to which students have access in schools. Thus, over 9% of schools don't have IT equipment available to students. On average, in the researched schools, there are 21 students for one computer and 45 students for one Internet-connected computer. Of course, the statement that the school owns such equipment does not necessarily mean that students have regular or equitable access to computers or to specialised IT learning, but where the infrastructure needed for computer skills development is in place, it is at least possible to deliver relevant courses. This indicator is thus an essential, be it insufficient, starting point.

As we discovered, only 30% of the schools who provided IT equipment-related data had a number of students per computer smaller than the average of 21 students calculated in this research, but this average is already very high; in other words, the number of students per computer is very high.<sup>87</sup>

The data collected helped to establish a statistically significant relationship between the percentage of Roma children in school and the number of computers available and accessible to students (tables V and VI from Annex 2).

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<sup>87</sup> Unfortunately, we don't have any national statistics about the number of students per computer, but to make a comparison, in the United States of America, in 2004, the national average for high-poverty schools was 4.5 students per computer, and in the schools with a high level of minority students the ratio was 4.7 students per computer (source: <http://www.dallasindicators.org/ScienceTechnology/UseofTechnologyforTeachingLearning/Numberofstudentspercomputer/tabid/1015/language/en-US/Default.aspx>, accessed in May 2009).



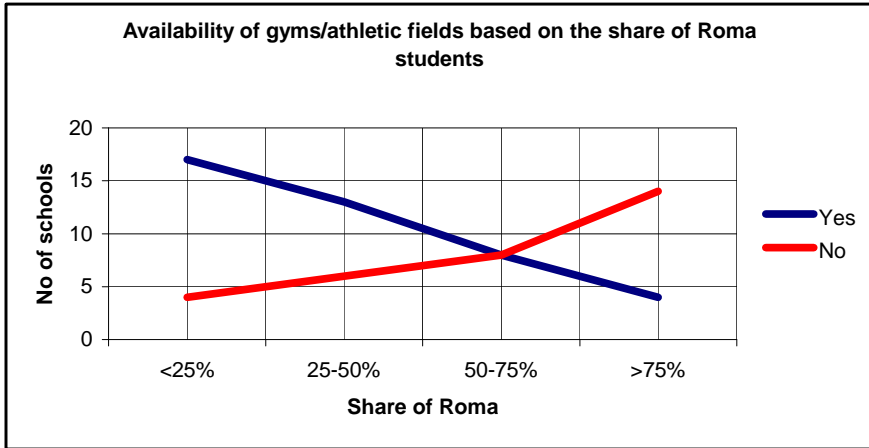
**Graph 14. Computers available and accessible to students based on the percentage of Roma students**

As regards the number of computers per student, it doesn't seem to be influenced by the percentage of Roma children, but rather by the total number of students, i.e. the size of the school. As for the indicator relating to the number of students per Internet-connected computer, we couldn't identify a statistically significant relationship with the percentage of Roma students in school.

It would however be interesting to study, in a future research, the effective student access to IT equipment and computer skills training, and how these data correlate with the percentage of Roma students in schools based on a national representative sample.

### e) Gyms/Athletic Fields

The availability of specialised gyms or athletic fields is another good indicator on the material resources of schools. Our data show that over 43% of schools don't have a gym or an athletic field. It is interesting however that the school is less likely to have a gym or an athletic field as the percentage of Roma students increases, as seen in Graph 15. Our hypothesis is statistically supported by the linear regression model presented in Table VIII from Annex 2. Hence, we can confirm the hypothesis that **the schools with high percentages of Roma are less likely to have a gym or an athletic field than those with low percentages of Roma.**



**Graph 15. Availability of gyms/Athletic fields based on the percentage of Roma students**

### f) Operating Permit

Finally, the last material indicator concerns the school’s operating permit. Thus, our data point out that approximately 17% of the researched schools don’t have an operating permit. Even if statistical tests are not significant, **the schools with over 50% of Roma students that didn’t have an operating permit in the 2008/09 academic year were twice as many as the schools with less than 50% of Roma students.**

The data on the operating permit should however be regarded with reservations because the check question evidenced the fact that, in some cases, the importance of the permit was unknown. Hence, out of 77 schools, 34 didn’t answer to the question “*What year did your school receive the operating permit?*”. Moreover, from the questionnaires applied in some schools it resulted that the permit was granted before 2000 (approximately one third of the schools), although under applicable laws the operating permit should be renewed *yearly* by specialised committees. Only 19 schools out of 43 that answered to the question declared that their permit was dated 2008 or 2009. All these lead to the idea that many schools actually didn’t have a valid operating permit for the academic year for which

the research data were collected. In this case, the social desirability bias may have also played a role in the distortion of the results.

Our analysis **strongly confirms the hypothesis that the percentage of Roma children in schools explains the quality discrepancies with regard to the material resources available in educational establishments: the higher the percentage of Roma students, the fewer the chances for the school to have the material resources needed to enhance and support education quality.** This hypothesis is statistically confirmed as regards specialised labs, the number of library books per student, the number of computers students have access to and gyms or athletic fields available. For all these indicators on the material resources of schools, the percentage of Roma children explains the variations more than any other factors, such as (urban or rural) area, distance to the nearest town, type or size of school.

### **3.1.2. Teacher Characteristics**

In the set of baseline indicators designed by the Ministry of Education, the indicators on human resources include the following:

- the share of qualified teachers;
- the share of full-time teachers;
- the share of female teachers; and
- the number of children per teacher.<sup>88</sup>

Nevertheless, these indicators rule out the number of lifelong learning hours from which teachers have benefited or the number of their teaching, pedagogy or subject matter specialization courses. The teaching staff turnover indicator is also missing. From this point of view, we think that the evaluation of the education system could be improved and completed.<sup>89</sup> Hence, the indicators we selected to assess the quality of human resources are as follows:

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<sup>88</sup> The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 10.

<sup>89</sup> At the same time, the indicator “the share of female teachers” is irrelevant as the feminization of the teaching profession is a documented fact; the indicator should consider the share of women in *managing positions* in schools, where the sex ratio is uneven (according also to The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 23).

- qualification
- commuting
- teaching staff turnover
- lifelong learning
- support staff (school mediators, school counsellors).

### a) Teacher Qualification

The Report of the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation (MERI) dated 2009 on the state of the education system highlights a few positive trends in Romanian education, such as the increased quality of human resources due to a reduction in the qualified teaching staff deficit.

The official statistical data reported by the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation are synthesised in Table 4a as a point of reference. Our research data are similar to the official national figures and are presented in Table 4b. We left out of this table the data regarding high school education and the Schools of Arts and Trades, as our research included only two such educational establishments, making it impossible to obtain significant data.

The share of qualified teachers	MERI data, 2008-2009 <sup>90</sup>	
	Urban	Rural
Based on area	98%	94%
<b>Total</b>	<b>96%</b>	

**Table 4a. The share of qualified teachers: official data**

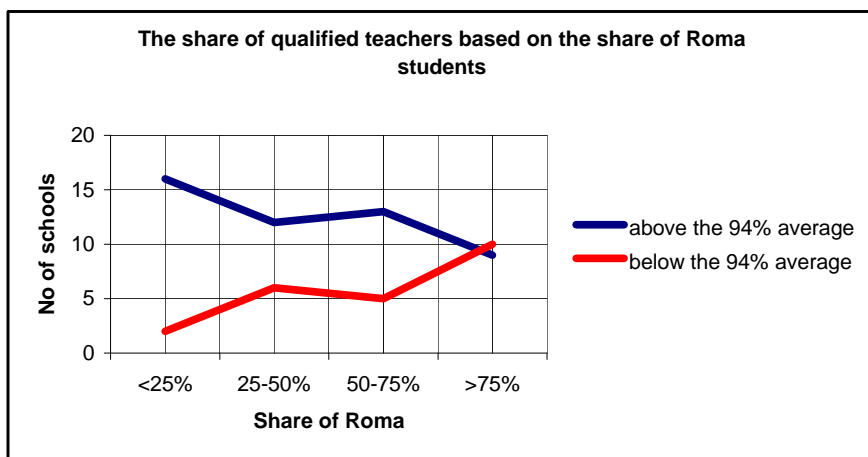
The share of qualified teachers	Research data	
	Urban	Rural
Based on area	96%	92%
<b>Total</b>	<b>94%</b>	

**Table 4b. The share of qualified teachers: research data**

<sup>90</sup> The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 10.

Although the fact that the researched schools are not nationally representative does not allow for a valid methodological comparison between official and research data, we notice that the share of qualified teachers in the researched schools tends to be slightly lower than in national figures.

To make the comparison between schools easier as regards the ethnic determinant of the share of qualified teachers, we drew up Graph 16 with the school distribution based on the percentage of Roma students and the share of qualified teachers in relation to the overall average we reached in our analysis, that is 94%.<sup>91</sup> We notice an increasing number of schools with a *below* average share of qualified teachers as the percentage of Roma students increases. On the contrary, the number of schools where the share of qualified teachers is *above* the average decreases as the number of Roma children goes up.



**Graph 16. The share of qualified teachers based on the percentage of Roma students**

The linear regression model confirms the variation in the share of non-qualified teachers based on the percentage of Roma students in schools (Table X in Annex 2). Hence, this **proves the hypothesis that**

<sup>91</sup> The data in Graph 16 can also be found in Table IX from Annex 2.

**the percentage of Roma students has an influence on the share of qualified teachers in schools: as the percentage of Roma students increases, the number of qualified teachers drops.**

### **b) Commuting**

In the researched schools, the percentage of commuting teachers reaches nearly 60% on average, while in 9% of schools all the teachers commute. Of course, the significant share of rural schools in our study explains the higher average percentage of commuting teachers. Statistical tests didn't show a significant correlation between the percentage of Roma students in schools and the share of commuting teachers, but, just as expected, there is a strong correlation with the area where the school is located. Thus, rural schools have a more significant percentage of commuting teachers than urban schools.

### **c) Teaching Staff Turnover**

In the researched schools, the teaching staff turnover, worked out as the share of teachers having left the school in the 2008/09 academic year in the total number of teachers, is above the average of approximately 9.2%. This phenomenon concerns mostly schools with a high number of teachers without tenure as these are not allowed to stay with the same institution for more than three years.

Of the 70 schools which provided data on teaching staff turnover, 31% reported values *above* the 9.2% average. 58% of schools say that they didn't have teaching staff turnover issues during the 2008/09 school year, but for the rest of the schools the teaching staff turnover numbers vary from 2% to 67%.

Beyond the figures above, it is also important to underline some qualitative aspects regarding teaching staff turnover that came out of the interviews with teachers and school principals. Teaching staff turnover is often associated with commuting, and in these cases the phenomenon affects tenured teachers too, who find a teaching position closer to their home and leave the educational establishment where they hold tenure. Another determinant of

teaching staff turnover is the perceived quality of the school: where it is noticed that *“the standards are very low”*, that *“high performance cannot be achieved”* with the students from some schools, teaching staff turnover is very likely to have a significant bearing on the institution. This phenomenon affects more the schools with a majority of Roma students because, as teachers say, the high share of Roma children lowers the professional attractiveness for teachers.

The consequences of teaching staff turnover are major. On the one hand, the change of teacher brings about psychological disruption in the life of a student, as the latter needs to adjust to a new way of learning, to new approaches and demands. On the other hand, the lack of continuity of teachers implies superficial knowledge and guidance to students, as well as lack of involvement in school development and in the students' sustained progress.

Box 4 stresses a few issues raised by the interviewed teachers and principals with regard to teaching staff turnover.

***Do you have to deal with teaching staff turnover?***

*Yes, every year in our school....our school is a launch pad for fresh graduates. They come, they get tenure, they stay for a year and then they leave. This is why things are not working as they should. Every year, we have new teachers who are not stable. If they stay for two years – that's already a lot. Four or five of us are senior here, so to speak, but the rest just come and go.*

***Who fills in for the leaving teachers?***

*Others come to get tenure. They stay for a year and then they go, too.*

*(...)*

***How is the school advertising its achievements? Do you use promotional means?***

*No, we don't do that. I mean, we don't use such means. It may be due to teachers' coming and going all the time and to the fact that they don't give it all. A teacher who stays with a school for a year is not that interested in doing something for our institution (Arad County, interview with a principal)<sup>92</sup>.*

<sup>92</sup> To protect the respondents' identity and data confidentiality, we chose not to name the institutions or the communities where they are placed, as they are generally small-sized.

*This is one of the weaknesses of our institution. The teachers come mostly from the town of Galați, they have to commute and they usually stay with us for a year, and after that, due to the commuting inconvenience, they try to get closer to their home (Galați county, interview with a school counsellor).*

*Substitute teachers are the ones that come and go most often. But this is not a rule. Tenured teachers who come from farther places give up on us when they find a position closer to their home (Covasna County, interview with a principal).*

*The best [teachers] usually leave our school to get closer to where they live, to find a better job, because you feel stuck here, the standards are very low and a self-respecting teacher wants to work with children who can achieve good results – to send them to Olympiads, etc. Other reasons why they leave are commuting and the issue of related costs reimbursement. These teachers are filled in by non-qualified ones, with less teaching experience (Iași County, interview with a principal).*

*The same, following the courses we had attended, we adopted all sort of active participatory approaches, but there is one problem: half of the project-trained teachers left. And so we have to start over, it's a sort of Sisyphean task, we have to start over, to train people, to show them what to do or what they can do (...) You can't train people very fast. You need time. We have to include them in other training projects, to have them attend demonstrative lessons (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

*For the young people who get tenure in an all-Roma school, the government, the Ministry should grant extra bonuses to make them stay, because they usually don't stay longer than a year. I live in the next locality, that's why I didn't leave, otherwise... (Argeș County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 4. Teaching staff turnover: causes and effects**

#### **d) Lifelong learning**

The Order of the Ministry of Education and Research No 4611 of 2005 regulates the lifelong learning of pre-college education teachers. Annex 2 to this Order sets forth that, every five years, pre-college education teachers shall accumulate a minimum number of 90 credits corresponding to lifelong learning courses.<sup>93</sup> There is no direct correlation between the number of lifelong learning hours and the number of credits as the credits are granted based on the type and category of lifelong learning programmes. The *Guidelines for Pre-college Education Staff Lifelong Learning Provider* points out that 90 credits corresponds on average to a number of 240 lifelong learning hours. In other words, in order to accumulate those 90 credits over five years, every teacher should attend an average number of nearly 48 lifelong learning hours per year.

The data reported by schools show that the number of lifelong learning hours from which the teachers benefited during 2008/09 academic year was 12,921 for 1,828 teachers. **This means on average almost 7 hours per teacher, or nearly 7 times less than the annual average needed to accumulate a minimum number of 90 credits in five years.**

33% of the schools who provided data regarding the number of lifelong learning hours from which the teachers benefited reported that, in 2008/09 school year, their teachers **did not benefit from any lifelong learning hours**, and apart from this, 29% of all schools recorded values below our average of 7 hours. The highest value was 54 lifelong learning hours per teacher, which is also **the only figure that topped (even if by little) the minimum number of hours needed in order to accumulate in five years the number of credits under Order No 4611**. Apart from this, only three other schools got close to the minimum hours needed (over 40 hours of lifelong learning per teacher).

From the tests correlating this with the share of Roma students in schools it results that the low number of lifelong learning hours is not influenced by the percentage of Roma students, as the situation is quite representative for all the schools included in the research.

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<sup>93</sup> Kovacs, M., et al., *Ghidul furnizorului de formare continuă a personalului din învățământul preuniversitar*, București, 2009, p. 63.

It would be interesting to have a look at the teachers' point of view regarding their participation in lifelong learning courses. First of all, shortcomings have been identified with regard to teacher training on how to approach and prevent racism, intolerance and discrimination in schools. We will largely tackle this issue in the section concerning discrimination in schools, but we would like to underline that there is a significant lack of teacher training in this department, where “*open, friendly talks*” or “*mass-media*” cannot replace training on discrimination, a widespread phenomenon in Romania that yet people are poorly aware of.<sup>94</sup>

How were the teachers trained on how to approach intolerance, racism, discrimination?

*They have not really been trained, except for ... they are now. Lately, starting this summer, we've had colleagues who participated in some courses. They attended courses in Predeal, Constanța or Năvodari. It is true that a colleague showed us some materials when she came back ... she was very pleased with the trainers. There are conflicting opinions, but most colleagues don't know much about it and it is clear that no training has been done. At some point, we wanted to partake in such a course at the Teacher Training Centre. We signed up for it but, I don't know, I guess they won't hold it anymore because no one has called us. We would prefer to have someone come to our school to hold such courses, just like in the rural intervention course. Someone would come, everyone would stay for the afternoon and take part in a course that made use of electronic media, as it is normal. We could watch different materials that, I think, had a bigger impact and this can help people put everything into practice without any problems. But if we get 3 pages, 3 posters, 2 CD's, it takes time and they don't have the time to have a look at them (Brașov County, interview with a teacher).*

<sup>94</sup> For more information on this, see also, among other things: European Commission, *Discriminarea în Uniunea Europeană, Fișa de țară România*, 2006, available at <http://www.mmuncii.ro/pub/imageprincipal/images/file/Rapoarte-Studii/200307eurobarometru.pdf>, accessed in May 2009, or The Gallup Organization Romania, *Percepții și atitudini ale populației României față de fenomenul de discriminare*, 2008.

*Through mass-media, teaching clubs, methodical clubs and exchange of opinions between the staff of the institution (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*The teachers were not trained as part of a specific programme, but in high school and at university (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*Through open conversations, friendly talks (Argeş County, interview with a principal).*

*During our teacher internship... no one has trained us in particular on that... We know we have to include all children in education... (Dâmbovița County, interview with a teacher).*

*We didn't take part in any training. And, I don't know about such training on how to approach intolerance, racism and discrimination... I don't know (Dâmbovița County, interview with a teacher).*

*We talked about this issue and the conclusion was drawn that there is no need for discrimination, but the number of teachers who would like such training courses is on the rise, and actually some of us have taken part in such training, me and professor N. included, the others left as we are facing teaching staff turnover. (...) Unfortunately, the teachers who attended such courses stayed with us very little. We have a small number of tenured teachers, I could even say that their number is limited. We need this kind of training to get the new-comers, the new tenured teachers used to the problems our school has (Buzău County, interview with a principal).*

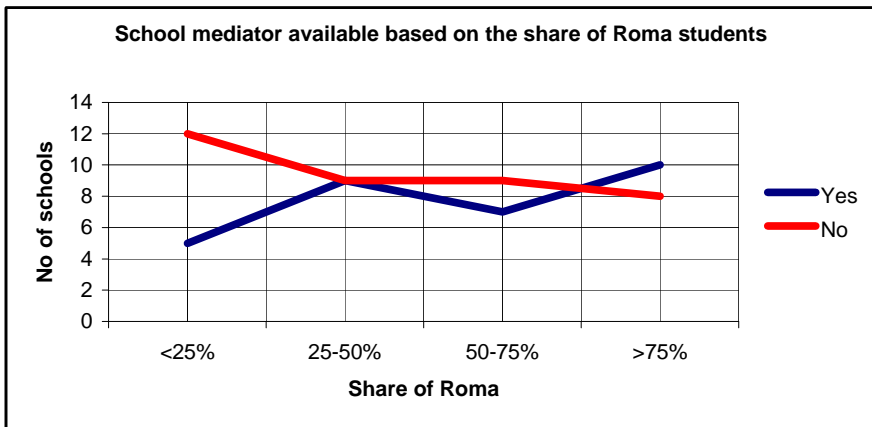
*We took part in courses on social inclusion, through World Bank, as part of an education mentoring course. They were useful to me as a person, but they can't be used in school. (Argeş County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 5. Poor training on discrimination prevention**

### e) Support Staff

Only 30% of schools said they had support staff, such as the school mediator or school counsellor.

As to the school mediator, at the time the data were collected in schools (November-December 2009), there were 31 mediators in the 69 schools that provided data relating to this issue. In other words, almost 55% of the researched schools don't benefit from the services of a school mediator. The school distribution based on the share of Roma children and the presence of a school mediator can be seen in Graph 17, built on the data included in Table XI from Annex 2.

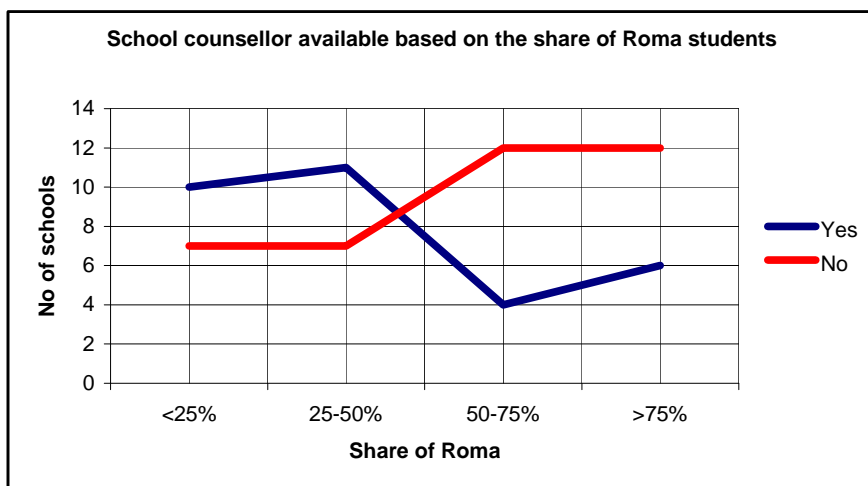


**Graph 17. School mediator available based on the percentage of Roma students**

We notice that, as regards the schools with a Roma student share of 50% to 75%, the number of schools without mediators is slightly bigger than that of schools with a school mediator, and where the share of Roma students goes beyond 50%, the number of schools without a school mediator is quite high (17 schools).

As for school counsellors, they are present in 31 schools, but the distribution of the schools that have a school counsellor based on the Roma student share is different than the one concerning

school mediators. Graph 18 shows this distribution making it once again clear that the schools with a majority of Roma students are less likely to have a school counsellor: 24 of the schools with a Roma student share of over 50% don't have a school counsellor and only 10 have one. For more details, see Table XII in Annex 2, on which Graph 18 was built. However, the statistical tests are not significant with regard to the presence of a school counsellor based on the percentage of Roma students; still more detailed statistical data would be needed to allow conclusive tests.



**Graph 18. School counsellor available based on the percentage of Roma students**

The interviews with teachers show the need for a school counsellor especially in challenging dropout cases. Where the school counsellor is missing, their role is sometimes played by the class teacher or other teachers, but student counselling can be effectively provided only if dedicated financial resources are allocated. Commuting or substitute teachers who leave school after a few hours can hardly get involved in time-consuming unpaid activities other than teaching. Box 6 presents some teacher statements highlighting the need for a permanent school counsellor or a psychologist in every school.

Employing a school counsellor actually implies additional resources being allocated to ensure the students' well-being, beyond the school's traditional role of "teaching" information to students. Or, the schools preponderantly attended by the Roma which are lacking such resources tend to outnumber the schools which do have a school counsellor, **confirming the basic hypothesis that the schools with a high percentage of Roma suffer from limited resources and implicitly from limited education quality more than the other schools.**

Do you have a school counsellor?

*We don't have a school counsellor. This is a Ministry-level policy problem because there are not enough children – as far as I know there is one counsellor for 800 children, or we, in the countryside, we don't meet this requirement, although requests have been made to the Inspectorate ... A counsellor is needed but for now counselling is provided by the class teacher, by the teachers (...)* (Cluj County, interview with a teacher).

*(...) Last year we even had a psychologist in our school. When the psychologist and the school counsellor were in school, they would call them [the student at risk of dropping out] and talk to them. They would really need a psychologist for one-on-one talks, to encourage them and make them think about their problems. I can't call them to my desk and ask them things ... When could I? In between lessons? They can't say what's on their mind that way. But if the school had a psychologist, a school counsellor, they would know what to do. They would talk to them individually and then maybe the children would open up to this stranger and say what their problems are, why they are dropping out ... because they drop out for more than one reason. It may be something going on in class, at home and so on* (Braşov County, interview with a teacher).

**Box 6. The need for a school counsellor**

As a conclusion of the section on the quality of the human resources available in the schools with a great number of Roma students, **the hypothesis that the percentage of Roma students in schools influences the human resources' qualification is**

**statistically confirmed.** The other aspects that we have studied – such as commuting, teaching staff turnover and lifelong learning – are strong signals as regards the Romanian education system as a whole and its shortcomings. As for the employment of a school counsellor, the schools with a high percentage of Roma students tend to benefit less from this position than the schools with smaller numbers of Roma students.

For statistically significant and nationally representative results, research should be conducted to compare a sample of schools with a high percentage of Roma students with a control sample comprising schools without Roma ethnics.

### **3.1.3. Organisational Ethos Elements**

The internal organisation elements of a school reveal its philosophy and guiding principles. The desire to give a voice to students and to equally and democratically represent all ethnicities in the school, both in student boards and in parent committees, is an element of inclusive organisational ethos. Although the numbers don't fully illustrate the manner in which the school involves the members of the Roma minority in its representative structures, statistical data may unfold unequal relations that may be worth research attention in the future.

#### **a) Student Boards**

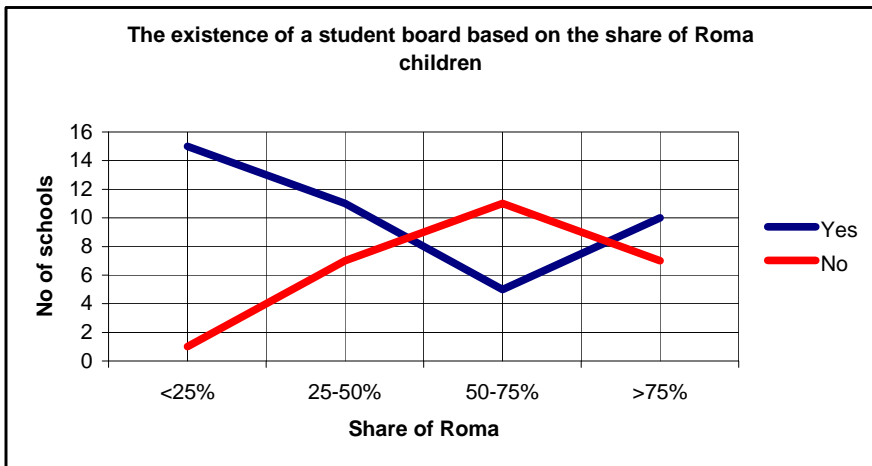
39% of the schools that provided data about the existence of a student board say they don't have such a representative structure. Or, Article 105 of the Organisation and Operating Rules for Pre-College Educational Establishments (hereunder called OORPCEE) sets down that *“in each state-run and private educational establishment, a student board shall be set up, being comprised of the leaders of the students from each class”*<sup>95</sup>. Although the document stays very laconic with regard to the roles and tasks of this board, prescribing only that this board *“works according to its*

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<sup>95</sup> The Ministry of Education and Research, Directorate-General for Pre-College Education, *Organisation and Operating Rules for Pre-College Educational Establishments*, 2005, p. 25, available at [http://www.isj.albanet.ro/documente/137\\_ROFUIP.pdf](http://www.isj.albanet.ro/documente/137_ROFUIP.pdf), accessed in May 2009.

own rules, approved by the management of the educational establishment and which are annexed to the Internal Rules<sup>96</sup>, the idea of giving a voice to students through a representative structure is recognised in the rules, but hardly ever put into practice.

We analysed the correlation between the share of Roma children and the existence of a student board. The school distribution based on the existence of representative structures and the percentage of Roma students is presented in Graph 19, designed on the data from Table XIII, Annex 2.



**Graph 19. The existence of a student board based on the percentage of Roma children**

As concerns the schools with a Roma percentage lower than 25%, we can notice a clear difference between the number of schools that have a student board in place (15) compared to just one school that doesn't. **The higher the percentage of Roma students, the smaller the numerical difference between schools with student boards and schools without such structures, in other words the probability of a having a student board decreases.** The statistical tests presented in Table XIV from Annex 2 confirm the correlation between these two variables.

<sup>96</sup> Idem.

## **b) Roma Representation in Student Boards and Parent Committees**

We also had a glance at Roma students' representation in student boards, where such structures were in place.

In principle, given the 51% share of Roma children in the total student population from the researched schools, if Roma students were treated equally as the other students, student boards should have a pretty similar make-up. However, according to our data, the Roma are present in student boards in a proportion of only 37%, which reveals **their under-representation in student boards. Roma parents are also underrepresented in parent committees**, with only 41% of the committee members being Roma.

The proportionality related to the ethnic distribution of school representative structures – or the lack of it – can reveal interesting organisational ethos issues as regards the respect for the principle of equal opportunities and rights. Also related to the organisational ethos and strongly connected to the idea of promoting proportional ethnic distribution in school structures, are aspects like student segregation and discrimination, which will however be tackled in more detail later on.

The first section of this chapter demonstrated the correlation between the percentage of Roma students in schools and the quality of education inputs, measured with indicators on material resources, human resources and organisational ethos. Box 7 briefly presents the conclusions of this first section.

1. As regards the material and human resources of the researched schools, we can state, **with an over 95% probability**, that:

- as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to have **specialised labs** in place;
- as the share of Roma students increases, the **number of books** in the school library decreases;
- as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to have a **gym or an athletic field**;
- as the share of Roma students increases, **the percentage of qualified teachers drops**;

- both **Roma students** and **parents** are **underrepresented** in the organisational structures of the school.
2. Moreover, we can state **with an 80% probability** that:
- as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to have **computers that students have access to**;
  - as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to have a **library**;
  - as the share of Roma students increases, the students are less likely to be represented in **student boards**.
3. We have noticed some tendencies for which statistical tests are not conclusive, but which could be significant for representative probabilistic samples:
- as the share of Roma students increases, the labs are less likely to be regularly used for the teaching-learning process;
  - as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to have a school counsellor;
  - as the share of Roma students increases, the school is less likely to hold an operating permit;
4. Some tendencies are obvious in all researched schools:
- high share of commuting teachers (60% of the researched schools);
  - the teaching staff turnover is up to 9.2%;
  - in 2008-2009, the teachers benefited, on average, from **7 hours of lifelong learning**, which is **7 times less** than the number of hours needed each year in order to accumulate the credits required by law;
  - **major lacks** as regards training on **combating and preventing discrimination**, racism and intolerance;
  - **lack of attractiveness of the schools with a high share of Roma students**;
5. Finally, the most worrying conclusion is that the **schools with a high share of Roma students tend to accumulate a quality deficit in material resources, human resources and organisational ethos**. This entails an acute **vicious circle**, requiring multiple long-term interventions.

***Box 7. Conclusions of the section on the quality of education in schools with a high percentage of Roma students***

In the next section we will analyse education outputs with the help of statistical and qualitative data.

## 3.2. Education Outputs

Phenomena like dropout, non-enrolment, non-promotion can be considered education output indicators. As we have already stressed<sup>97</sup>, many arguments come to support the idea that what happens in each school greatly determines the learning path of each student, beyond students' individual features and even beyond those related to the social background they come from. Academic success is the responsibility of the school more than it is of the family or the individual. Therefore, the undesirable phenomena that we will analyse hereunder can be regarded as educational process *outcomes*, where education quality plays a major role. Following the analysis from the previous paragraphs which greatly confirmed the hypothesis that the schools with a great percentage of Roma students have a higher quality deficit than the rest of the schools, we can only expect that output indicators (dropout, non-enrolment and non-promotion) follow the same trend. In other words, this section tries to test *the hypothesis that the undesirable phenomena related to education outputs tend to amplify when the percentage of Roma children increases in schools as the logical upshot of the quality deficit in the education inputs.*

### 3.2.1. Dropout

Before looking into the correlation between dropout and the share of Roma children in schools, we need to tackle a series of basic issues.

#### a) Definition of Dropout

First of all, before measuring the scale of the phenomenon, a few methodological observations are needed regarding the **definition of the phenomenon** and the school reporting of dropout figures.

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<sup>97</sup> Chapter 1 provides more details regarding this theory.

Dropout is defined in the Organisation and Operating Rules for Pre-College Educational Establishments (OORPCEE), laying down that a student has dropped out if *“s/he doesn’t attend the day classes in a compulsory education grade level and s/he is at least two years older than the age for the respective grade level”*<sup>98</sup>.

First of all, it is necessary to point at some ambiguity deriving from this definition: what happens to the student who drops out *at the age of the respective grade level*, from the time when s/he effectively drops out to the time s/he can be declared a drop-out, namely *two years after* the event? It is obvious that a student in such a situation should be thought about, integrated in a category that requires special support with the aim of reintegrating them in the education system and closely monitoring them. The way the student in this situation is defined establishes how s/he is reflected in public educational policies. From the actual dropping out to the effective declaration as a drop-out, the student in the hypothetical situation above is considered absent and his/her academic year incomplete. All through this period, there is no specific support for remedying his/her situation and reintegrating him/her into the education system. For two years, the student is thereby in a limbo zone: practically s/he is neither integrated into the education system, nor declared a drop-out yet.

Next, in the effort to clarify potential solutions for dropping out students, OORPCEE prescribes that *“the drop-out may be signed up, on demand, for evening classes, low-attendance or distance learning forms of schooling, for which separate groups are set up”*; paragraph 6 sets forth that *“the youth who are more than four years older than the school age can finish their basic education through second-chance programmes, in line with the methodology of the Ministry of Education and Research.”*<sup>99</sup> In rural areas, evening or low-attendance education completion structures are less numerous, which limits their accessibility and reduces the number of rural students enrolled in forms of remedial education. Second-chance

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<sup>98</sup> The Ministry of Education and Research, Directorate-General for Pre-College Education, *Organisation and Operating Rules for Pre-College Educational Establishments*, Article 68(5), p. 18, available at [http://www.isi.albanet.ro/documente/137\\_ROFUIP.pdf](http://www.isi.albanet.ro/documente/137_ROFUIP.pdf), accessed in May 2009.

<sup>99</sup> Idem.

programmes are limited to those who are *more than four years* older than the typical age for a certain grade level. This methodology features another shortcoming, namely that the student considered a drop-out, therefore the one who exceeds by two years the normal age for the grade level s/he should attend, is not included in the target group of second-chance programmes. S/he needs to wait for two more years until s/he meets the criteria of being at least four years older than the grade level age in order to be enrolled in this type of programmes. Once again we have to deal here with a group of students living in a blur who, unless remedial programmes are run in the community, do not have any institutional access to the education system. The two definitions discussed, that of dropout and that of the second-chance programme target group, can *widen the exclusion* from the education system as it limits the education reintegration opportunities available to two student categories. The first category comprises those who don't go to school but have not yet exceeded by two years the normal age for the last grade level attended and who basically cannot be declared drop-outs.<sup>100</sup> The second category includes those who have been declared drop-outs but don't have the possibility to integrate into a form of remedial schooling and who have not yet exceeded the grade level age by more than four years in order to benefit from second-chance programmes. This entails the alarming hypothesis that a student from a community with limited possibilities of running evening or low-attendance schooling programmes, who has left school, is *in a blur* for four years. The first two years, s/he is not statistically included in a category receiving additional support and cannot benefit from specialised interventions. In the last two years of this period, the student doesn't have the chance to integrate into the education system because s/he doesn't meet the age criteria for accessing second-chance programmes.

Besides the ambiguity generated by the definition of dropout under OORPCEE, it has been noticed that alternative dropout definitions are used in the official reports of the Ministry of

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<sup>100</sup>We can argue that these students are free to go back to school any time they want to as practically they are not considered drop-outs. Without any outside intervention, without help from support staff (school counsellor or psychologist), it is hard to believe that school reintegration will come naturally.

Education. Hence, in the report on the state of education from 2009, the dropout indicator was defined as “*the difference between the number of students enrolled at the beginning of the academic year and the one reported at the end of the same academic year, worked out as the share in the total student population enrolled at the beginning of the year*”.<sup>101</sup> Even if it stands for a more precise and instant manner of identifying dropout, this definition is not free of faults as it overlooks the losses generated by child migration abroad, transfers to other schools or deaths recorded during the academic year. As Romania faces a strong flow of emigration, child migration figures may be significant<sup>102</sup> and may greatly distort dropout statistics.

The fact that school dropout has two different definitions, one in the official reports of the Ministry of Education, and the other in OORPCEE, made us think about the issue of dropout figures as reported by schools. To what definition does school management relate when submitting official statistical dropout data?

With the help of the data collected from the interviews with principals (or with the staff they delegated for the interview), this study shows **the widespread practice of arbitrary dropout reporting by educational establishments**. As found from 81 interviews, the OORPCEE dropout definition was used only in **two cases**, while the definition coined in the report on the state of education was never mentioned. The other schools use very vague definitions or arbitrary indicators (such as the number of absences which varies from one school to another). Box 8 shows some of the answers to the question “***When do you consider that a student has dropped out of school?***”.

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<sup>101</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 66.

<sup>102</sup>Unfortunately, clear statistics are currently unavailable about this category of children, but there are signs that the figures could be significant. The report “*Research Study on the Migration Phenomenon from Oaş*”, conducted in 2005 by the Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, highlights for example that 15% of the respondents in the researched sample declared that at least one child from their family was abroad. More precisely, 170 migrant children were identified in the four communities from the Region of Oaş. Source: Romanian Foundation for Children, Community and Family, *Research Study on the Migration Phenomenon from Oaş*, 2005, p. 35 and p. 42, available at [http://www.studiidecaz.ro/images/attach\\_com/285-151.pdf](http://www.studiidecaz.ro/images/attach_com/285-151.pdf), accessed in May 2009.

*When even their family knows nothing about them anymore. (Botoșani County, interview with a teacher)*

*When s/he accrues unexcused absences over a long period of time. (Sibiu County, interview with a principal)*

*At the end of the semester, when the number of absences exceeds 40. (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher)*

*When the number of absences reaches 70, 80 per year. (Iași County, interview with a principal)*

*If, despite the school mediator's repeated interventions, the student does not come to school at all for more than two weeks in a row. (Covasna County, interview with a principal)*

*When s/he doesn't come to school for a maximum of one month. (Dâmbovița County, interview with a principal)*

*When, during a whole semester, s/he has come to school only 20-25% of the time. (Suceava County, interview with a deputy principal)*

*When a student doesn't come to school for a month or two unless s/he is ill. (Gorj County, interview with a principal)*

*When s/he hasn't come to school for a whole semester and in the first month of the next semester, which means that his/her academic year is incomplete. (Argeș County, interview with a principal)*

*A student has dropped out of school if s/he hasn't come to school for a year. (Prahova County, interview with a principal)*

*After three incomplete academic years or grade retentions. (Iași County, interview with a principal).*

### **Box 8. Dropout definitions used by educational establishments**

The “definitions” above demonstrate that the grace period before declaring the dropout stretches in practice from two weeks to three years, and that the criteria for defining dropout are arbitrary. There is a worrisome lack of coherence in the definitions used in practice by the management of the researched schools. It is very

likely that **the application of these arbitrary definitions invalidate the dropout data reported by the schools, thereby questioning the grounding of many projects and programmes aimed at dropout prevention and mitigation.**

Although aware that the school-reported data fail to reflect the operational definitions of dropout, we will next show the figures deriving from our research, **not necessarily to effectively measure the dropping out phenomenon among Roma children, but to underline qualitative aspects and some tendencies** resulting from statistical data. We reiterate the idea that the data provided here are not nationally representative, but they only describe the situation as seen in the schools running nearby Roma communities with a low socio-economic level.

## **b) School-Reported Dropout Statistics**

According to the statistical analysis of the data furnished by the educational establishments, only two schools declared that they didn't have a single dropout case during 2008/09 academic year. 11 schools declared a dropout rate different than null but under 1%; 15 schools recorded a dropout rate between 1 and 1.99%, and 33 schools reported a rate of over 2% - numbers that top the national average dropout rate. Based on the figures reported by the schools included in our research, the dropout rate is somewhere around **4.3%**, which once again is almost twice as high as the national dropout statistics. If we work out the school-reported dropout rate *only for Roma children*, the number goes up to nearly **6.7%**.

As regards gender-disaggregated dropout figures, the data reported by schools reveal a slight variation to the detriment of girls. Thus, according to these figures, girls' dropout is around 4.4%, while boys' dropout is somewhere around 4.2%. For both genders, the share of dropping out Roma children is far superior to that of non-Roma children: of all the children reported as drop-outs by our schools, 76% are Roma, with an uneven gender distribution. Thus, 79% of the girls who have dropped out and 73% of the boys declared drop-outs are Roma. As for the ratio between the Roma boys and the Roma girls who have dropped out, once again we have

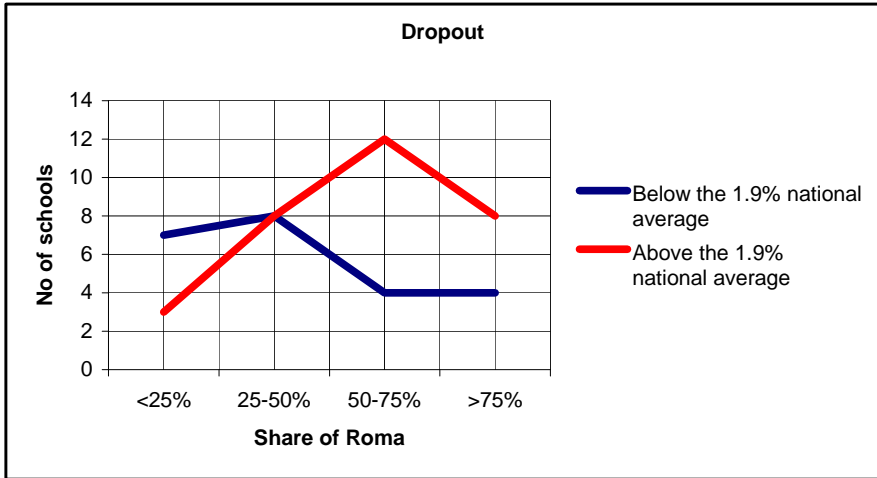
higher values for girls: 54% of Roma drop-outs are girls, as reported by schools.

When analysing the school distribution based on the share of Roma children, we took into account the national average dropout rate for 2008/09, of 1.9%<sup>103</sup>, splitting schools into those with dropout rates below the national average and schools reporting values that are superior to the national average rate. With all the methodological setbacks deriving from the fact that our data are not nationally representative and **their comparability with national data should be regarded with reservations**, we chose to present our research results this way in order to sketch at least roughly the scale of the dropout phenomenon in the researched Roma communities. The major lack of ethnicity-disaggregated data in education can be palliated only by collecting such data at national level and in a representative manner.

Graph 20, built on the data from Table XV in Annex 2, illustrates that Roma shares tend to generally influence the dropout rate. **As regards the schools with a percentage of Roma students of less than 25%, the number of schools reporting a dropout rate above the national average is twice as small as the number of schools which declare dropout values below the national average.** This ratio evens out at the next school category – with a Roma student percentage between 25-50%. For the schools with a Roma student share between 50% and 75%, we see a 50% increase in the number of schools with a dropout rate above the national average. At the same time, the number of schools with a dropout rate below the national average drops by 50%. **Hence, as concerns the schools with Roma student percentages of over 75%, the number of schools recording dropout rates above the national average is twice as high as the number of schools with figures below the national average of 1.9%.**

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<sup>103</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 7.



**Graph 20. Dropout based on the percentage of Roma students**

In other words, **in the schools where Roma students make a majority, the recorded dropout rate tends to be higher than the national average.** Statistical tests are not conclusive as regards the correlation of dropout with the share of Roma students, while the problems with defining the concept and reporting dropout figures by schools invalidate the test results from the start. Therefore, we think rigorous dropout-related data collection is needed before statistically testing the correlation between this phenomenon and the percentage of Roma students in schools.

In the light of the theory that the institution of school bears the greatest responsibility for student dropout, we can link the increased dropping out tendency in the schools preponderantly attended by Roma children to the quality deficit encountered in these schools in terms of material and human resources. Of course, the different types of quality deficits do influence each other. Poor material resources may influence the qualified teachers' decision to get involved in that school, and the teachers' poor involvement or their qualification and lifelong learning deficit definitely impacts education quality and consequently students' decision to leave school.

Map 1 shows the figures from each county included in the research; black figures stand for the number of schools included in the research<sup>104</sup>, and the percentages for the average dropout rate reported by these schools. Red counties are **priority areas for intervention** to prevent and fight school dropout in the schools with a significant percentage of Roma students, as the average worked out for our researched schools is higher than the national statistics reported by the Ministry of Education for 2008/09 school year.<sup>105</sup> Our data show that the county with the highest dropout rate (*worked out based only on the researched schools*) is Braşov, with 10%, which is over 5 times higher than the national average, according to official numbers. The county with the lowest dropout rate is Cluj, with 0.25% - this is actually the only county with an average dropout rate below 1%.

The County of Cluj is quite an interesting case because it shows a number of strengths regarding the support lent to Roma children's education. First of all, in this county, we find the only institution certified to train school mediators ("Gheorghe Lazăr" National Pedagogical College, Cluj-Napoca), which allowed for the training of a great number of local human resources to fill in these positions and to be employed as mediators across the county.<sup>106</sup> Considering collateral training costs, such as travel and accommodation, it is very likely that people from the County of Cluj were the first to be trained as school mediators. Second of all, the Roma civil society in this region is quite well-established (The Resource Centre for Roma Communities, Wasdass Foundation, The Association for Roma Women's Emancipation, to name a few) and active in community development and education.<sup>107</sup> Therefore, the County of Cluj benefits from multiple interventions in education, as

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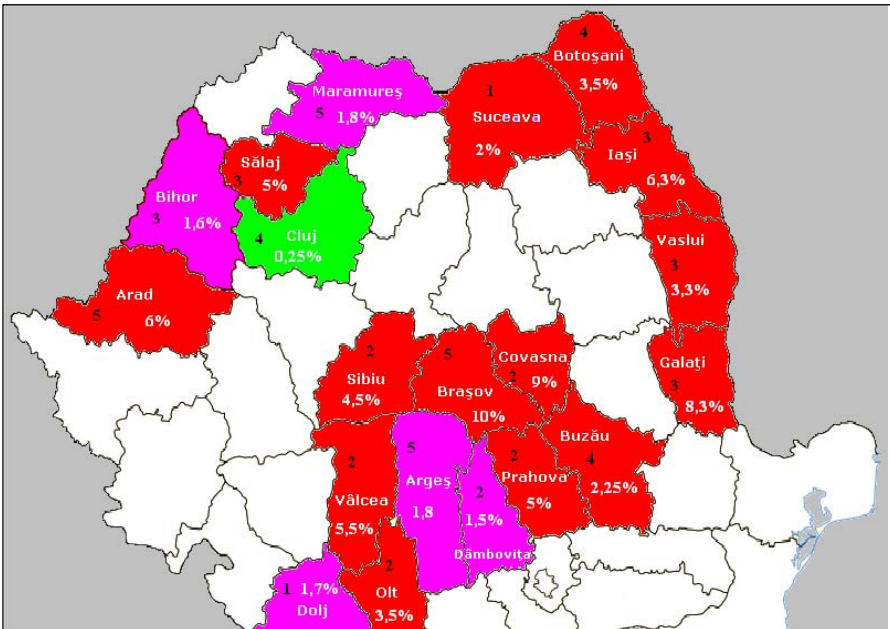
<sup>104</sup>Some schools were left out of the statistical data as the number of identified errors in the questionnaires was higher than the allowed threshold.

<sup>105</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 66.

<sup>106</sup>At the time of data collection, out of the 22 counties we had data from, the County of Cluj had the highest number of employed school mediators, i.e. 18 mediators. To make a comparison, the second-ranked county in terms of employed school mediators, Dolj, had 12 hired mediators.

<sup>107</sup>The Resource Centre for Roma Communities is running education programmes such as "Scholarships for Roma High School Students", "Roma Teachers – A Success Factor for Roma Students' Education", "Professional Development for Roma Teachers". For more details about these programmes log on to <http://www.romacenter.ro/programa/>, accessed in April 2010.

well as from increased resources, which, very likely, gives this county the upper hand over other regions in the country. It would be interesting to study in the future the local impact of educational interventions for Roma, as compared to other counties. But here, we go no further than the results reached based on the data gathered from the researched schools, which are far from being representative at county or national levels.



**Map 1. Dropout map based on the figures reported by the researched schools**

**Legend:**

- County with average dropout rate of over 2%
- County with average dropout rate between 1-2%
- County with average dropout rate below 1%

### c) Statistics from the Questionnaires Applied to Children

Considering the problems with defining school dropout and reporting this phenomenon by the schools included in our research, we believe that a more precise source of the dropout data is represented by the questionnaires applied to children. Hence, out of 763 validated questionnaires, 69 come from children who *attended school in the previous years, but not anymore*. This is the definition we have coined for dropout for the purpose of this research. This definition gets round the *time* issue – the moment when the school declares the dropout – and encompasses the children that have attended school in the previous years. From our point of view, this definition is the closest to the reality that needs to be measured in order to draw up dropout prevention and remedial interventions, beyond any other administrative criteria for defining the phenomenon. The figures above represent **9%** of the total interviewed children.

Hence, we notice that **the school-reported Roma dropout rate (6.7%) is smaller than the 9% dropout rate deriving from the questionnaires applied to Roma children**. This difference may be explained, at least in part, by the above-mentioned dropout definition and reporting issues.

Once again, we have chosen to present official dropout data as the point of departure for underlining tendencies in the Roma communities selected for our research.

	Overall dropout rate <sup>108</sup>
<b>Rural</b>	2.2%
<b>Urban</b>	1.7%
<b>Girls</b>	1.7%
<b>Boys</b>	2.2%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1.9%</b>

**Table 5a. Dropout rate: national official data**

<sup>108</sup> According to the most recent data of the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 66.

Table 5a presents the figures reported by the Ministry of Education for 2008/09 academic year, and from this table we can identify the overall tendency of a higher dropout rate in rural areas than in urban areas, and also higher for boys than for girls.

Our research revealed the same tendencies upon analysing the questionnaires applied to school-aged children. Our data are presented in table 5b.

	Dropout rate in <b>Roma</b> as derived from this research
<b>Rural</b>	9.2%
<b>Urban</b>	8.6%
<b>Girls</b>	7.4%
<b>Boys</b>	10.6%
<b>Total</b>	<b>9%</b>

**Table 5b. Dropout rate: research results**

Thus, our data show the same tendencies as portrayed by official figures. The research therefore confirms the tendencies of urban/rural and male/female polarisations, with a smaller difference between urban and rural areas and a more significant male/female polarisation to the detriment of boys. In other words, our data confirm that **the dropout rate is higher in rural than in urban areas. Also, the dropout phenomenon affects boys more than girls.**

The overall figures of our analysis show a dropout rate 4.7 times higher than the national rate. Previous research noted that Roma dropout was 6-7 times higher than in the majority population<sup>109</sup>. So, our figures may prove **a decreasing tendency of the dropout rate** in Roma, although we have to keep in mind that the data collected in this research are not nationally representative.

<sup>109</sup>Hatos, A., *Sociologia educației*, Editura Polirom, Iași, 2006, p. 135.

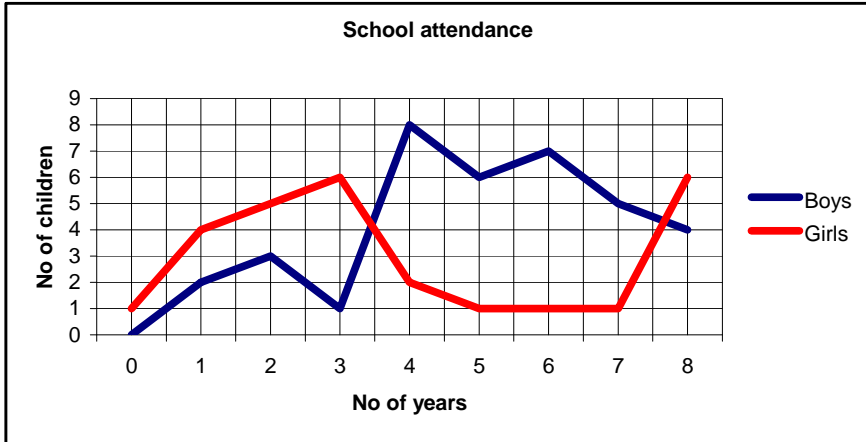
Still, we have to repeat that, besides the fact that our sample is not nationally representative, our data talk about the situation of Roma communities with low socio-economic levels. Consequently, **our study scans Roma participation in education in the most disadvantaged settings**. In the light of this, the research results are even more surprising as we would have expected that the dropout rate in these communities be much higher than the estimates considering that the figures are not weighted on the presence in the sample of a comparative number of communities with a higher socio-economic level and implicitly with a higher school participation rate. Because of this, we can say that **Roma dropout may have indeed known a decrease in the last few years**, but for this hypothesis to check out, data first need to be collected based on a clear and unequivocal dropout definition and from a national representative sample. Therefore, we stay reserved with regard to the optimistic statement that Roma dropout is decreasing, and we reiterate that comprehensive quantitative research on this phenomenon is needed.

Another hypothesis, which however we cannot test in this research, is that the positive trend of decreasing dropout is due, among other things, to the school mediator's intervention in the Roma communities with a high risk of non-participation in education. The interviews with school mediators show indeed a decreasing tendency for this phenomenon in the last few years as a consequence of their presence and work. The next chapter will focus more on school mediators' impact on Roma children's education.

Another school participation indicator is **the average school attendance rate before leaving school**. In the case of dropping out Roma children, this is of **4.6 years**, with a gender distribution as seen on Graph 21. Disaggregated on gender, the average school attendance rate for dropping out **girls** is of **3.9 years**, and **5 years** for **boys**.

These data show that boys tend to drop out especially during lower secondary school, and girls tend to leave school mainly before they finish primary school. The girls' tendency to drop out in lower secondary school decreases only to rise again at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade. In other words, **the critical period where dropout**

prevention and combating measures should intensify for girls is the first 4 grades and the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and upper secondary school for boys.



*Graph 21. School attendance rate with gender-disaggregated data*

#### d) Dropout Determinants: Myths and Realities

We will next focus on the **dropout determinants** in the studied population. Hence, the interviews with Roma drop-outs show that the **main reason for dropping out had to do with financial shortcomings** (24%), followed by **work or looking after younger siblings** (20%), which are also linked to financial struggle. 16% of drop-outs had achieved **unsatisfactory results** (grade retention, multiple retakes) in the years before dropping out, which made them leave school, and 12% said they didn't want to go to school anymore, but didn't give any reasons for it<sup>110</sup>. 9% of children said that dropping out was their parents' choice, and in 7% of the cases,

<sup>110</sup>Child psychology considerations that we shall not insist on here make us look at this answer with reservations: the statement that the child simply didn't want to go to school anymore hides deeper causes that the child could not formulate before a stranger interviewing him/her. It is also very likely that the declared reluctance to attend school is a sign of psychological discomfort that the child feels when at school and which triggers his/her refusal to attend it. In the future, more detailed interviews should be applied to unveil the deep causes of the refusal to participate in school.

the children could not attend school for health reasons (disabilities, chronic or contagious diseases). Finally, 4% of children said they had left school because of great distance and travel issues, while 7% chose “other reasons” for an answer.

Box 9 gathers a few statements from school mediators explaining dropping out mechanisms in Roma children. We notice how often poverty and financial shortcomings pop up as the root cause.

What are the main reasons for dropping out of school?

*I would say poverty, lack of money, family's financial shortcomings, the lacks that Roma ethnics face. Most of them live on Law 416 welfare which does not cover their basic needs. School demands are very high – clothes, notebooks – as we all know. They can't handle it with the welfare money and children's state benefits. Some families are very large, with 6-7 children, and 4-5 of them go to school and 2 to kindergarten. I have a family that has 14 children and they live on Law 416 welfare and they can hardly make ends meet (Galați County, interview with a school mediator).*

*The distance is not that long, but they are very poor, they have one set of inappropriate clothes; if they are caught by the rain, the next day they don't have anything to wear for school, plus it gets cold in winter. Another reason: the road traffic is wild and the parents are afraid to let their children come to school; a school bus would solve maybe 50% of the absenteeism problem. This is what I believe and I think that parents and teachers alike, most of them, would tell you the same thing if you asked them. School bus transportation would boost school attendance (Suceava County, interview with a school mediator).*

*School transportation, the financial situation – the parents are leaving for other parts of the country during the berry and mushroom picking season (...) and then they have to leave their children at home, or they take some of them with them, and then absenteeism rates go up in school. For this reason, they lose out on schooling and maybe go as far as dropping out. They don't see the importance of education, most of them see only their importance and I've been*

*through that myself: when I was going to school I realised that I had no future and that's when I started to live in the present. I said to myself that I would better work and have something to eat. I'm telling you, I wouldn't have finished high school if I hadn't been motivated. I was hired as a mediator and forced to continue my studies. I wouldn't have done that unless I hadn't been hired (...) I knew there was nothing waiting for me, especially that we are Roma, no one hires a Roma. There are educated Romanians who don't have a job. Projects should be run, just like they hired me. At the end of these courses, they should get a job and that would motivate them to go to school. Second of all, social projects should be carried out, like the school in Rădăuți, that gives them a meal, they have a playground, they get homework help after school. Because parents are illiterate, they don't help them with homework, they don't understand the importance of education. Parents should be educated too, to see that they have achieved something in the end. After all, I think poverty is the root cause of absenteeism. (Suceava County, interview with a school mediator).*

What should be done to keep Roma children in school?

*To run programmes offering them ... like in the past, a meal, like it used to be during the PHARE project, a hot meal. Many children come without pocket money and I don't think a waffle and some melted cheese can keep them full for a whole school day (Galați County, interview with a school mediator).*

*Considering their financial situation, NGO's and charities should focus more on improving it: if this were improved, I think their education would also improve. This is in my opinion the biggest problem: parents' financial situation and I think more social projects are needed at community level. In the communities where there are just a few Roma, it is easier; where there are many, it gets harder. When a few Roma children are skipping school, you can handle it easier, but when most of them are missing it is more difficult. More social projects should be run. That would improve the dropout situation and would motivate them to come to school (Suceava County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 9. Root causes of dropping out in Roma children**

Interesting enough, there is a low percentage of early marriages among the children who dropped out in 2008-2009. Thus, out of 69 children, only one said s/he had dropped out of school to get married. The questionnaires applied to parents feature 11 cases<sup>111</sup> of early marriages among school-aged children, accounting for 4% of the causes reported by parents for their children's non-participation in school. In the light of these data, **it is possible that the early marriage phenomenon among Roma children be overrated.** Regional statistics indicate, for example, that in the County of Mehedinți, in 2006/07 academic year, the share of Roma children who dropped out because of an early marriage was of only 3%.<sup>112</sup> Compared with the percentage of students who had to leave school because of their precarious material situation – according to the same statistics – (71%), this percentage is less significant. **Still, it is interesting that the idea of an early marriage as the root cause of dropping out for Roma is quite widespread and persistent, despite the fact that the phenomenon shows statistically insignificant figures.** The fact that a less statistically significant factor is more visible and more often quoted than the objective root cause of Roma children's non-participation in education (which is poverty) is typical for ethnic stereotype building mechanisms. Based on the data in this research, supported by the above-mentioned official statistics, the idea of Roma early marriages may very well be a part of a complex stereotype placing the Roma in a second-class blameable cultural alterity. In a society where the media portray the Roma in a negative and distorted manner, it is very possible that the cultural traits specific to this minority and considered negative come out stronger than the objective reality. Even among teachers, who should know better the realities of the communities where they work, the early marriage cause pops up again and again when providing an explanation for dropout. One of the respondents talks, for example, about *an early marriage case* which happened “*years ago*”, proving that this cause is however less widespread than what it is said to be. Box 10 gives some explanations for the dropout phenomenon offered

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<sup>111</sup>The difference between the cases deriving from the questionnaires applied to children and the cases reported by the parents may also be due to the fact that married children may have been more reluctant to answering to a questionnaire regarding school participation.

<sup>112</sup>Source: Mehedinți County School Inspectorate, <http://www.calificativ.ro/index.php?module=news&ida=1985&tpl=print>, accessed in May 2009.

by the interviewed principals and teachers, who insistently focus on the role of early marriage. However, we have spotted a clear tendency to recurrently highlight early marriage even when it is mentioned that this is not the root cause for dropping out, as seen for example in the first statement.

***In some cases** they leave school because they are getting married prematurely, so to speak, **but most of the time they drop out for economic reasons.** (Arad County, interview with a principal)*

*There are many girls who, at the age of 12-13, are getting married or we also have cases of boys who just don't want to come to school. (Arad County, interview with a principal)*

*I think we are not succeeding in attracting them towards school and maybe they feel isolated, humiliated, the underdog, they can't cope with it, so they drop out... I think this is also psychological, that's what I think. And most of them end up dropping out ... and I don't know, I think there are no sex education lessons, this is my biggest regret, so they get pregnant ... and the problem is ... for example, I am now working with the children of my students, which is not normal...in 14 years. So, if at 12-13 years old, you have a child and you are biologically mature, but you are not psychologically mature, then your child too ... how can you raise a child when you are a child yourself?*

*I can't go and hold sex education classes in school, I do it, but at a level ... I don't feel up to it...*

*If a doctor or a nurse came ... they would speak a different language and they are not from school. I think the schoolteacher should mind his/her own business, I mean you tell things in a general manner ... so here's the problem ... and I think many drop out because of this, especially girls, and the boys, I don't know ... later, **if they fail the grade they automatically drop out because their father takes them to work** and so on. (Braşov County, interview with a teacher)*

*We call the parents to school, the class teacher first takes note of the problem and talks to the students if they know their situation.*

*They may skip school because they are sick, or because – there was **a case years ago** of a girl who got married, she got engaged. We informed the Child Protection about the situation and then it was clearly a drop-out case and we couldn't intervene anymore because the parents had willingly given her in marriage in another location, so we couldn't do anything anymore. (Suceava County, interview with a principal)*

**Box 10. The dominant place of early marriage in teachers' explanations for the dropout phenomenon**

Going back to the reasons for dropping out invoked by children, the number one factor, with **44% of all answers, is represented by economic challenges**, which was expected considering the profile of the communities where the research was carried out. **Hence, the economic situation of many Roma communities is a structural obstacle to children's effective school participation.** Access to education is guaranteed by law, but the principle of equal opportunities needs to be supported and accompanied by social protection measures, such as social scholarships for students from underprivileged families that cannot cope with the collateral costs of education. **Otherwise, the access to education guaranteed by law does not benefit from a real backup as practice seems to deny the rights granted on paper.**

Our data show **an acute insufficiency of social scholarships for students from poor families.** Thus, the school-reported data show that 39% of Roma children have both parents unemployed, but only **14% of all Roma children benefit from social scholarships.** If to the high percentage of families with both parents unemployed we add those 9% of Roma students from single-parent families, the picture becomes even more disturbing: **48% of all Roma children come from poor families. The number of Roma children in precarious situations is 3.4 times higher than the number of social scholarships granted.**

The second-ranked reason for dropping out is **students' poor attainment, which can push them towards leaving school**, as seen in 16% of all answers. The theory regarding the individual

determinants of dropout highlights strong correlations between students' school disengagement leading to dropout, on the one hand, and factors such as the satisfaction with their own results and with school, the support students feel they are getting in school, participation in structured extracurricular activities and the type of relationships they have with teachers and classmates, on the other hand. In addition, in the last decade, sociological studies have shifted from explanations placing dropout and school failure on individual factors or family to the idea that school dropout is directly influenced by the school itself and by school ethos-based practices.

In order to present the data on students' perception of their own results and the satisfaction with their results of those around them, in Table 3 we synthesised the answers to the questions:

- (1) *Are you pleased with your school results?*
- (2) *How about your parents?*
- (3) *How about your schoolteacher/teachers?*

We should mention that these data indicate a *subjective* perception of their own results and of the satisfaction of those around them, and not that those results are good or bad. We decided not to focus on this aspect at all for reasons that have already been mentioned in Chapter 1.<sup>113</sup>

	Yes	No
Are you pleased with your school results?	86%	14%
How about your parents?	74%	26%
How about your schoolteacher/teachers?	69%	31%

**Table 6. Declared satisfaction with school results**

We notice that the great majority of students are pleased with their own school results, but also that parents' satisfaction as perceived by the children tends to be lower to some extent, while the teachers' to a greater extent. Thus, almost a third of the students think that their teachers are not pleased with their school results. More than half of these students feel a discrepancy between their self-perception and the teachers' satisfaction with their school

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<sup>113</sup>See p. 14.

results. In other words, even if they are pleased with their own academic results, the students feel that their teachers or schoolteachers are not as satisfied.

We tested the hypotheses according to which:

- the students who are not satisfied with their own results tend to appreciate school less than those who are satisfied with their school results;
- the students who feel their parents or teachers have a negative attitude towards their results tend to appreciate school less than those who feel their parents and teachers are satisfied with their school results; in addition, parents' positive attitude can help decrease absenteeism;
- the students who perceive teachers' behaviour as negative tend to appreciate school less than those who perceive teachers' behaviour as positive; in addition, teachers' positive attitude can help decrease absenteeism;
- the students who don't like their classmates' behaviour tend to appreciate school less than those who perceive classmates' behaviour as positive; in addition, classmates' behaviour perceived as friendly can help decrease absenteeism;
- the students who perceive the teachers' attitude towards their school results as negative tend to appreciate school less than those who perceive the teachers' satisfaction with their school results; in addition, teachers' positive attitude can help decrease absenteeism.

Statistical tests show a strong correlation between variables, thereby confirming the hypotheses with a 99% probability. Still, teacher satisfaction with students' academic results does not seem to significantly influence students' school appreciation. The same way, the satisfaction with their own results does not significantly influence absenteeism (see Tables XVI, XVIII and XIX in Annex 2).

From the confirmed hypotheses it strongly results that a friendly environment favours school appreciation and has a positive influence on absenteeism. The teaching approach that encourages and values the child rarely comes out of the interviews with teachers. Only one teacher talks about child and parent valuing practices to enhance their involvement in school:

*I was terrified to hear my 5<sup>th</sup> grade students, coming from other schoolteachers...say “I’m not doing it right, mine is ugly, it’s not pretty”... It doesn’t matter ... let’s have it as it is and change it a bit. They would tear up the pages, it was like they were tearing up my soul. It was so hard for me to convince them that “You did a wonderful thing”, this means that maybe that child was not encouraged ... “What you did was great”. Not everyone is born an artist or a scientist, but you have to encourage them and it matters a lot if you tell them ...”Bravo! Good job! You are fantastic”.*

(...)

*I try not to nominate anyone in particular to answer my questions in class when I call them to parent-teacher conferences or I do lesson observation. Everyone sits near their child. I do my best to make the child who doesn’t know something and lagging behind on the alphabet answer to oral questions based on a text. S/he answers in the first part of the lesson, and so it is not obvious that s/he can’t read or write. S/he answers orally to the questions, then the others read the lesson and practically s/he has taken part in the lesson and that parent leaves happy and involved because you didn’t humiliate them or their child which must hurt, to say to them “Your child is stupid”... S/he may be stupid, disabled or bad in school ... but the parent doesn’t know it, and if you tell them that, I think that is very painful. So I don’t tell them ... it’s not a problem for me (Braşov County, interview with a teacher).*

### **Box 11. Teachers valuing students**

#### **e) Roma Parent Participation in Children’s Education**

We wanted to pay special attention to the idea that “Roma parents don’t send their children to school”. The results of the questionnaires applied to children show that almost 90% of parents come to school, take an interest in their children’s schoolwork and encourage them to study harder. From the answers to the question “Do your parents encourage you to study harder?” it results that **the parents who encourage their children to study are almost ten times more numerous than those who don’t.**

On the other hand, 9% of children say the decision to leave school was their parents'. Some parents' lack of interest in education also stands out from the interviews with teachers, whilst school mediators also talked about this in their interviews. **Still, just like for early marriages, the parents' lack of interest in their child's education seems to be overrated.**

Moreover, the questionnaires applied to children show that 26% of parents or other relatives often come to school to talk to teachers, 63% come "every now and then", and only 11% never visit school. The interest in the child's academic progress is strongly linked to parents' literacy: hence, among illiterate parents, those who never go to school are five times more numerous than those with a higher degree of literacy, where the proportion is reversed. In their case, the parents who often come to school are five times more numerous than those who never come. Despite this behaviour, it results that **among illiterate parents too there are three times more parents who show a positive attitude towards education**, encouraging children to study harder. Still, among the parents with a higher degree of literacy, this ratio is 13 to 1 in favour of those who encourage children to do better in school. The attitude towards learning is also linked to the living area: 95% of parents from urban areas encourage their children to study harder, while the percentage drops to 90% in rural areas. These results are not surprising, confirming that educational values are passed on from one generation to another, children's behaviour tending to perpetuate the parents', at least to some extent.

The results show the **high number of parents who encourage their children to improve their academic achievement (91% of parents)** compared to only 9% of parents who don't lend support to their child's school attainment. Correlated with the data showing that only 11% of Roma parents never go to school, **these results strongly invalidate the idea that most Roma parents are not interested in their child's education.** Once again, we have to deal with a stronger visibility of a rare negative phenomenon (parents' lack of interest in their child's education) compared to very frequent positive trends which fit perfectly into cultural norms and so they are not visible or highlighted in the majority population's speech on Roma.

At this level, we identified the poor communication between school and parents, and the lack of a shared language between teachers and some parents who, unfamiliar with the school setting, don't always understand how they could get involved in school activities. The same way, the teachers, often ignoring the everyday life of many Roma families, have trouble understanding some parents' behaviours.

*I don't know ... I would like to see them finish school or their studies, but it's hard for me to believe that because parents are a role model to us and implicitly to them too. When I came here at the kindergarten at the beginning of the academic year, **the parents came to sign up their children but they didn't know how to write the applications and told me they had no education; most of them had barely had four years of school and they said they wanted their children to have an education, that's why they wanted to enrol them ...** I was thinking 'Oh, great... that means that they will be on the right track'. Nothing from what parents told me became reality. They didn't even come to parent-teacher conferences...(...). We had courtyard cleaning activities at our kindergarten but they didn't get involved (Arad County, interview with a kindergarten teacher).*

*As far as this is concerned, I couldn't say that I am pleased with Roma parent participation. Some of them who truly get involved do come and follow-up the student to see how s/he is doing, his/her grades, but others hardly ever come. There are three categories: some who get involved a great deal, some who are involved to some extent, and others at all. So 2/3 don't have a very good relationship with school. I mean, they are not involved. Of course, if we go deeper into this we realize they have a challenging financial situation back home. They are people with life issues. They go to work and of course they don't give up work to come to school. It's pretty hard, isn't it? If we were to be in their shoes (Galați County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 12. Teachers' perspective on parent participation in child's school education**

An entire set of questions asked to parents tried to survey their attitudes towards education. Thus, different questions were posed to parents who had children in school and to those who didn't<sup>114</sup>. Tables 7a and 7b show the scores drawn from the answers to the questions asked to parents. The attitudes and values regarding education expressed by parents with **schooled** children are over 90% positive at all items. We notice that the scores to the item "*I take part in my children's school life*" (90% - Yes) come to confirm the data from previous paragraphs which were gathered from children's questionnaires, according to which roughly 90% of parents take an interest in their child's schoolwork. The only item with a more moderate score is "*I am pleased with my children's school*", where only 86% of respondents said "Yes", while 11% said they were not pleased.

For parents of <b>SCHOOLED</b> children			
Items	Yes (%)	No (%)	I don't know (%)
<i>Education is important.</i>	98	1	1
<i>It is worth making sacrifices for our children to go to school.</i>	97	1	2
<i>The children want to go to school.</i>	95	4	1
<i>My children will do better in life if they go to school.</i>	94	1	5
<i>I take part in my children's school life.</i>	90	9	1
<i>I am interested in my children's school results.</i>	95	3	2
<i>School gets children ready for life.</i>	92	3	5
<i>I am pleased with my children's school.</i>	86	11	3

**Table 7a. Scores to the questions regarding the attitude towards education of parents of ENROLLED children**

<sup>114</sup>Both sets of questions were asked to parents of children from both categories.

For parents of UNSCHOOLED children			
Items	Yes (%)	No (%)	I don't know (%)
<i>Education is important.</i>	92	3	5
<i>We can barely afford it for our children to go to school.</i>	85	11	4
<i>The children want to go to school.</i>	64	28	8
<i>My children will do better in life if they go to school.</i>	83	12	5
<i>If I had gone to school, my children would go to school now.</i>	65	10	25
<i>The education we give our children is enough.</i>	31	52	17
<i>School gets children ready for life.</i>	81	6	13
<i>I want to send my children to school.</i>	90	4	6

**Table 7b. Scores to the questions regarding the attitude towards education of parents of children NOT ENROLLED**

We got interesting scores from parents of children not enrolled: 90% of parents say they want to send their children to school, 81% think that school gets children ready for life, and 83% agree that their children would do better in life if they went to school. At the same time, 52% of respondents *disagree* that home education is enough for their children. From all these scores we get the idea that the parents of children not enrolled show positive attitudes towards education, as supported by the share of 92% of those who say “*Education is important*”. Obviously, the social desirability bias can drastically impact the scores to these two series of items. We believe it is worth underlining that **these data come to support our hypothesis that the idea that most Roma parents have negative attitudes towards education has more to do with negative stereotypes built for the Roma minority than with the real attitude of Roma towards education.**

In Box 13, we synthesised some answers from the interviews with teachers in support of our hypothesis.

*Our school mediator is a school and community representative who is close to them, at least to the little ones in kindergarten. Parents come to school every day to bring their children, they talk and ask questions to schoolteachers about what is going on, if there are any problems and the same happens in the other classes. Every day there are at least 10-15 parents in the courtyard with questions, clarifications and so on that we have to handle (Galați County, interview with a principal).*

*Just like the other parents, they are helpful, interested in their children's progress. In our school shows, they very often play the leading parts if the child has a good diction, personality, if s/he can act and is prepared for that role, we never made... s/he is Roma so s/he won't be able to get the lead role, for example, and then the Roma parent follows the same steps as any other parent. They get the costume, they get interested, they do everything it takes for their child to be just like the other children or even to stand out of the crowd (Cluj County, interview with a principal).*

*If you talk about parents, they are generally involved in the activities in which the other parents from school are involved. They take part in extracurricular activities, they are invited to... (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*Parents attend extracurricular activities, if we plan school shows for example, to support their children. Generally, Roma and Romanian parents show up. Or, at teacher-parent conferences, of course, all of them have to come. At school shows or any other activities, we generally invite the parents if it is the case (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*I think that if they are involved, they will come... you may have to push them a little bit to make them fit in or they tend to isolate, to sit in a corner, but if you, as a teacher, plan everything right and involve them, they get equal rights and not discrimination (...). If you win them over and you involve them, you have no problems, they come and do what they have to... I for one don't have problems ... (Brașov County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 13. Roma parent participation in children's education**

The last quote reveals some Roma parents' shyness to get involved in their children's school life. This tendency "*to isolate*", to come and sit "*in a corner*" may be a sign of the experience these parents went through during their own school years, which left deep marks and which they find difficult to cut off from even as adults. We may assume that, to low-education parents who left school early, school reminds them of less positive experiences. If today Roma children are marginalized, we can guess that their parents too were given the same treatment, which probably made them lose confidence in the education system.

Going back to the parents' attitude towards education, it is interesting that only 64% of parents of children not enrolled said 'Yes' to the item "*The children want to go to school*". Going back to the reasons for dropping out named by children, some children do feel a sort of psychological reluctance to reintegrate into school, namely 28% of them (which is identical to the percentage for the parent questionnaire item "*Children don't want to go to school*").

Another low score went to the item "*If I had gone to school, my children would go to school now*", namely 65% of affirmative answers, pointing to the fact that nearly one third of respondents fails to make the connection between their own school experience and its impact on their children's.

## f) School Practices to Prevent and Fight Dropout

One last aspect that we want to highlight here is dropout prevention and fight **as resulting from the practice of the researched educational establishments.**

The problem of defining dropout presented at the beginning of this section has a major implication for educational practices because the way in which dropout is defined shapes **prevention strategies** against this undesirable phenomenon.

The specialised literature points to the idea, mentioned in Chapter 1, that school dropout is only the tip of the iceberg, the end of a journey that the student perceives as personal failure, as inadequacy to the outer social environment; dropout is the final event that marks the student's gradual detachment from the school environment to the point where lack of motivation reaches a critical

level and the student makes the decision to leave school.<sup>115</sup> Thus, a strategy to effectively prevent dropout should focus on identifying students at risk **long before the actual school leaving**.

The answers to the question ***“What actions does the school take when a student is at risk of dropping out?”*** have revealed first of all the fact that **no effective prevention strategy is in place** as regards this phenomenon and that when the school takes action, it usually happens **after** the child has left school, when the psychological damages are already very deep and the situation is not easy to reverse.

In the impact assessment of the PHARE programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” we find that 88.6% of the interviewed teachers believe that dropout prevention has improved in schools following the programme.<sup>116</sup> None of the interviews from our research **has pointed to coherent dropout prevention and fight, built on the thorough understanding of the phenomenon**. Methodologically speaking, a question like the one from the PHARE Programme impact assessment (*“Do you think that the way in which your school is trying to prevent dropout has improved, is the same or has worsened?”*) has more chances to get an answer distorted by social desirability bias than the question ***“What actions does your institution take to prevent and fight school dropout?”*** which we included in this research. In other words, it is much easier for a respondent to answer “yes” or “no” than to detail *the exact actions* taken in specific cases.

Going back to the strategies aimed at preventing and fighting dropout, **we are concerned about the use of coercive measures as a dropout prevention strategy**, as the police is often called upon. Box 14 lists some answers received from the interviewed principals and teachers.

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<sup>115</sup>In this respect, see Hatos, A., Riscul abandonului școlar la adolescenții din școlile urbane: între constrângeri structurale și climat organizațional, *Analele Institutului de Istorie „G. Bariț” din Cluj Napoca*, Series Humanistica, Tome VI, 2008, p. 177-192, p. 177.

<sup>116</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Impact Assessment*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 101.

*Special measures..... **calling the police** and maybe getting their support. And, not long ago, my colleagues and I have talked about the fact that if we don't manage to cut down absenteeism , we will seek support from the mayoralty and the police, to see what can be done (Arad County, interview with a principal).*

***We call the police**, the local authorities; we cooperate in the attempt to bring them back to school or to refer them to special low-attendance schools (Argeş County, interview with a principal).*

*We talk to parents...we go to their home, talk to their parents... **The local authorities step in** if we, the teachers, don't manage to convince them... You know, they get really involved...**sometimes, we scare them off with a fine...** (Dâmbovița County, interview with a principal).*

*The parents are informed **by the police** if it is noticed that the student has many absences; if the parents exploit him/her (for different work) they are fined, but it is a vicious circle because the fines are cancelled by the Local Council and parents know it and don't really care about the fines they get (Argeş County, interview with a principal).*

*Well, when we see the absences are starting to accrue, we try to find out what is going on, we talk to the parents, to the child, if necessary; **there were times when we turned to the police for help** and that's about all (Prahova County, interview with a principal).*

#### **Box 14. Coercive measures to fight dropout**

If dropout is considered the manifestation of a *psychological* discomfort felt by the student over a longer period of time, **it is completely out of line to resort to law enforcement and coercive action to remedy the situation instead of turning to psychologists and school counsellors.** The fact that the school management takes into consideration this kind of a “solution” may be a sign of how students in difficulty are actually perceived: as deviant individuals that can be “fixed” through police intervention. From a social and psychological standpoint, there are lots of question marks as regards the efficacy of such a police-based approach to reduce

the psychological causes of dropping out. Such an approach shows that **the dropout phenomenon is not understood by the teachers who resort to coercive measures.**

Moreover, the “solution” to turn to law enforcement is a **way of passing on school’s responsibility to support students in difficulty.** In most interviews, we didn’t see the school take on the job of monitoring students, of identifying, based on an early warning system, high risk school disengagement or school failure cases. All teachers do is to write down the absences and grades in the roll book, while the school does not take any dropout prevention measures *before* the child leaves school. None of the interviewees mentioned the evaluation chart-based working method used in personalised intervention programmes. These individualized programmes, ideally designed with input from the psychologist or school counsellor, diagnose difficulties in each student, detail the remedial action plan, assess the impact of remedial actions and recommend future ones with a view to support the student in difficulty as efficiently as possible.

Another aspect which becomes manifest from the interviews with teachers is the fact that **there is often no intercultural communication, or even effective communication with the family.** Some teachers say that, in case of dropout issues, they go to the community and talk to the family to convince the parents on the importance of their children’s education. This speech is rarely preceded by an attempt **to thoroughly understand the causes** of school dropout, the child’s social background and his/her difficult situation. In addition, we couldn’t spot any attempts from teachers to shape their speech to match the reality of the Roma family. In Box 15, we give some illustrative examples supporting the idea that the dropout phenomenon is not yet properly understood.

*As regards smaller children, we are luckier. But for older children (12 +), there is not much we can do. In some cases, the child wants to come to school, but their parents don't let them; or the other way around. We don't know what the truth is. When we talk to the child, s/he says she would come but s/he is not allowed because there is work to do; when we talk to parents they say that they send the child to school but the latter doesn't want to go (Covasna County, interview with a principal).*

*The saddest thing is that when it comes to dropout there is not much we can do.*

*The school mediator or we can't do much when the children reach the age of 12-14. I don't know what the reason is, but at this age most of them are mature and I think they are ashamed to go to school after that age. There is the possibility to apply fines if the student doesn't go to school, but I think this is not a solution. The students and their families should be convinced on the importance of school through different means. For now, I don't see a solution to this problem (Covasna County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 15. The dropout phenomenon is not always understood**

In some cases, the statement that teachers go to the community to talk to the family of the drop-out must be regarded with reservations due to the social desirability bias, discussed in Chapter 2<sup>117</sup>, which can lead to significant distortions in the respondents' speech just as our field operators noticed. Some answers are obviously embellished, others make use of clichés, and in some cases we see that the answers are more hypothetical and do not necessarily refer to the *real* actions that the school takes in challenging situations. In Box 16, we present a few statements that we believe reflect the tendency to embellish some of the answers.

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<sup>117</sup>Pages 29-30.

*We track down the causes that make the child skip school, **we try to set up a school attendance monitoring commission in school, we may apply questionnaires to children and parents and we seek the support of the psychologist, if we have one. In our school, we don't have a psychologist** (Vaslui County, interview with a teacher).*

Question: What actions does the school take when a student is at risk of dropping out?

*More frequent meetings with parents, house calls and we try to convince them that school is important.*

Question: What do you do after you notice that a student is at risk of dropping out?

*More frequent meetings with parents, house calls and we try to convince them that school is important (identical answer to the question regarding dropout) (Iași County, interview with a principal).*

### **Box 16. Attempts to embellish answers**

Even if school dropout is one of the sensitive issues on which education programmes and projects have been focusing in the last years, there are also other forms of non-participation in school that are worth at least as much attention. Most often, **absenteeism** and **non-promotion** are precursors to school dropout, symptoms of a deeper wound that needs to be healed *in time* to prevent dropout. Next, we will have a look at the research outcomes regarding these phenomena.

### **3.2.2. Absenteeism**

In our opinion, **absenteeism** is one of the disguised forms of non-participation in school.<sup>118</sup> The low-attendance student is formally included in the education system, but his/her schooling does not attain the expected outcomes, due, among other things, to on-and-off attendance.

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<sup>118</sup>Jigău, M. (coord.), *Învățământul rural din România: condiții, probleme și strategii de dezvoltare*, București, 2000, p. 122.

Around 10% of the interviewed children say they “often” miss school. Out of these, 53% are boys and 77% come from rural areas.

The main reasons for low attendance are economic in nature (57% - of which 26% are due to the fact that they work; 25% because they look after younger siblings; 6% because they don't have the financial means to pay for the collateral costs of education). 14% say they often miss school because of the great distance between home and school or of the fact that the road becomes impracticable during winter and when it rains. 7% of absenteeism is due to health problems. For 20% of them, their frequent absences are due to the fact that “I don't like school; I can't wake up in the morning; I am staying home”. As in the case of dropout, we reiterate the idea that behind these statements may hide deeper causes of children's reluctance to attend school regularly linked to some sort of psychological discomfort.

The (school-related) determinants of absenteeism are the frequency of family visits to school, and the child's appreciation of school in general, of teachers and of his/her own results (according to Table XVIII in Annex 2). This leads to the idea that a child-friendly school climate can reduce absenteeism and consequently dropout. As to out-of-school determinants of absenteeism, there are statistically significant correlations between the number of absences and the parents' degree of literacy, and, less significant, the mother's income earning activity.<sup>119</sup>

Just like in the case of dropout, there are no obvious and clear absenteeism prevention strategies implemented in schools. Interesting enough, the impact assessment of the PHARE programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” reveals that “*the way in which schools focus on the causes of low attendance*” has improved, as mentioned by 87.9% of the interviewed teachers.<sup>120</sup> Our interviews failed to clearly identify *these* improvements in the researched schools (some of them having already participated in the PHARE programmes). On the contrary, the conclusion drawn from the interviews with teachers is that there is actually a **lack of strategies to prevent absenteeism.**

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<sup>119</sup> According to Table XIX in Annex 2.

<sup>120</sup> The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Impact Assessment*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 101.

More seriously, the idea of resorting to law enforcement to prevent absenteeism is recurrent, which, just like in the case of dropout, indicates the poor understanding of this phenomenon, the responsibility being passed on to outer institutions and an approach that is not as inclusive as it should be. The child who skips classes is “*taken to the police station*” from an early age and s/he slowly gets used to the idea that s/he is deviant. To him/her, being perceived as a delinquent may become at some point a state of normality which could leave him/her out of the society forever: “*The mayoralty gets involved, so does the police, if we have absenteeism problems; we give them the names of the children and they are taken to the police station, and we are informed or the parents are called to school*”.<sup>121</sup>

### 3.2.3. Non-Promotion

Another disguised form of effective non-participation in education is **non-promotion (grade retention)**. Just like in the case of absenteeism, it concerns poor student participation in education, inadequate system demands and the training the student may get to successfully meet these demands. We will largely tackle the non-promotion phenomenon in Roma with the help of data collected from multiple sources of information.

From the data reported by the schools included in this study, the non-promotion rate (the number of students failing the grade in 2008/09 out of the total number of students) is somewhere around 8.9% of the *total* students from 2008/09 school year. In girls, the non-promotion rate is nearly 7.9%, and in boys 10.4%.

Previous research has proved that the non-promotion rate among Roma is significantly higher than that of the majority population<sup>122</sup>. If we refer strictly to Roma students, their non-promotion rate is 15%, according to the data gathered from the schools included in the research. We can also notice significant differences between gender-disaggregated data (13% of all Roma

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<sup>121</sup>Interview with a school mediator, Sălaj County.

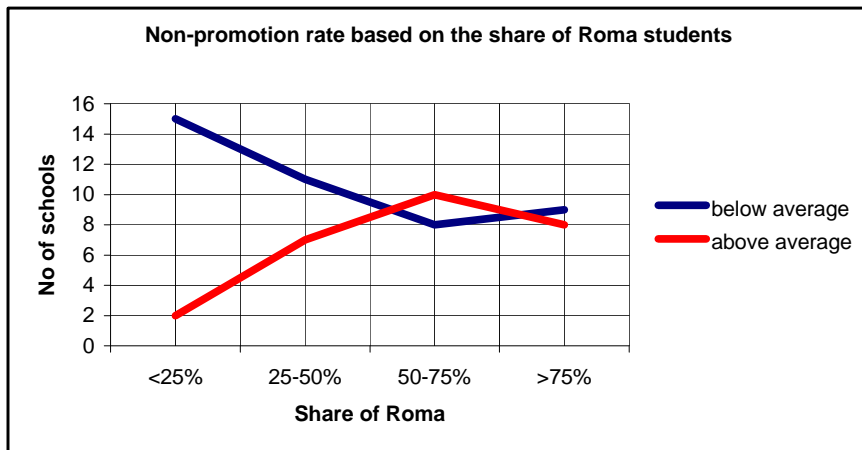
<sup>122</sup>Fleck, G., Rughiniș, C., (ed.), *Vino mai aproape. Incluziunea și excluziunea romilor în societatea românească de astăzi*, București, 2008, p. 158 (*Come Closer. Inclusion and Exclusion of Roma in Present Day Romanian Society*).

girls failed the grade, and 18% of all Roma boys). Thus, 59% of the Roma who failed the grade in 2008/09 school year are boys, and 41% girls. We note that the data regarding Roma non-promotion show values that are almost twice as high as the overall non-promotion rate. Another series of worrisome data concerns the share of Roma children who were not promoted in 2008/09. Thus, **over three quarters of all the children who failed the grade in 2008/09 in the researched schools were Roma** (76% of boys and 77% of girls, to be more precise).<sup>123</sup>

The non-promotion rate distribution based on the 8.9% average worked out using our data shows a statistically significant correlation with the share of Roma children in school. In other words, the higher the percentage of Roma students, the more likely the non-promotion rate to be at higher levels than the average worked out using our data. Graph 22 shows the dynamic trends in the schools with a significant share of Roma students as regards non-promotion. At the same time, the linear progression model from Table XVII in Annex 2 indicates that the **percentage of Roma students is the variable that best explains the non-promotion rate variation.**

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<sup>123</sup>We should mention that the impact assessment of the PHARE programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” revealed that in the PHARE pilot schools from the sample, the share of Roma in the total non-promoted students was 86%, higher than in our case (The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Impact Assessment*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 93).



**Graph 22. Non-promotion rate based on the share of Roma students**

As seen above, dropout and non-promotion increase in the schools with a high percentage of Roma students, unlike those that have lower percentages of Roma ethnics, which can also be statistically supported. Thus, **tests confirm the hypothesis that the dropout and non-promotion output indicators are correlated with the percentage of Roma students in schools.**

In the light of recent changes in the educational theory paradigm, stressing the responsibility of the school for the students' academic success, we believe that the high non-promotion rate among Roma discloses two aspects that we want to bring forth for discussion. On the one hand, the high non-promotion rate among Roma reveals the **intercultural inadequacy of the academic content.** As some teachers pointed out, **the understanding between school and Roma communities, based on mutual knowledge and value acceptance, is often far from ideal, and this cannot all be blamed on the Roma,** as suggested in the criticism addressed to Roma parents by teachers who are insufficiently trained in intercultural communication. In Box 17, some extracts from the interviews with teachers and resource staff show a persistent need for training on intercultural issues to improve teachers' understanding of the Roma.

*The teachers don't have the capacity to understand, to work with Roma children. They don't know where Roma children come from, they don't know that these children haven't been given the same support as Hungarian children and that they are not understood (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I am thinking of what I was saying earlier, new teachers don't know how to..., they were not trained. University education is not, does not provide training, I repeat. Just as textbooks are designed for a high level, for good students, the same way pedagogical training is not for all groups of students, but for good students and then they don't fit in at the beginning, they don't know how to work with students, we need to train them. The new-comers need to be trained in this respect... As regards the specific problems of our school, our communication with Roma families is quite difficult. We should have a school mediator for this. This is where we have problems (Galați County, interview with a principal).*

What kind of courses would you like to attend in the future?

*I think I would like something about school mediation or how to win the community over so that we can work better with Roma parents (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

### **Box 17. Need for training on intercultural communication**

#### **3.2.4. Non-Enrolment in School**

School enrolment, measured in the *Report on the State of the National Education System* with the help of the **gross enrolment rate** indicator<sup>124</sup>, is defined as the participation in education of people aged 3 to 29 years, either in compulsory education or in optional schooling (early education, high school and higher education). At national level, the gross enrolment rate statistics are distorted by the fact that 6 and 7-year-olds can enrol in the 1<sup>st</sup> grade, which sometimes make gross enrolment rates go beyond 100%.<sup>125</sup>

<sup>124</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 52.

<sup>125</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 58.

Or, these values don't necessarily reflect the reality on the ground, hiding at times significant percentages of out-of-school children.

First of all, conceptually speaking, we think it is necessary to clearly define and make a distinction between the forms of non-participation in education. Therefore, we need to distinguish between:

- **non-attendance** of kindergarten by preschool children, at the level of *optional* education;
- children's **non-enrolment** in *compulsory* education, meaning children who have never attended compulsory schooling;
- **early school leaving**, comprising those who have finished compulsory education, but have not continued their studies.

Obviously, the forms of non-participation defined above must be handled differently as they have different repercussions on the child's later development and require different public policy interventions.

We will next tackle each form of non-participation in education separately.

### **a) Out-of-Kindergarten Preschool Children**

In the questionnaires applied to them, parents declared a number of 500 children aged 3 to 6 years, out of whom 71% were enrolled in education. Of the 29% representing children who don't attend kindergarten, 56% are boys, and 44% are girls. At national level, according to the official data of the Ministry of Education<sup>126</sup>, in 2009 the participation in early childhood education of children aged 3 to 6 years reached 77% in boys and 78% in girls, which means a higher enrolment rate than in our case.

The reasons given for children's non-participation in early childhood education mainly concern the child's small age, often thinking that it is too early for them to be integrated in education. Box 18 synthesises a number of ideas taken from the interviews with teachers, showing that Roma children's participation in preschool

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<sup>126</sup>Idem, p. 52.

education is on the rise compared to past years. Unfortunately, we cannot corroborate this with statistical data, as Roma children's participation in preschool education should be measured over several years before we can draw a relevant conclusion.

How do you appreciate Roma children's participation in kindergarten?

*In recent years, I can say that their families have become aware of the need for children to attend kindergarten and they do come in quite great numbers at kindergarten especially in the prep group both for that 'milk and croissant' programme, and because they realize that the child can thus develop and they can reach those levels that they see in other families (Cluj County, interview with a principal).*

*This year, [Roma children's participation] it is good. Children come to kindergarten and their attendance is increasing (Dâmbovița County, interview with a principal).*

*In my group, I have Roma children and it's OK. They come to kindergarten, they are curious just like any other children, they are not different from the other children.*

Do you motivate children in any way to come to kindergarten?

*Yes, they come, we haven't had problems with that...they come to kindergarten...at least the children in my group, they all come.*

Do you have children enrolled who haven't yet come to kindergarten or who have rarely come?

*Yes, a little boy who came rarely last year, but this year he comes everyday.*

Why wasn't he coming to kindergarten last year?

*I was told that there was no one to bring him... this year he has an older sister who is in 1<sup>st</sup> grade and now she comes to school and he comes to kindergarten (Cluj County, interview with a kindergarten teacher).*

*I can say that this year their attendance is quite good, so I couldn't say that absenteeism is significantly high. This is a time when they get a cold, everyone is scared and stressed out about the flu, but at the beginning of the year I can say that we didn't have great problems, because I tell them every day: See you tomorrow, I'll be waiting for you, tomorrow we'll do this – I try to motivate children as well as parents to bring them (Arad County, interview with a kindergarten teacher).*

**Box 18. Rising participation of Roma children in preschool education**

**b) Children's Non-Enrolment in Compulsory Education**

Children's questionnaires show a number of 15 children who are not enrolled in compulsory education, accounting for 2%. Out of these 15 children identified, who are over 7 years old and have never attended school, 9 are girls and 6 are boys. The reasons invoked for not attending school are mainly related to financial shortcomings (6 cases) and the long distance to the nearest school (2 answers), and in 2 cases it has to do with parents' lack of interest. Finally, 4 children simply stated that they "were not enrolled", without any further details, whereas one child didn't want to answer the question.

As for the percentage of non-enrolled children reported by the educational establishments, 70% of these institutions report an enrolment rate of 100%. The average non-enrolment rate, worked out as the share of children non-enrolled in compulsory education in the total of children (those enrolled plus those who are not enrolled) is 2.4%, which is quite close to that deriving from the questionnaires we applied to children. It is important to keep in mind that, at the time the information was collected, almost 11% of the schools did not have data relating to the share of children who were not enrolled in education, which proves a certain alienation of these schools from the social environment they work in. The fact that these data are missing in schools shows, on the one hand, a lack of communication between them, as institutions, and the communities they cater for, and, on the other hand, **a lack of planned strategies to attract**

**out-of-school children.** When the problem is not even quantified, which makes it impossible to become aware of its scale, it is hard to find a solution to it.

### **c) Early School Leaving**

A frequently invoked reason for dropping out is the 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduation, which for many Roma children is the top schooling level they can reach given their financial means (in rural areas, for example, the family can't afford to send their children to high schools in town) or their final goal as concerns education. As seen in many interviews, one of the children's goals is getting the driver's licence, for which one has to finish 8 grades.

It is obvious that, in socially and economically challenged environments, youth's labour force is needed from an earlier age than in better-off environments, where children can go to the next educational stage without worrying about the family's financial needs. In the case of the communities included in this research, the low standard of living is a structural obstacle for continuing one's education to high school or college. Hence, 7 out of 8 over 14-year-old children who have finished 8 grades and have dropped out say that their decision not to continue their studies was due to financial reasons (lack of means needed to continue education, the need to work or look after younger siblings). Box 19 presents some statements that come to support this idea and also confirm that in rural areas the early school leaving issue is triggered by financial factors in poor non-Roma families too.

*Our children are very interested, and they take active part in education, but their problem is that they lack continuity, they don't have a purpose; they can't afford to commute to Zalău or Baia Mare, or to live in a boarding school, so when they finish 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they finish their education, even if we have children(...) There are many Romanian children who don't go to high school for the same reason (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher).*

*More should be done for them, because most of them are capable and smart children, children that can take the reins of Romania; it is a great shame that at some point lack of money makes them stay home; when I say lack of money, I mean that many Roma children graduate 8 grades, and, as our school is 30 km away from Craiova, it is a great financial challenge for them to go to high school. So I think that programmes should be designed, scholarships too, but all-inclusive scholarships from accommodation to travel and everything related to education costs; so this is what I think ... well, if I were in the Ministry I would be thinking of something like this for the children. So, I repeat, it is a great shame, we have valuable children; some girls in the community finished university with great sacrifice, with high costs and lots of efforts from their parents, or in the community not all parents can afford it (Dolj County, interview with a school mediator).*

### **Box 19. Early school leaving due to financial reasons**

Some interviewed teachers and school mediators think that another obstacle to Roma children's continued education is the lack of successful education-based role models in the researched communities. To illustrate this, 6 out of 8 children who have left school after finishing 8 grades say that their role model in life is either a sports figure, a show business figure (football player, sportsman, singer, actor), or a family member. Or, success in sports and show business does not rely on one's education, while the parents' short-lived educational path tends to influence the duration of children's studies.

*Right now, after many years of work, I use different means to convince children and adults in favour of education. For example, I noticed that a great number of children and young people want to get the driver's licence in the future and I told them that, for that, they needed to learn to read and write; so in my spare time, apart from other activities, I help those who sign up for the driving school study the traffic law. I also tell them "see, I am old and yet I started studying this old".*

*(...)*

*Nothing is more persuasive than the good example set by someone else. If the members of the community see that someone has been schooled and now s/he is better off and leads an easier life thanks to that, then others tend to follow their example (...). I believe that in order to change the mentality enrooted in here for generations (that education doesn't count and doesn't feed us), years need to pass and, most of all, those who manage to finish a school should be guaranteed a job, in other words live better, before the others can follow. If someone goes to school and studies hard, and they eventually end up in the same place as someone who hasn't been to school or studied, they will be the mock of the community (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

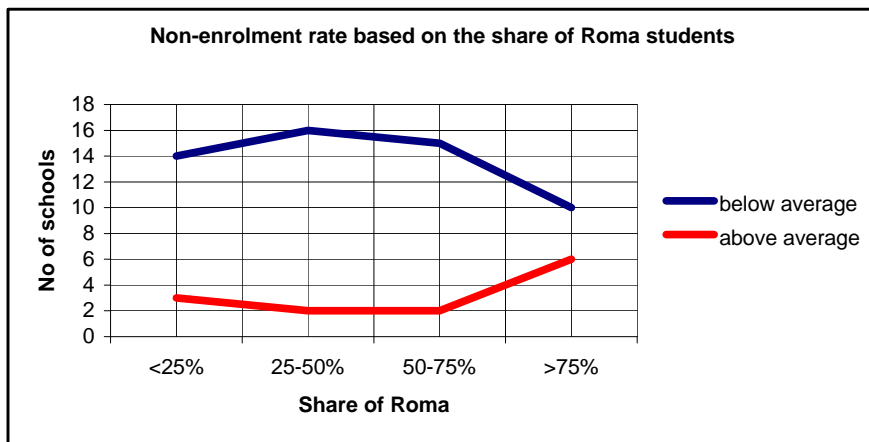
**Box 20. Means to motivate children to continue their education**

The quote above touches on a sore point: Romanian education does not provide enough labour market integration opportunities, and, on the other hand, given the small salaries earned by disadvantaged groups, labour market integration does not always guarantee a better living. Hence, the value the education is assigned in these disadvantaged settings drops after a cost-benefit analysis. High collateral costs, family's needed investment in order to continue education, and at the same time no guarantee that it will pay off in the near future, point to the idea that education does not justify the required investment. And in the case of socially and economically challenged groups, the effort of keeping children in school for a longer period of time is considerably higher than for other society segments because all family members' labour force is

needed to maintain a minimum standard of living.

It goes without saying that the size of this problem makes it difficult to find a solution in the near future. It is however crucial for the education reform to correlate the education system with the economic environment for a better adjustment to the current labour market demands and to ensure to disadvantaged groups “*an education that can help them to get jobs*”.<sup>127</sup>

How does the non-enrolment rate correlate with the share of Roma children enrolled in a school? We reiterate that the school-reported data indicate a 2.4% non-enrolment rate in the researched communities. The number of schools reporting below average non-enrolment rates is higher than the number of those with non-enrolment rates above the average computed in this research; the latter account for 19% of all the schools having provided data on non-enrolment rates. Still, as shown in Graph 23, as the share of Roma children goes up, the number of schools with a non-enrolment rate above the average worked out in this study tends to increase.



**Graph 23. Non-enrolment rate based on the share of Roma students**

Statistical tests don't confirm the non-enrolment rate variation based on the share of Roma students, but we repeat that many

<sup>127</sup> Interview with a school mediator, Covasna County.

schools didn't even have data regarding the non-enrolment rate, which can have an effect on the validity of the tests.

As regards the lack of statistically significant correlation between the non-enrolment rate and the percentage of Roma students, it is confirmed that this phenomenon – external to education itself (namely children who have never been enrolled in school) – is not directly influenced by what is going on in school, contrary to the dropout phenomenon. **This comes to support the theories that dropout is mainly caused by the quality of school education. In other words, the education system is the one bearing the biggest responsibility for students' academic success.**

On the other hand, the fact that the expectations of finding a higher non-enrolment rate in the schools serving communities with a high percentage of Roma than in the schools with smaller shares of Roma are proven wrong confirms that Roma non-enrolment is likely to be an isolated phenomenon (as a reminder of the figures – the average non-enrolment rate worked out based on the data provided by 68 schools is of 2.4%, while the children's questionnaires show a non-enrolment rate of 2%).

The previous sections have greatly confirmed the hypothesis that the quality deficit is significantly higher in the schools predominantly attended by Roma students. Dropout and non-promotion rates show **a deeper quality deficit in the schools with a high percentage of Roma students, which can be statistically supported.** The features that suffer from the education quality deficit tend to intertwine and influence each other. Schools with poorer material resources are less attractive to qualified teachers, and if the education inputs such as teachers and material resources are insufficient, the output phenomena – dropout, non-promotion – will boost. This will further reduce the attractiveness of these schools, where it is hard to “*achieve high performance*”.

The interviews with teachers indicate that some of them still label “Gipsy schools”, identified as schools of poor quality, both as regards material resources and teachers' input. Box 21 presents a few statements relating to this.

*(...) We have school S., which was traditionally dedicated only to Roma students, called the **Gipsy school**, and the school teachers from there were not welcome to teach here because it was considered that they would not provide quality education to all students, so there was discrimination among school teachers and towards children (Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

*I have the feeling that there is some sort of segregation as regards this institution compared to others as regards the state of the kindergarten. (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

### **Box 21. “Gipsy School”**

Box 22 summarises the conclusions drawn from the second section of the chapter before moving on to the qualitative analysis of discrimination in the schools attended by Roma students.

1. The dropout rate tends to rise in the schools with a high percentage of Roma, but the problems of defining school dropout invalidates statistical tests; according to school-reported data, the dropout rate among Roma children is 6.7%, whereas the data that come out of the children’s questionnaires indicate a **dropout rate of 9%**;

2. The main dropout determinants are **financial lacks** (44%), **poor academic results** (16%), and only **to a small extent** Roma parents’ lack of interest in children’s education (9%) or the early marriage phenomenon (4% of answers from parent questionnaires);

3. In their great majority, **schools lack coherent and efficient dropout prevention strategies** and they take action when it is already too late or they resort to inappropriate means;

4. We can say, with a probability of over 95%, that the non-promotion (grade retention) rate is influenced by the percentage of Roma students in school;

5. **76% of children who did not pass the grade in 2008/09 are Roma**;

6. The gross enrolment rate reaches 97.6% in our studied schools;
7. The correlation between phenomena like dropout and non-promotion with the percentage of Roma students in schools **confirm that the education outputs are affected by the quality deficit in the inputs** analysed in the first section of the chapter.

**Box 22. Conclusions of the section on education outputs**

To get the big picture of the school environment attended by Roma children, in the last part of this chapter we will have a look at mostly qualitative issues regarding the scale of discrimination in the schools with significant numbers of Roma, as well as segregation and (successful or failed) desegregation.

### **3.3. Discrimination in Schools Attended by Roma**

In this last chapter section, we will run a qualitative analysis of the aspects related to the discrimination of Roma children. We will also pay increased attention to a very serious type of discrimination – the segregation of children in “Roma” schools or classes.

#### **3.3.1. Discrimination**

The interviews with teachers and principals from the researched educational establishments show the **persistence of highly discriminatory perceptions and attitudes towards Roma children.**

Thus, we have identified a series of answers to the question “*Have you noticed any differences between Roma and non-Roma children?*” that illustrate a discriminatory perception of Roma.

Even those teachers who want to shed positive light on a few Roma students demonstrate persistent misconceptions about the Roma. Discrimination is obvious when positive examples – considered exceptions – are separated from the rest of the ethnic group, which continues to be perceived as negative. This

overemphasis on the “clean” and “tidy” Roma children reveals that the expectations have been exceeded in their case, and that the frame of reference continues to be a negative stereotypical image ingrained in the overall mentality:

*In my class, I have only one Roma child, so I can only talk about my class. A very good kid, active, dynamic, interested, never skips school, she studies, she is always doing her homework... and I am telling you, **if her complexion were not a bit darker no one would guess she's a Roma, very clean, tidy...** books, notebooks, so there is nothing much to say... (Dâmbovița County, interview with a teacher).*

*I couldn't say there are any differences because **you don't see it at a first glance**, looking around in the room, **who come from Roma families, I mean judging on their appearance, which is very good, nicely dressed, clean**, they speak Romanian (...) (Cluj County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 23. “The exception that proves the rule” of negative stereotypes**

As for other teachers, they clearly focus on the negative when they talk about the Roma and their opinions tend to confirm their own stereotypes:

*Yes, I have noticed some differences. I mean, they can't stay focused for long, they don't obey the conduct rules in class or in school. Some non-Roma children have these issues too, but the number of Roma students is clearly higher in this respect. I mean, in a class of pupils, out of ten children with the behaviour problems I mentioned, nine are Roma (Maramureș County, interview with a teacher).<sup>128</sup>*

<sup>128</sup>The same teacher later says that “Roma students are just like any other students”, indicating that the principle of non-discrimination is present at least at the level of speech. Still, this does not yet mean a renouncement to negative stereotypes, or the application of the non-discrimination principle. Often, the “politically correct” speech continues to cover up segregation and discrimination practices.

*Yes, there are differences. Because in my class I have non-Roma children too the differences are noticeable in how neat they are, in how they organize their work for learning, in structuring it logically, I mean they have a logical structure, and differences in the command of the language (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*As concerns culture and education, but also the intellect to some extent (Maramureş County, interview with a teacher).*

*Indolent, badly-behaved, with precarious hygiene (Argeş County, interview with a teacher).*

#### **Box 24. Discriminatory perceptions of Roma children**

Teachers' projections for Roma children are just as interesting. A pessimistic projection comes with low expectations that will reflect in class. As indicated by many previous studies<sup>129</sup>, little expectations may keep education low-key and hinder the child's intellectual development. Nevertheless, most of the respondents believe that children's later success in life fully depends on their educational path. Box 25 shows some answers to the question "How do you see these children in 20 years?".

*Their mentality could also change and why do I believe Roma's mentality could change? Because many years ago when the first Roma schooling efforts were put in, we were told: stop bothering us because we haven't yet reached the conclusion (and I'll never forget that Gipsy) that we have to go to school to learn, that we will be informed because we need to, we will send the children ourselves without you asking us. So we have reached this point. I hope in the next years they will also reach the conclusion that their children too need to continue their studies (Suceava County, interview with a teacher).*

*The children will develop according to the education they get from their parents and at school, as well as on their interest to be schooled – some might want to set up a family, others to finish high school (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher).*

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<sup>129</sup>This is largely discussed in Chapter 1.

*Most definitely, those who will have more education than their parents will have a better life than their parents. This is our theory which has checked out many times. The higher the education level of the children, the better their life will be compared to their parents. It is also our goal for them to go beyond their parents' education. And most definitely, if they indeed manage to surpass their parents in education, they will surpass their parents' material situation in 20 years (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

*Without many changes, without prospects, if things go on this way (Iași County, interview with a teacher).*

*The same, without a future, without a job, with many children (Argeș County, interview with a teacher).*

*Just as their parents now: no income, no education (Argeș County, interview with a teacher).*

*Jobless young people or leaving for another country (Argeș County, interview with a teacher).*

### **Box 25. Teachers' future projections for Roma children**

From the discriminatory perceptions revealed at the beginning of this section comes out the tendency of blaming Roma students for their academic failure (“*they can't stay focused*”, “*they don't obey the conduct rules*”...). **This attitude is a major bottleneck for the educational process: teachers who blame students for their failure risk to ignore the need for them to change their own teaching methods, the teaching approach or attitude towards students.** The responsibility falls exclusively on the shoulders of the students and their families. As long as the root cause of the problems remains on the outside, teachers are not motivated to change anything about themselves, to question if their own attitude is fair or if their approach is efficient. As in the case of dropout, we see teachers avoiding responsibility and passing it on to the students and their parents. **This passing on of the responsibility is strongly related to the above-mentioned stereotype, according to which “Roma parents don't want to send their children to school”.** This is an easy way out, saving teachers (and the rest of the society) from revising their own attitudes.

Raising awareness among teachers of the discrimination to which Roma children are exposed, and making them take actions to fight the negative stereotypes of Roma, is something that can be done, at least in part, through courses on inclusive education and intercultural communication and through meaningful long-term mentality-changing interventions. We need to understand Roma-specific social and cultural realities and develop a sense of respect for them. Actually, some teachers are aware of their own intercultural communication and understanding shortcomings, as shown in Box 26.

What kind of courses would you like to attend in the future?

*Well, maybe now that I work in this school where we have Roma children too, people talk about inclusive education, to help Roma students fit into the education system, to... I don't know... maybe in this field (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*I think I would like something about school mediation or how to win the community over so that we can work better with Roma parents (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*Something about different kindergarten working methods, given that the share of Roma children is 95%, children that come with very little knowledge and skills from home, and maybe we need slightly different methods to get the child closer to kindergarten and school (Cluj County, interview with a teacher).*

*As regards the Roma, we should be taught more about how to work with them, to better adjust our lessons, especially in mathematics, to them. I would like to know what we could offer in order to attract them (Suceava County, interview with a teacher).*

What do you know about inclusive education?

*I can't say I know much about inclusive education, but we would definitely like to do what they like so that they want to come, to attract them (...) (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*Honestly, not much. I would have liked to take part in a training programme on inclusive education if there had been any or if there is from now on (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*I don't know much, but I suppose disabled students should go to special schools (Argeş County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 26. Need for training on inclusive education**

The answers above reveal the insufficient understanding of the concept of inclusive education,<sup>130</sup> and the need to systematically provide this kind of courses in Romanian educational establishments.

Next, we will look into school segregation, which is considered a serious form of discrimination towards Roma students.

### **3.3.2. Segregation and Obstacles to Desegregation**

Recently, the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports has issued a new notification on Roma student segregation prevention in the schools preponderantly attended by this minority.<sup>131</sup> This notification confirms and strengthens the ideas embedded in previous Ministry regulations, namely Notification No 29323 of 20 April 2004 banning Roma segregation, and Order No 1540 of 19 July 2007 banning school segregation of Roma children and approving the methodology to prevent and eliminate school segregation of Roma children.<sup>132</sup> Hence, the notification mentions “*some tendencies of segregation of Roma children from other children*”, it stresses the conflict between this situation and internal and external regulations on equal opportunities and human and child rights, and the need to take real action to prevent segregation.

The need to issue a new notification, six years since the first actions to eliminate Roma children’s school segregation were taken, proves how profound the education system problems are as regards the root causes of segregation, and how many actions still need to be taken to reach full, irreversible and effective desegregation.

To describe the scale of segregation, we will next present a few statistics drawn from our data. In order to capture segregation without setting off the tendency to embellish the answers and cover up the reality, we measured the scale of segregation through a

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<sup>130</sup>This concept was defined starting from students with special educational needs (SEN), but pretty fast it extended to disadvantaged groups, like children from disadvantaged backgrounds or ethnic minorities.

<sup>131</sup>Notification No. 28 463 of 3 March 2010 on the prevention and elimination of Roma preschool and school children’s segregation in schools, some measures to maintain the study in minority languages/mother tongue lessons in the Romanian education system, available at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/13466>, accessed in March 2010.

<sup>132</sup>Both documents are available at [www.edu.ro](http://www.edu.ro).

composite indicator which takes into account the distance to the nearest Roma community, the percentage of Roma students in school and the number of classes with over 50% of Roma students. We can thus spot the cases where the percentage of Roma students in a class is disproportionate to the share of Roma ethnics in the total number of students. This is in fact the operational definition of the segregation phenomenon employed in the methodology of Order No 1540 of 19 July 2007.<sup>133</sup> By focusing on the distance to the nearest Roma community we could make a distinction between residentially segregated schools and those segregated exclusively on ethnic criteria.

The scale of residential segregation was worked out taking into account a distance to the community of less than 1 km and a share of Roma students of over 50%. As for non-residential segregation, we identified the cases that met all of the following conditions: a share of Roma students *below* 50%, classes with *over* 50% of Roma and the distance to the nearest Roma community of > 1 km. Still, the educational establishments with more than 50% of Roma students may feature classes where the proportion of Roma students is higher than the ratio between Roma students and the total number of students, but such cases are hard to identify. These considerations lead to the conclusion that **the number of schools with non-residential ethnic segregation may be higher than what we have identified.**

Hence, out of 100 educational establishments included in the research, we came across residential segregation in 16 cases and non-residential segregation in 15 cases, accounting for 31% of the researched educational institutions. Table 8 shows their distribution based on the type of segregation, area and type of the educational establishment.

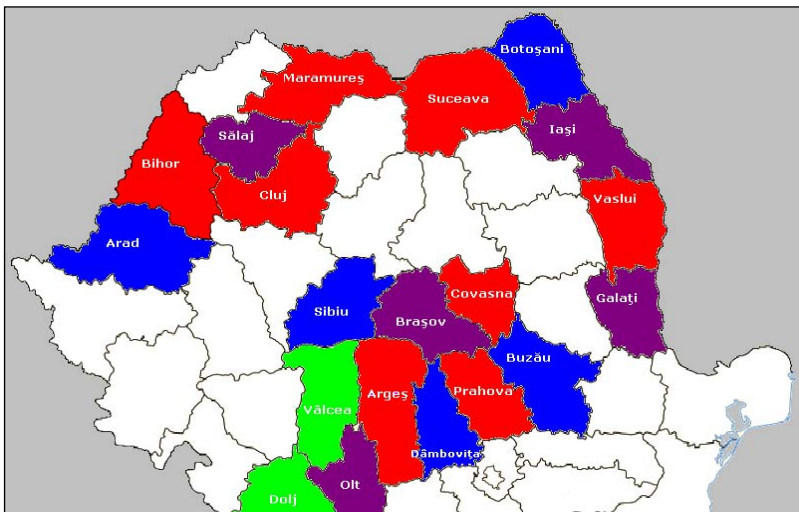
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<sup>133</sup> *Annex to MERY Order No 1540/19.07.2007 banning school segregation of Roma children and approving the methodology to prevent and eliminate school segregation of Roma children*, art. 2, p. 1-2.

Kindergartens RESIDENTIAL		Kindergartens NON-RESIDENTIAL		Schools RESIDENTIAL		Schools NON-RESIDENTIAL	
Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban	Rural
3	2	0	0	2	9	4	11
5		0		11		15	
5				26			
<p align="center"><b>Total: 31 Educational establishments with residential or non-residential segregation</b></p>							

**Table 8. Segregated educational establishments based on their type, type of segregation and area**

Map 2 shows the counties where Roma children segregation was spotted in at least one of the researched educational establishments.



**Map 2. School segregation of Roma children**

**Legend:**

- Residential segregation
- Non-residential segregation
- Both types of segregation
- No segregation identified **in the studied schools**

Once again, we must say that segregation may also be encountered in the counties of Vâlcea and Dolj, but our data do not allow us to identify all the relevant cases. In the County of Dolj, for example, statistical data don't indicate segregation, but the interviews with teachers show at least one case where we identified attempts to cover up segregation (see Box 28).

In qualitative terms, the interviews with principals and teachers show a few segregation-related aspects that need to be pointed out.

First of all, the definition of "segregation" itself doesn't seem to be known at all times. Most of the time, it is taken for "discrimination", ignoring the physical and spatial separation of some children based on their personal features (ethnicity, attainment, financial background). Box 27 shows a few examples in this respect drawn from the answers to the questions "*Do you think there is segregation in this institution? If yes: in line with the MERY Order No 1540 from 2007, what effective measures have you taken with a view to desegregation? With what results?*".

*I think it is a bit difficult to fully eliminate this idea of segregation, because it kind of starts from certain prejudices. But I could give examples of children that stand out, Roma children who are the top students in their class and who are extremely bright and involved and I think that, slowly, the acceptance will improve,... not necessarily the acceptance, but their inclusion. (...) They started to integrate because, I want to stress this, they have a different attitude now, I mean they are very open, they want to learn, to come to school, they see things differently, so I believe that this issue of segregation must be regarded from both perspectives, from the point of view of Romanian children and of Roma children. (...) I think the word is a bit too...a bit too harsh. I mean the question 'is there or not' and the answer 'yes' or 'no' are not enough; I repeat what I was just saying, it is a problem of adjustment that requires a positive attitude from the children who need inclusion and from the others; it is...there are two poles that practically need to be fine-tuned (Cluj County, interview with a teacher).*

*The segregation plan has been done. We have as optional subject matters ... traditions and customs where we both find about each other's customs so that we don't discriminate each other (Braşov County, interview with a teacher).*

*I think there is not [segregation] and I think we are open, both Romanians towards the Roma and the Roma towards Romanians (Dâmboviţa County, interview with a teacher).*

*Yes, we know this Order<sup>134</sup> and the measures that have been taken, as I've said to the first point, was to organize extracurricular activities such as chalk drawing or school shows or field trips, visits (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*No, all students are actively involved in all our school activities (judeţul Olt, interview with a teacher).*

*From my point of view, I think there isn't, and, if there is, it is to a small degree!*

***That is?***

*Children's behaviour to each other; we are trying to prevent this kind of behaviour as much as we can, by talking to them, being close to children, talking like older brother to younger brother, teaching them what it should be done in certain racial conflict situations (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

*No. All children are integrated in joint activities (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher)<sup>135</sup>.*

**Box 27. The definition of “segregation” is not always known**

Some teacher statements according to which there is no school segregation are sometimes an attempt to hide the reality, from a desire to show things in a good light or from fear of repercussions if “disclosing” the truth about segregation. Box 28 shows a statement hiding a less desirable reality.

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<sup>134</sup>Order 1540/2007 banning segregation.

<sup>135</sup>During the data collection monitoring activity, the research team went to this school, where most children are Roma. Still, in interviews, the teachers didn't mention that this school was clearly segregated on residential criteria.

Do you think there is segregation in your institution?

*I think, just like I've said, that we equally respect and educate all children, so we make no difference between them and us, they are our students, good or bad.*

**NB:** The same person answered to a previous question:

*As our school has a pretty great number of Roma children, different courses were held for the class teachers of the **classes where such children are a bit more numerous than in other classes**; during the class teachers' board meetings, courses were held on intolerance, racism, discrimination, the overhead projector was used, power point presentations as well, so these were held only during teacher board meetings (Dolj County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 28. Attempts to cover up segregation**

The impact assessment of PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”, published by the Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation in 2009, highlights that in the counties which benefited from the desegregation component of the PHARE programme, educational establishments tend to recognise segregation more than in other counties.<sup>136</sup> Nevertheless, our research results show exactly the opposite: some PHARE pilot schools seem to have learned the set phrases of the new norm on segregation which feed into a “politically correct” speech. After internalizing the idea that “segregation is bad”, **there is quite a tendency to embellish the reality**, to present things in a good light and to deny the existence of segregation even when it is visible, just like in the case that we will briefly present as follows.

During a data collection monitoring visit in the County of Maramureş, in a school where the interviewed teacher said that “*there is no segregation*”, another teacher<sup>137</sup> told us that they had

<sup>136</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Impact Assessment*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 105.

<sup>137</sup>To protect their identity, we preferred not to disclose the name of the school or of the teacher.

“Roma” classes, where not only the level of attainment and teachers’ expectations were visibly lower than in other classes, but the state of the equipment was more precarious. During the PHARE programme “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”, the school renewed some of its furniture, but the new items were concentrated in the “Romanian” classes. Following the same PHARE project, a desegregation plan was drawn up, but the only measure taken was *“to transfer a few Roma children in the other classes”*. Moreover, we were told that *“the principal (...) says desegregation should not be done or our Romanian children will leave”*.

The teacher’s statements were also confirmed by the Roma children that we interviewed, concentrated in a “Roma” class, with visibly outdated and more damaged furniture than in the other classes where the number of Roma students was smaller. The students (of 6<sup>th</sup> grade) were feeling the effects of segregation and were aware that they were separated from Romanians, internalizing this segregation (*“we wouldn’t want to be in a class of Romanians; we don’t want to have anything to do with them”*).

Maintaining this state of affairs is a danger to interethnic communication: the gap between them could widen, and in time interethnic conflict-generating situations may arise. We want to use this example to underscore the extremely damaging effects of segregation and the danger it represents to the socialization of a whole generation. To these children, segregation and lack of intercultural dialogue may become normality, which is highly incompatible with the principles of an open and multicultural society to which the European Union increasingly aspires and to which Romania too has adhered at least in theory.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Actually, the negative effects of segregation were recognised at the Ministry of Education and listed in Article 3 of Annex 1 to the Order 1540 from 2007 banning segregation. Thus, this article sets forth that:

- “Segregation has negative educational and social consequences, such as:
- a) difficulties in making school appealing to students/high degree of non-enrolment;
  - b) incapacity to maintain students in school/high degree of dropout;
  - c) incapacity to attract and retain qualified teachers in those schools, which affects the quality of education;
  - d) incapacity to school students at the standards required in order to pass to higher educational stages;
  - e) preserving misconceptions and stereotypes in majority and Roma populations;
  - f) building a negative perception of the school’s capacity to generate social progress.”
- (We would like to add to this last point that it does not concern *only* the risk of building a

We later wanted to find out from the interviewed teachers how the desegregation or segregation prevention plan<sup>139</sup> had been drawn up and implemented in each school. First of all, the same idea came up of not knowing anything about this plan, about its role, and the need to draw it up under Article 6 of Annex 1 to the MERY Order of No 1540 from 2007 banning segregation.<sup>140</sup> Box 29 presents some illustrative answers in this respect.

**Does your school have a segregation prevention/ desegregation plan?**

*Yes, there is a segregation prevention plan.*

*Some of the measures included in this plan are: avoiding dropout, talking to students, school activities. (Olt County, interview with a teacher).*

But is there an actual plan, called desegregation plan?

*I personally have...my plan...*

But the school, does it have one?

*Well, if it is my plan it is probably the school's also. Mrs. Principal knows about this plan (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

In your opinion, is there segregation in the school/kindergarten where you work?

*No.*

Does the school/kindergarten have a segregation prevention/ desegregation plan?

*It is being drawn up<sup>141</sup> (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

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negative *perception* of the school's capacity as a social institution, but even of its *capacity* to generate social progress given that in such a case the school fails to fulfil its role as a trainer.)

<sup>139</sup>MERY Order No 1540/2007 prescribes only the formulation of a desegregation plan, but, aware that segregation might replicate year after year as new 1<sup>st</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grades are being formed, we asked for details regarding the real actions the school had taken to *prevent* the creation of segregated classes at the beginning of the school year.

<sup>140</sup>Annex to MERY Order No 1540/19.07.2007 banning school segregation of Roma children and approving the methodology to prevent and eliminate school segregation of Roma children, art. 6, p. 3.

<sup>141</sup>Almost three years since the MERY Order No 1540/2007 was issued.

*The school had a desegregation plan stipulating several measures: elimination of school dropout, of absenteeism. We developed a remedial programme where the students would do their homework in school, the parents would participate in various activities. It was useful as it was eliminating segregation among students and in the community (Vaslui County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 29. The desegregation plan is not known**

Almost three years since the MERY Order No 1540/19.07.2007 had come into force, even in the schools which had tried to apply desegregation measures as prescribed in Annex 1 to MERY Order No 1540 and in their desegregation plans, desegregation was not fully acknowledged or fully achieved at the time the data were collected for this research. The difficulties that these schools had to face were multifaceted.

Firstly, given that educational attainment in Roma classes was low-key due to segregation, the desegregation and the merger of these classes with the other ones entailed differential academic achievement levels in the desegregated classes. These differences require teachers to work in parallel with several groups of different levels within the same class, which translates into unpaid extra work. If this work gets tough, the teachers might exclusively work with the “good” students and neglect the “bad” ones from Roma classes, based on the idea that “*you can’t work with two children and forget about the other 25*”<sup>142</sup>. This considerably increases the risk for the children coming from “bad” classes to fail the grade, to feel marginalized and to gradually detach from school. This shows how an example of unsuccessful desegregation may lead, in the end, to the adverse effect of dropping out.

On the other hand, in some schools, non-Roma children’s parents notified the management about a potential drop in the academic achievement level of the classes merged with desegregated ones. Box 30 illustrates a few of these considerations as experienced by the teachers.

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<sup>142</sup>Interview with a teacher, County of Bihor.

*We found about it in school at some point when **we wanted to create those academic level classes**, we thought it would be a good thing and would get our quota. The schoolteacher has to do a lot of work and s/he is not paid any different, s/he is not paid cumulatively; and at some point good students from your class, who have attended kindergarten, start doing worse... And then due to this lagging you end up forming 3 groups, which is very hard, it's like having 3 classes. I have a 3<sup>rd</sup> grade now and I am teaching some of them how to write correctly, I do the lesson... Others, poor kids, are behind, they only copy parts of the lesson or they answer questions because they haven't yet reached the right level of writing; then the 2<sup>nd</sup> group of those whose social background and not only is quite difficult, who effectively work with the ABC. So, I don't know...it's a sensitive matter. But if that child felt marginalized and discriminated in a class then clearly s/he needs to be integrated. I don't know... my opinion is...50-50. Is there segregation? No, there isn't. There isn't because measures have been taken, **I don't know how good they are at some point for them**... (Braşov County, interview with a teacher).*

*The [desegregation] plan sets forth than anybody can enrol in our school. Desegregation is supported especially through the above-mentioned activities. My involvement is presented above, but I would now like to stress that **[Roma] parents support separate classes for Roma**. They think the current structure is good and working well. Students who finish middle school will be prepared for desegregation. **It is interesting that our students, who at some point were enrolled in other schools (in 5<sup>th</sup> grade), came back to us** (Covasna County, interview with a teacher).*

*The parents didn't agree with mixed classes. They accepted it after the school had insisted on it; we stayed and talked 'til late in the night, they accepted some compromises. They accepted it in the first year and then they made a petition that they wouldn't agree anymore. They brought arguments, they agreed to Roma children's inclusion only if the academic achievement wouldn't drop, if there weren't any big differences... **They had solid arguments** (Bihor County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 30. Obstacles to desegregation**

Therefore, there are still mixed opinions about the need for desegregation both among teachers, non-Roma and Roma parents, and, in some cases, among the students themselves who have internalized segregation as a state of normality. Clearly, the process is still underway, at different speeds in different settings and with different outcomes.

The impact assessment of PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” specifically mentions that “*Non-Roma parents show tolerance towards Roma students and parents; it is often underlined that there are no interethnic issues in the community*”<sup>143</sup>. The examples above show the opposite, highlighting the conflict that arises when the quality of education in school and in desegregated classes tends to drop following the integration of Roma children who are less prepared than the rest of the students. This reaction from non-Roma parents is a significant obstacle to desegregation because it directly impacts the management’s decision not to apply desegregation measures (as proved by the case from the County of Maramureş). Nonetheless, the impact assessment does bring up the “*white flight*” trend as an effect of desegregation<sup>144</sup>, proving that parents’ decision to move their children to other schools has been based on an at least latent conflict. Embracing the idea that there haven’t been or there aren’t any conflicts between non-Roma and Roma parents (or between non-Roma parents and the school management taking desegregation measures) is a naïve point of view concealing one of the biggest obstacles to desegregation.

The eradication of residential segregation is another issue of disagreement between the various stakeholders involved in the process. The MERY Order No 1540 lays down that desegregation shall be the concern of all educational establishments with a share of Roma students disproportionate to the percentage of Roma population in the respective area.<sup>145</sup> Residential segregation is, as

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<sup>143</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *PHARE Programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Impact Assessment*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 103.

<sup>144</sup>Idem, p. 99.

<sup>145</sup>*Annex to MERY Order No 1540/19.07.2007 banning school segregation of Roma children and approving the methodology to prevent and eliminate school segregation of Roma children*, art. 6, p. 3.

mentioned in Article 4 of Annex 2 to MERY Order No 1540, one of the unwanted situations leading to segregation. Thus, some “Roma” schools located close to the communities were closed down, and the students transferred to schools kilometres away, which actually hindered their participation in education, especially when harsh weather conditions during winter or rains block the access road to the communities. Under these circumstances, the County School Inspectorate cannot provide school transportation, even if regulations were in place concerning this. Box 31 reproduces some statements made by teachers from residentially segregated schools.

Are you familiar with the Order of the Ministry of Education No 1540/2007 banning the school segregation of Roma children? If yes, how did you find out about this Order?

*Yes, I have found out about it. I know that in our school there is no segregation, except for geographical segregation which is not something that depends on us. **This order does not apply to us, but to other schools.** I found out about this Order on the group facilitated by Professor Sarău Gheorghe<sup>146</sup>.*

Do you think there is segregation in the school/kindergarten where you work? Please explain.

*No. As there are only Roma students in school **it is impossible to segregate them and you can't take non-Roma children from 2-3 km away.***

Does the school/kindergarten have a segregation prevention/desegregation plan? Could you please detail on that? What measures does this plan include? What do you think about its usefulness?

*Yes, **we have a segregation prevention plan, but we never put it to work.** The community cares a lot about the school; they fought a great deal for it. Some people who helped build the school are still alive, they see it as theirs, and **they don't want it to be closed down.** The measures in the plan are that all the children*

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<sup>146</sup>A yahoo group where members share information.

*from the school should come to the big school and simultaneous classes should no longer exist, and that only the kindergarten should be left there. I was involved in the PHARE programme and I proposed this desegregation plan, I worked on it, but when I presented it to the parents, they disagreed. The parents were called to a meeting, I proposed the plan and you can imagine that it turned out bad because it is their school. As long as the parents were pleased there was nothing we could do; there is a difficult class at C., 2 simultaneous classes, little space, no playground, it would have been nice for them to be moved to the big school. But there is no use talking about it because I've been trying for years and it was not possible (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher).*

*At P. there is geographical segregation and there is nothing we can do about it. It would mean to close down the school and the kindergarten and to transport children to another school; that would be the only way to eliminate segregation because over 90% of the students are Roma. Yes, this school is in the middle of the community (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 31. Residential segregation is “justified” by teachers**

An interesting case is the pilot school from the PHARE project “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups” located in the County of Bihor. The teachers told us: *“We achieved desegregation – there are no more Roma-only areas in the building. Before, there were separate buildings, separate spaces, but now only two classes comprise exclusively Roma children.”* The questionnaire regarding the school's statistical data shows that 8 classes (out of 70 classes) have more than 50% of Roma students although only 25% of the school's students are Roma. During the PHARE project a new building with two classrooms was built, *close to the community* (the school is 6 km away from the community). *The building is not yet connected to the water mains, to electricity or to a septic tank<sup>147</sup>*, but it is functional, with two 1<sup>st</sup> grades *attended exclusively by Roma children. We should keep in mind that these segregated 1<sup>st</sup> grades were created in spite of the fact that one of the specific measures in*

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<sup>147</sup>According to the teachers' statements, at the time the data were collected, the mayoralty was to handle these works.

the desegregation plan of the school was to prevent the creation of segregated classes at the beginning of an educational stage.

Furthermore, the teachers told us about the community: “*that one needs to go, but it will happen naturally as they are slowly building houses farther away*”, and “*those who finish it [school] leave the community, they won’t go back, it wouldn’t be normal, they will leave that place for sure*”. The construction of a new building *close to that community, exclusively for Roma children*, lays the foundation of residential segregation, achieved, paradoxically, through the PHARE project, with funds destined, among other things, to desegregation. Given that teachers say that “*there is nothing we can do*” as regards residential segregation, this example illustrates a strategy of turning non-residential segregation into residential segregation in order to be able to justify lack of action and avoiding responsibility.

Anyway, the need for an integrated approach to desegregation is recurrent. **The first step to desegregation is prevention, ensuring via school regulations that the classes that are formed at the beginning of an educational stage are segregation-free.** This measure is however insufficient and needs to be accompanied by a more comprehensive long-term plan, encompassing inclusive education principles and other educational interventions to support children from segregated environments.

*Immediately after the Order on desegregation had been issued, we drafted a **long-term action plan**, so not only a year-long plan that went into the school development plan. And, it included important specific issues. We didn’t have to develop it very much. **First of all, the classes that are created when school starts.** Then, the educational policy for every lesson, like I was saying, **inclusive education that needs to be incorporated in every lesson** (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

*Desegregation is useless unless we do something about those who are lagging behind to help them catch up... The problem is that there are complex projects, but there are no simple projects: if we gave them a meal and 3-4 hours of school, they would come;*

*catch-up programmes can achieve amazing results, but everyone wants complicated, spectacular projects. It could be so simple, but we wouldn't get funds for something that simple. It would be most efficient, but it is not funded (Bihor County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 32. Desegregation needs to be completed with remedial measures**

Nevertheless, to run these interventions, additional financial and human resources are required over long periods of time. The dream of a teacher from Bihor County to have a system “*like in the West, from 8 to 6, with lunch and homework done in school*” is still far from coming true.

The last type of segregation, based on educational attainment, “happens” to coincide with ethnic segregation, which confirms the fact that the education to which Roma children have access does not provide them with the same academic levels as the other children. Box 33 shows **the extremely low attainment-related expectations from Roma students** as a result of a major quality deficit in “Roma” classes.

*In the 5<sup>th</sup> grade we are happy if a Roma student says ‘Hello’, if s/he uses the restrooms in a civilised manner or knows the colours. Then we are happy. But even that much is hard; you can't do a lot of the subject matter. **You can imagine, if we achieve desegregation, they won't pass the grade.** They can't keep up with the others. You can't work with two and forget about the other 25. They passed the grade for nothing (Bihor County, interview with a teacher).*

*Fortunately, segregation is dying out in our school but, unfortunately, we still have one last segregated class because it was created before the Order, in 2006, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade was created. Before, we used to separate classes based on school attainment, not on ethnic grounds. Tests would be run and based on their scores the students would be distributed to a class with good students or with bad students. **It so happened that most of the***

**Romanians were in a good class and most of the Roma in the other one.** *Although some very good Roma students were in the [good] class. Finally, this would lead to segregation. We still have one last class but we couldn't change them<sup>148</sup> or the students. All the other classes were created from 2007 on, and all of them are desegregated, perfectly balanced academically and ethnically speaking and it all proved to be a positive thing (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

### **Box 33. Attainment-based segregation**

So, there is practically a multitude of segregation criteria: the ethnic criterion overlaps with the educational attainment criterion, and, due to Roma communities' space-based segregation, the residential criterion often pops up. The statements quoted in this section show that teachers tend to justify residential segregation (*"There is nothing we can do about it"*) or to agree with attainment-based segregation (*"academic level classes"*, so that they can work differently with students). Nonetheless, these considerations cover up the ethnic criterion, which explains both residential segregation (compact Roma communities are established on this very ethnic criterion) and differential academic levels between students (the education quality deficit is symptomatic for the schools which are preponderantly attended by Roma children and for "Roma" classes<sup>149</sup>).

1. In schools, we have noticed persistent negative stereotypes regarding the Roma;
2. A result of discrimination is blaming failure on Roma students and parents, while teachers avoid responsibility for their own approaches, methods, perceptions and attitudes;
3. **The teachers need to be extensively trained on inclusive education**, intercultural education and fight against discrimination;

<sup>148</sup>Although the teacher talks about only one segregated class, s/he then uses the plural (we couldn't change *them*). Throughout the interview there is this confusion leaving the impression that there are actually more segregated classes, but s/he tries to cover it up.

<sup>149</sup>See the example of the PHARE pilot school from the County of Maramureș at page 99.

4. **Segregation, as a serious form of discrimination, is resistant to regulations trying to eradicate it.** It is a phenomenon that is **often covered up** in schools, and consequently **hard to measure**.

5. Desegregation regulations hit against **complex obstacles**:

- Non-Roma (and sometimes Roma) **parents' opposition**;
- **Teachers' opposition** for fear of the “*white flight*” phenomenon;
- Because of the education quality deficit in “Roma” schools and classes, desegregated classes tend to face **major academic level differences between children, which can trigger adverse effects**;
- **Residential segregation** is justified by teachers and sometimes by parents, reluctant to moving their children to more remote schools;

6. **Desegregation needs to be backed up by complementary measures to eliminate** academic level differences between Roma and non-Roma students.

**Box 34. Conclusions of the section on discrimination and segregation**

In this chapter, we have proved that the schools with a great number of Roma students tend to accumulate a quality deficit in terms of material resources, human resources and organizational ethos, and that discrimination, embodied in one of its most serious forms – segregation, continues to exist in the Romanian education system. It is obvious that the picture that this research makes of the school to which Roma students have access is far from perfect. From many points of view, the school that Roma children go to is not a school for all, but rather a school that has failed the education quality test.

The next chapter will try to identify successful educational initiatives for Roma children that could contribute to a school “for all”. At the end of the research study, we will showcase some recommendations for the school attended by Roma children to be able to pass the test in the near future.

## Chapter 4: Vectors of Change

The previous chapter highlighted the intricate challenges facing the Romanian education system with regard to the schools Roma children attend. **The quality deficit of material resources**, added to **that of human resources**, paired with **persistent discriminatory attitudes** lead to a hard-to-break vicious circle. Still, initiatives to improve education for Roma have been taken by the Ministry of Education and the civil society. Some of them have reached visible outcomes, others have hit against major barriers.

This chapter wants to expand on these attempts of escaping the vicious circle. We will thus focus on the potential vectors of change by having a look at the identified successful initiatives and by analyzing the educational programmes that can help Romanian school reach an increased degree of inclusion. We have to say that we didn't screen the success of these initiatives based on a complex methodology used to identify best practices (which actually lack a clear definition), but we established it based on teachers' and school mediators' stories. In the future, it would be indicated to include an analysis on educational initiatives considered successful by children and parents – direct beneficiaries of the services delivered by school.

The chapter is structured on three sections. In the first section, we will make an overview of the successful initiatives identified in the interviews with teachers and school principals. They focused on the following issues: measures to fight dropout, support to underprivileged families, parent and community participation in school activities and teacher training.

The second section portrays successful components of **PHARE** programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. Whenever we believe that there are shortcomings in the measures undertaken in these programmes, we shall present and argue our viewpoint.

The last section of the chapter focuses exclusively on the role of schools **mediators** as essential vectors of change. We wanted to

stress the **positive effects** of their work on the educational process, as well as **weaknesses in the implementation** of Order No 1539 of 19 July 2007 issued by the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, regulating school mediators' work.

## **4.1. Identified Positive Initiatives**

From the qualitative analysis of the interviews with teachers we extracted some initiatives that improved the quality of school education and implicitly enhanced participation of Roma children in education. They concern for the most unstructured initiatives, which were not part of programmes or projects, but which, from the interviewed teachers' experience, attained positive outcomes. We will tackle one by one aspects regarding: the fight against dropout, support to children from needy families, involvement of the social environment in education, personalized interventions in the community.

### ***4.1.1. The Fight against Dropout***

Our analysis shows that schools tend to lack structured dropout prevention and combating strategies. In a school from the County of Prahova, however, we came across a more in depth reflection on the dropout phenomenon which led to the adoption of a strategy centred on the psychological factor. Hence, the first step to fight dropout is to detect its root causes and set off a social enquiry to gather information on the family situation which has led to the child dropping out. This social enquiry later allows for personalized intervention and dropout combating approaches tailored to each case.

The second dropout combating measure is remedial education during school breaks, where the focus is put on activities meant to make the school environment appealing to the child. With such activities, school becomes a more attractive and friendlier place. We would also like to mention the initiative of a school from the County of Covasna to reward the children who are working hard in school and who take part in after-school remedial lessons with a summer trip.

What actions does the school take when a student is at risk of dropping out?

*The first measure we can take is trying to **identify the causes** of dropping out; then, together with the mediator and the class teacher we start a sort of **social enquiry** – we go in the community, we talk to the parents and we try to see what solutions we can find to make the child come back to school or to make parents agree with the child’s return to school. If the student is indeed at risk of dropping out, where possible and if we find the time, **during summer holidays we try to help him/her catch up with school**. In the last two years, in our school we have been running a programme called the “**Summer School**” and “**Summer Kindergarten**”; in this programme we are trying to attract the children who have dropped out during the school year, and we try to plan for them not real lessons, but **competitions, games in order to make them come back the next year** (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

*We have a programme in which children get lunch. Thanks to it, we have managed to improve children’s school attendance. Some children come at 9 or 10 o’clock especially for this meal, but at least they stay in school. We believe that this method will slowly improve children’s achievement too. We also have after-school classes in the afternoon, two hours for 1<sup>st</sup>-2<sup>nd</sup> graders twice a week. We have three 1<sup>st</sup> grades and three 2<sup>nd</sup> grades. We make two groups, one for more hard-working students and one for children with learning difficulties. We also hold 2 after-school lessons a week for two groups of children from 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grades. We received financing from Erste Bank, together with Caritas. They have a programme for Balkan countries, not only for Roma, but for all who need such help. I don’t remember exactly the name of the programme – we have a project manager. (...) Moreover, the students who come to school and to these after-school classes every day are offered a “bonus”: they take part in a one-week trip during the summer (Covasna County, interview with a principal).*

*Individualized homework and learning support (itinerant schoolteachers);*

*Mutual aid-based group work in classes;*  
*Rewards for any progress made (verbal appreciation, diplomas, etc.);*  
*Presenting, promoting the success stories of students from different settings;*  
*Attracting parents to joint supervision, guidance, support activities;*  
*Additional support (Argeş County, interview with a principal).*  
*Differentiated work in class; support from the itinerant teacher who makes tailored programmes together with the other teachers; talking with the school psychologist (Iaşi County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 35. Successful initiatives for combating school dropout**

The need to run remedial education programmes for students at risk of dropping out was often underscored by teachers as a simple but efficient catch-up measure: *“The problem is that there are complex projects, but not simple projects: if we gave them a meal and 3-4 hours of school, it would work; catch-up programmes can achieve amazing results”*.<sup>150</sup> The same teacher stresses that donors generally don’t take an interest in such programmes because they are considered simple and lacking in innovation. This is a shame, especially that the philosophy of development projects does not exclusively rely on permanent innovation, but also on identifying successful interventions and scaling them up once they have been proved effective. Or, a lunch, a few hours of additional remedial education and a reward for those who attend the programme prove to be extremely efficient measures in combating dropout and improving educational achievement.

Another aspect that teachers stressed as a positive means to fight dropout is the employment of support staff and mobilizing them into tailored dropout prevention activities. Just as we have underlined in the previous chapter, the itinerant teacher, the school counsellor and the psychologist may be essential resources mobilised for this goal.<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>150</sup> Interview with a teacher, Bihor County.

<sup>151</sup> See pages 50-51.

#### **4.1.2. Support to Children from Needy Families**

As shown in the analysis from the previous chapter, most dropout and absenteeism cases are related to poverty. Students from underprivileged families hence need support to cut back collateral costs of education. In this respect, we identified a series of measures that could be considered successful initiatives that not only answer to deprived children's material needs, but, highly important, also strengthen social solidarity which can build sustainable support mechanisms for the disadvantaged. In addition, these measures are meant to implement and advance positive mutual aid values, which enhance inclusive education if internalized by children.

How does your institution support the students whose parents can't buy them school supplies?

*We buy them with the other parents' money and some sponsorship (Arad County, interview with a principal).*

*Children who don't have school supplies use the other children's, because we decided together with the parents to pool school supplies money and buy such items together in order to teach children positive values, such as friendship and mutual aid (Arad County, interview with a teacher).*

*Each teacher talks in class about Government provision of school supplies; these students are awarded scholarships too; they also come to school for the milk and croissant they get every day because they are so poor. (Galați County, interview with a principal).*

#### **Box 36. Support to students from needy families**

An important role in supporting children from disadvantaged families is played by the 'a-meal-a-day' programme, as stressed in the previous paragraph. The school can thus cover, at least to some degree, the material lacks that parents face, and this meal is also an investment in the children's nutrition, their health and implicitly in better conditions for schooling.

The implementation of the government programme aiming at school supply provision to children from disadvantaged backgrounds was also underlined as playing a very positive role. The programme was started under Government Ordinance No 33/2001, approved by Law No 126/2002, and became functional in 2003, with annual nationwide implementation. The goal of the programme is to keep in school the children from needy families, intended as families whose average monthly net income per capita accounts for up to 50% of the minimum gross salary income in Romania. Nearly 945,780 school children benefit from this programme each year.<sup>152</sup> Like for the “Milk and Croissant” programme, the expected outcome of this programme is reduced school dropout and diminished absenteeism as a by-product. Although these support programmes don't necessarily improve the *quality* of education that Roma children are delivered in class, they are measures that at least address some basic poverty-generated problems in children's school participation. Still, we insist on the fact that, unless accompanied by drastic improvements in education, these programmes will only solve a few problems of a student population segment. The fact that the student is physically kept in school due to these support programmes does not necessarily mean that his/her presence in school will entail academic success. As shown over and over again, this very much depends on the quality of education.

#### **4.1.3. Parent and Community Participation**

As we found out from the interviews with some teachers, the way in which parents are involved in school activities may significantly improve the quality of school education. First of all, it is essential that teachers and schoolteachers know very well the community the school caters for. Knowing this helps identify not only high risk weaknesses in students (such as parents' illiteracy or under-schooling), but also resource people that could be more actively engaged in education-supporting activities. They could be mobilised for remedial education activities to be carried out with groups of children, including those children whose parents have a lower level of education.

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<sup>152</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation, *Report on the State of the National Education System*, Bucharest, 2009, p. 116.

Apart from knowing the community very well, it is just as important to encourage 'peer-like' discrimination-free communication between parents and teachers. When Roma parents are treated the same as non-Roma parents, when the communication between them and teachers is healthy, based on non-discrimination, mutual respect and understanding, there are more chances for parent participation to be enhanced both quantitatively and qualitatively.

A third aspect, deriving from the first two, is a personalised approach to each community according to the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats identified in each case. As regards this, it would be appropriate for the teachers and the parents involved in school to make the SWOT analysis of the community they cater for, at the beginning of each school year. In this analysis, resource persons can be spotted and mobilised to support the educational process, and priority action axes can be established to solve major weaknesses and threats with a view to ensure optimal education. The statements below illustrate the ideas we have underlined.

*I always make a comparison between inclusive education and health – if you are ill and you know what you are suffering from, you take a pill and you might get better. The same goes for inclusive education, each community has its own specificities and **it would be better to solve specific problems**; once these are solved, we can make inclusive education (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher).*

How does your institution actively involve parents, especially those from Roma communities?

*Through the meetings they attend, by turning **some parents into resources**, meaning that they help many students in the class as some children go to their colleagues' whose parents know how to read and write and help those who can't. For example, this happened in my class – a student's mother helps her daughter and also another student whose parents can't read and write and can't help her out. So she goes to that little girl's mother who is always available and quite a resource parent (Suceava County, interview with a teacher).*

*It is not easy to get parents involved, but they usually come to our school shows, they are proud of their children; we make sure we give them a diploma, we take photos, and display these things. They recognise themselves and **are very proud that things are changing. They feel they are treated differently** (Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

How does the institution communicate with parents?

*Directly, we invite them to school. Our staff, **schoolteachers in particular go to their home to see where the child lives, if the parents can read and write, if they can help children with homework and find out that some can, others can't and that's when the schoolteacher helps out especially with remedial education activities** (Suceava County, interview with a teacher director).*

**Box 37. Knowing the community, mobilising resources and getting parents involved**

**4.1.4. Extracurricular Activities and Teacher Participation**

If we take into consideration that school plays an educational role beyond the formal schooling hours, extracurricular activities gain major importance. In our analysis, we have underscored the fact that after-school teacher participation in students' life is crucial for success.

It is obvious that the work performed by teachers beyond their tasks must not be regarded as an obligation to volunteer. The volunteer work of some teachers from Gorj and Suceava Counties is very admirable – and rare –, but we need to stay realistic when it comes to expectations from teachers. Undoubtedly, the education budget should be supplemented to retain competent, motivated teachers who are pleased with their work. At the same time, extra work should be rewarded to match the efforts put in by teachers involved in remedial education or other type of activities.

A positive initiative is getting sponsors for these activities, such as the mayoralty or local businesses.

Has the institution had extra-curricular initiatives in the community (theatre, trips, competitions)?

*Last year, we organised many trips and the children [were] only from the community. One was sponsored by the mayoralty, another one was paid by the parents, so I think all children in school went somewhere, including those who maybe left the community for the first time in a year (Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

*I'm lucky to have old-fashioned colleagues who do extra work with children without thinking of being paid more (Gorj County, interview with a principal).*

*I would like to say that we gave great importance to Roma ethnics because we knew this was our weakness and we are very concerned about their situation. Every year, we had a summer kindergarten for the children who hadn't been attending kindergarten that much or haven't been enrolled for various reasons; the teachers volunteered, they were never paid, so they took a month or three weeks off their holiday to work with these children, which is remarkable I might say. No one forced us, we wanted to do it knowing that other schools were doing it, but we could have chosen to stay home (Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

*I try to find attractive school and extracurricular activities, or a sponsor for clothes, sweets, toys. I like to introduce them to lots of new things, I use the information and research centre to the fullest and I always start my lesson with something that gets their interest, for example I wanted to talk to them about Bug. I found that 7<sup>th</sup> graders knew nothing about Auschwitz and so I looked for a short movie about Auschwitz, about what the Nazis did back then. The children were very interested and they even borrowed the book (...) that they take turns in reading (Sălaj Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 38. Extracurricular activities and teacher participation**

As underlined in this last quote, it is also worth noting that there is a need to implement activities that can attract children towards knowledge and learning. Students' interest must be boosted

through extracurricular activities, interactive approaches and the use of multimedia specific to modern education. Moreover, teachers' interest in using these methods and resources must also be encouraged. This is linked to another factor, namely teachers' continuing training on inclusive education and interactive teaching.

#### **4.1.5. Teacher Training**

In the previous chapter, we stressed the acute lack of continuing professional development programmes for teachers<sup>153</sup>, especially in the area of inclusive education and means to combat discrimination and promote tolerance in school. Nevertheless, the statements hereunder show that, in some cases, the continuing training that the Ministry of Education, the Teacher Training House and other relevant organisations offer to teachers may be quite affluent. Below, we see that some teachers benefited from such training which improved the quality of teaching.

What lifelong learning professional courses did you attend in the last four years?

*We did many courses on new teaching approaches, new evaluation methods, some courses on school psychology for a better understanding of the children's psychological level or age, as we basically attended just one year of school psychology at university, so these courses were useful! (...) Following these programmes, we noticed that our teachers became more open to students and to the problems they face at home and at school. We have noticed that in general, maybe thanks to us, the students in our classes see school differently, more positively. I am glad I took part in these courses and programmes. In the PHARE programmes we received some educational materials and resources. I forgot to mention that I attended a course on AeL, Advanced eLearning lessons, at Câmpina; we now benefit from more resources and these courses and programmes were useful indeed. The children and we have evolved. (Prahova County, interview with a teacher)*

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<sup>153</sup>See pages 48-50.

*Many. From courses on Romani teaching, language and culture in 2006 to training sessions on Romani courses, methodologies and teaching, counselling to Roma parents, intercultural education, interethnic relations, electoral education, building responsible classes, project management, training course on Roma education methodologies, seminars-exam for national trainer in educational romanipen, education in disadvantaged rural areas, community cooperation and desegregation competences, training of national trainers, critical thinking and active learning, training programme for principals and inspectors, educational management, education and support in an inclusive environment – all the courses were provided by the Ministry of Education in partnership with Education 2000 +, CRCR<sup>154</sup> Cluj, CCD<sup>155</sup> Sălaj, CNCD<sup>156</sup>, and all of them were approved by the Ministry of Education and Research. They were very useful to me because I managed to train the teachers from my school (Sălaj County, interview with a teacher).*

How were the teachers trained on how to approach/address intolerance, racism and discrimination?

*Training course on inclusive education and on discrimination-free schools, organised by the National Council for Combating Discrimination and MERI (Sălaj County, interview with a principal).*

### **Box 39. Teacher continuing professional development**

We have seen that the continuing professional development on offer for teachers shows some training providers' concern for critical issues, such as inclusive education and combating discrimination. The contribution of some institutions and organizations like the National Council for Combating Discrimination, Centre Education 2000+ or the Resource Centre for Roma from Cluj is crucial for these courses. The civil society, with involvement from organizations active in Roma education and social inclusion, may round out the specialised courses on offer at public institutions (counselling to Roma parents, intercultural education, interethnic relations, educational romanipen etc.).

<sup>154</sup>The Resource Centre for Roma.

<sup>155</sup>The Teacher Training House.

<sup>156</sup>The National Council for Combating Discrimination.

This picture of an abounding continuing professional development offer for teachers contrasts strongly with the situation from other counties, where most often the teachers didn't benefit from such courses. The logical question which comes to mind is what exactly hampers the replication of examples like the ones above in other schools. Thus, one of the barriers that can restrict teacher access to continuing professional development courses is the fact that some courses charge a fee, between 600 and 1,200 RON.<sup>157</sup> Another obstacle is the fact that the travel costs from rural areas to the towns where these courses are being held are not reimbursed, and if the courses take more than four hours a day, the food costs have to be covered by the participants. As salaries in education are among the lowest, teachers can hardly cope with these expenses. If there are regulations concerning teacher lifelong learning (namely the obligation to accumulate 90 credits in 5 years), then the framework must also be created to ensure their application and the widest access to continuing training must be given to teachers.

## 4.2. PHARE Programmes

A few interviews with principals and teachers underscore the fact that the PHARE programmes "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" contributed in different ways to the improvement of education quality in the pilot schools where they were implemented.

The first area where the impact of the PHARE programmes was considered positive is teacher training on inclusive education, and combating discrimination, racism and intolerance. Following the courses held as part of these programmes, some teachers noticed a mentality shift towards a more open-minded approach as regards Roma students and parents. Of course, these changes didn't take place in every pilot school where the programme was implemented, as previously mentioned<sup>158</sup>, but it is worth focusing on the cases where the teachers highlighted and supported these improvements.

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<sup>157</sup> Interview with a resource person, the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport, April 2010.

<sup>158</sup> See, for example, the cases from Bihor and Maramureş Counties, mentioned at the pages 99 and 103-104.

In what projects/programmes was the institution included in the last 4 years (since 2005)?

*The most important project with an impact was by far the PHARE 2005, "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" that we implemented in 2007-2008. This was one of the most important projects and then there were other small projects.*

What were the achievements of these projects/programmes?

*First of all, the fact that it changed the way I was thinking. Once again, we adapted everything, from school vision and mission to management plans, internal rules, everything was adapted after those training courses. (Galați County, interview with a principal).*

How were the teachers trained on means to approach intolerance, racism, discrimination?

*The kindergarten teachers participated in PHARE project training courses on inclusive education, and as a result the communication between them and parents improved in the sense that Roma children were accepted in the group.*

What educational resources regarding ethnic groups in Romania does the institution have? Are these resources used?

*Through the PHARE project we received teaching-learning materials, audio tapes, books about the Roma ethnic group which are frequently used by the children and the teachers (Maramureș County, interview with a principal).*

How were the teachers trained on means to approach intolerance, racism, discrimination?

*Our school received educational materials, books, CD's; apart from this, we also participated in courses which, if I'm not mistaken, were part of the 2006 PHARE programme.*

What educational resources regarding ethnic groups in Romania does the institution have and when do you make use of them?

*In general, we do have resources, especially books or, how should I say, those little information booklets, leaflets. These books are generally used during form time lessons and during school or class teacher-parent conferences (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

How were the teachers trained on means to approach intolerance, racism, discrimination?

*If, in the beginning, I found that some of my colleagues had the wrong mentality, an inappropriate attitude towards Roma students who were treated differently during and after lessons, and that these teachers' behaviour had nothing to do with a modern-day European teacher who embraces tolerance and non-discrimination, after some training courses held in the PHARE project, "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups", where (...) things changed almost completely. The teachers now treat all children the same and involve them in all school activities (Suceava County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 40. Successful interventions in the PHARE programmes "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" as regards teacher training on inclusive education**

In addition, the PHARE programmes had a positive impact as regards the new approaches adopted to adjust school activities to all groups of students. Thus, some schools became more inclusive, and the educational offer more adapted to students' needs.

*We have completely changed, so to speak, the approach in our lessons and in all management-related issues, in all documents, we see things completely different. When we make projections, we should find solutions for all groups of students. So, the school no longer designs activities for virtually good or average students, but for all groups (Galați County, interview with a teacher).*

What is the institution doing to improve student achievement?

*I could go back to the PHARE programme, which I think helped us a lot because after school we hold catch up classes twice a week with students who are behind; “School after School” is the name of the programme and we try to help students catch up with the most serious lacks they have (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 41. Positive effects of PHARE programmes on child needs-adapted school activities**

Finally, a last aspect underscored in the interviews with teachers was the improved communication between school and community, after having included parents in children’s school life and in school activities in general. This happened through a parenting course initiative, called “Parents’ School”. Following these courses, parents and teachers were engaged in a more intense communication process.

*We did a very good thing with “Parents’ School”. This PHARE project was really beneficial because it brought parents to school and it built a bridge between school and community and the parents have become more open, more communicative, they cooperate more, they even come and tell us a bit too many of their family problems which are none of our business, like arguments between spouses, unless they concern children! (Prahova County, teacher).*

**Box 42. Improved communication between school and parents**

Unfortunately, there are some signs regarding the lack of sustainability of some activities started in the PHARE programmes “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups”. If during their implementation, financial resources were allocated for activities like remedial education, parent training or provision of a meal, some of these are currently no longer financially sustained, which could endanger the achievements of PHARE programmes.

*There were projects, such as “Parents’ School”, run during the implementation of the 2005 PHARE programme, a successful programme, **but there is no money now to continue such activities**. We are trying to carry on the project with the education we offer to parents during teacher-parent conferences where various educational issues are discussed (Covasna County, interview with a teacher).*

What should the school do, in your opinion, to keep Roma children in school?

*In the past, a meal was provided, **during the PHARE project, a hot meal**. There are many children who don’t come with pocket money and I don’t think a waffle and some melted cheese can keep the full for the whole school day (interview with a school mediator, Galați County).*

What is your institution doing to improve student achievement?

*We run a “School after School” programme, where children with lower achievement levels are included, they stay after school or come in earlier, it depends – the 1<sup>st</sup>-4<sup>th</sup> graders stay after school, and 5<sup>th</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> graders come earlier. This project was very good because everyone would also get a meal, **now they don’t get it anymore because there is no money**, but it was very good; the children were really coming and it was a positive thing because the children would understand what they were told, those who were lagging behind, and they would even like it a great deal! (Prahova County, interview with a teacher)*

**Box 43. Lack of sustainability of some PHARE programme activities**

### **4.3. Positive Effects of School Mediation**

The interviews with 25 school mediators, as well as the interviews with teachers and the principals of the researched schools pointed out some positive effects of the work performed by school mediators. These have mainly to do with sensitive issues such as dropout, non-enrolment and absenteeism reduction,

combating ethnic segregation in schools, improving attainment and communication between teachers and parents, and changing teacher mentality as regards the Roma.

Unfortunately, there are no figures or statistics supporting the positive impact of school mediators on the schools where they have been hired. The school mediator impact assessment implies the evaluation of a set of indicators at different times – before and some time after the mediator’s intervention – or, maybe, the comparison between two very similar schools, one who benefits from mediator’s intervention, and one that doesn’t. There are of course limitations to this last methodology because not only the baseline indicators of these two schools should be identical, but also their social environment and – inside and outside – influences that may bring about changes. The methodology implies the quasi-experimental creation of conditions that are hard to find in real life.

Due to these methodological limitations, the data supporting our hypothesis are purely qualitative, and the only way to double-check them is to confront several sources of information, namely school mediators, teachers and principals. Thus, we will next present their opinions on the effects of school mediators’ work. We will close the chapter with a series of critical views on the implementation of the school mediator employment policy.

### **4.3.1. Dropout Reduction**

School mediators’ success in dropout reduction is officially recognised and declared, even if relevant exact numbers are not available in comprehensive studies. Thus, in 2004, sources from the Ministry of Education and Research declared for the press that thanks to mediators’ work, primary school dropout diminished by 50% in the schools that employed them.<sup>159</sup> Nonetheless, today these data must be regarded with reservations because the current context is very different than the one from 2004, before Romania’s accession to the European Union, as meanwhile numerous projects

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<sup>159</sup>Liliana Preoteasa, Director-General at the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, in the article “Mediatorul școlar îi va sprijini pe copiii romi”, published in *Adevărul*, 9 September 2004, available at [http://www.acces-la-educatie.edu.ro/index.php/articles/resurse\\_utile/518](http://www.acces-la-educatie.edu.ro/index.php/articles/resurse_utile/518) , accessed in April 2010.

and programmes engaging school mediators have been implemented.

The interviews with school mediators do indicate the dropout reduction effect, with a dramatic drop in some cases. Relevant statements can be seen in Box 44.

*Well, since I started working as a mediator, they [the students] have started to come to school, and only about 2% are at risk [of dropping out]. Before, it was 5%. Now they come, things have improved... I went in the community to explain everything to children and parents and in the end they came to school. So, from 5% to 2% (Braşov County, interview with a school mediator).*

*So far, amazing things have been done. There is practically no school dropout (...). Fantastic changes have been made; so, when I came in this school, there were 16 to 20 dropout cases, plus tens of thousands of school absences in a year. Of course, the number of absences has been cut down, and the attendance rate has changed a lot (Cluj County, interview with a school mediator).*

*When I first started working in the commune of S., Roma children wouldn't go to school and they would finish only 5-6 grades, but now two Roma students, out of 83, have enrolled in high school at Târgu Secuiesc. They didn't apply for Roma-dedicated places, but for regular places as they were well-prepared and they didn't want to turn to this type of support (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 44. Dropout reduction as resulting from interviews with mediators**

The last statement is taken from an interview with a school mediator who has been working since 1995. This example shows how Roma children's school participation has drastically improved, but over 15 years. The conclusion one can draw from this statement is the need for a long-term intervention in order to reach sustainable results and change patterns engrained for generations.

### ***4.3.2. Non-Enrolment Reduction***

Many interviewed school mediators highlighted the significant improvement in Roma children's school participation with reduced percentages of school-aged children who are not enrolled in compulsory education. School mediators' work consists in sharing information about what needs to be done in order to enrol a child in school, and in real enrolment support especially in the communities where the parents are not schooled enough to make the application file.

Just as important is community monitoring through child census and school situation follow-up, especially for those at high risk of non-participation in school (preschool-aged children, as well as those who have finished 8 grades). School mediators are a great data collection tool because in general they hold the key to these communities and have access to authentic data. The mediator's involvement in the identification of families coping with difficult issues that affect children's school participation is just as significant. The mediator, as an integral part of the community, holds thorough information regarding children's family situation and the obstacles that may hinder their school participation – either parents' under-schooling or the difficulty to handle the enrolment documentation, or a precarious economic background or parents' migration in search of temporary income sources. These obstacles are not always well-understood by teachers. As highlighted in the previous chapter, myths still persist and are deeply engrained in the non-Roma overall mentality, such as Roma parents' lack of interest in children's education or frequent early marriages. School mediators, on the other hand, have access to information that reflects Roma communities' realities and as a result they can intervene more efficiently to eradicate the root causes of Roma children's non-participation in school.

*Back then<sup>160</sup>, there were fewer children, I heard that only 12-13 children were enrolled in school.*

*When I started working, I went to the Roma community (door to door), I took their personal data for the school enrolment files, and I also went to the mayoralty to get some information (who needed to go to school, how old they were, etc). I gathered the children from the Summer Kindergarten (...) and last year I set up 2 classes of Roma children. As regards their behaviour, the children would come to school, but they would go home at 9, 10, 11.*

*(...)*

*Parents wouldn't send their child to school when s/he was 7-8 years because they didn't even know how to make the enrolment file and for this reason they would leave their children unschooled, they wouldn't even try to make the file; even now they don't get involved in taking care of all the required documents (...). So, I have to go door to door to get the files done, so that all the papers are filled out, to enrol them in school, to fill out their applications because many of them can't write (Bihor County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I believe that in my work as a school mediator I managed to raise awareness of the importance of education in the Roma community from the commune of B. There were some achievements as well as failures because many Roma families can't afford to send their children to school during any period of the year, and other parents don't take a special interest in children's education. At the beginning of my work, the Roma schooling rate was 75% and it has now reached approximately 90%... To increase the schooling rate I worked with the parents to encourage children's timely school enrolment (Botoşani County, interview with a school mediator).*

*At the beginning of my work, the Roma schooling rate was 77% and it has now reached around 85%. Although the Roma understand quite easily how important education is, they can't always leave their children home alone when they go to other parts*

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<sup>160</sup>The respondent actually means the beginning of his career as a school mediator.

*of the country for seasonal agricultural work (Botoşani County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I proposed to have in the class committee a Roma parent who can improve the school participation of Roma children and parents from the community (Botoşani County, interview with a school mediator).*

*(...) Since I came, things have improved, people happen to come when they are called to school, to teacher-parent conferences too. In my opinion, the schooling rate has improved (...). I am proud that all of them attend school and that they don't want any of them to be unschooled. Some are still unschooled, but this happened before I have become a mediator (Braşov County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I went in the community, I gathered all the children than needed to start the 2009/10 school year, I selected all of them, I enrolled them, I wrote down those who needed to go to school, those who started school, those who needed to come to kindergarten, those who finished 8<sup>th</sup> grade at the end of the semester, I monitored all of them and I went to their parents'; so my work was pretty time-consuming and I had to work hard. As to parents, the same, I went door to door and talked to them. I can't say that they didn't answer to my appeal. I can open every door in the community and I can talk to them. If you go there, you'll see how appreciated I am in the community (Braşov County, interview with a school mediator).*

*In 2008, I did a sort of census. I went to every family and saw how many children they had, their age, to see when it was the right time for them to be enrolled, or if they had dropped out to see how to get them in a second-chance programme if they wanted to. We are doing our best to school them (Braşov County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 45. Positive effects of school mediators' work on enrolment rate improvement**

### **4.3.3. Absenteeism Reduction**

A side effect of school mediators' work is improved school attendance among Roma children. This came out from a number of interviews. The attention goes once more to the crucial role of a deep understanding of the community problems and the school mediator's efficient intervention to solve them. Box 46 presents some statements that highlight the mediator's positive role in solving absenteeism problems.

*It was more difficult in the first year because the Roma live far away, somewhere at the outskirts of town. In addition, some of them didn't have a watch to know the time and the Roma children were always late at school in the morning. So, I talked to Mr. Principal and we solved the problem in the sense that the young children were brought in by a school bus (Bihor County, interview with a school mediator).*

*Thank God we have a very competent school mediator that helps us solve many absenteeism problems. He plays a liaison role between our institution and the Roma communities from the commune. I believe we are lucky to have him with us and he helps us a lot with community visits (Covasna County, interview with a principal).*

#### **Box 46. School mediator's role in absenteeism reduction**

### **4.3.4. Combating Segregation and Desegregation**

Some interviews underline the mediator's positive role in the process of **desegregation** and as regards segregation prevention actions, such as the creation of classes at the beginning of an educational stage. The statements from Box 47 crystallize the role that the school mediator could play in monitoring segregation and as a gatekeeper of Roma children's inclusion in mixed classes. Thanks to school mediator's permanent presence, school principals and teachers sometimes internalize inclusive education principles, like children's distribution in classes with a view to avoid segregation,

gaining thus a positive organisational ethos where the teachers are careful that segregated classes are not formed “*not even by mistake*”.

In your opinion, is there segregation in the school where you work? What kind of segregation? Explain.

*There is. Both at School No 1 and at School No 4. At School No 4, it's 99%, there are very few Romanians there. The classes are made up mostly of Roma. There are classes made up only of Roma and classes comprising only Romanians. We tried to desegregate this year (...). **It was my initiative. The school was doing nothing about it.** Children's parents probably had a final word in this segregation issue. "Why should my child sit next to a Roma child?" Non-Roma parents, they did it. They insisted on it and the teachers agreed (Galați County, interview with a school mediator).*

*For years, we've been careful to avoid any situations that could lead to segregation. At the beginning of each school year, such measures are set and discussed. **Even more so since we have a school mediator, we pay special attention to this so that such cases don't happen, not even by mistake** (Covasna County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 47. School mediator' contribution to desegregation**

#### **4.3.5. Improving Attainment**

Another effect of school mediator's presence and work is improved student attainment, also due to improvements in undesirable phenomena, such as dropout, non-enrolment and absenteeism. Hence, we were told about Roma children's academic achievements and about some cases of their enrolment in high school without turning to the additional support or affirmative measures, like applying for Roma-dedicated places.

*I would like to point out one thing: the greatest joy is that the 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> prizes go almost always to our Roma children. This is the biggest achievement that I've forgot to mention earlier. (Cluj County, interview with a school mediator).*

*They didn't apply for Roma-dedicated places, but for regular places as they were well-prepared and they didn't want to turn to this type of support (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 48. Roma children's school attainment**

Also as regards improved attainment and Roma children's motivation to continue their studies to a higher level than their parents, we should mention the successful initiatives of some interviewed school mediators. Thus, the power of example is one of the main motivational factors, as coming out from the statements in Box 49.

*I invited two Roma college students to attend a teacher-parent conference where they talked about the importance of education and the chances out there for college graduates. I believe that this kind of activity may mobilize more families and school children to finish their studies (Botoșani County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I also tell them "see, I am old and yet I started studying this old". Nothing is more persuasive than the good example set by someone else. If the members of the community see that someone has been schooled and now s/he is better off and leads an easier life thanks to that, then others tend to follow their example. (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I helped the school mediator to finish school, higher education I mean, so that he doesn't have problems if he needs a higher education degree at some point. He is an example for the whole community. If asked how he did it he can answer "through education" (Bihor County, interview with a principal).*

**Box 49. School valorisation through the power of example**

#### **4.3.6. Improving School-Community Relationship and Communication**

While being a link between the school and the community and holding information about the community and intercultural competences which allow them to mediate and facilitate communication, the school mediator is at the same time a tool needed to improve mutual understanding and communication between teachers and Roma school children or parents. This can improve the quality of the education which Roma children get and can ensure more parent participation in children's school life.

*This is exactly my case. I am the bridge between the school and the community, there always should be a school-community, community-school interest. This is the only way to get good results. (Cluj County, interview with a school mediator).*

*The teachers could not go through with their lessons because the children were loud, talking back to them, would send them out of the classroom, so there was not a good teacher-student relationship. That's when I stepped in and I talked to the teachers and the students alike – I told students to pay attention and to teachers to do more than just write on the black board, but to explain. And I am happy that the teachers and the students reached a mutual agreement. The children were no longer loud, the teachers started to better explain the lesson, and the children tried to learn. They started to stay in school more, skip classes less, and whenever I would see them downtown I would take or send them to school.*

(...)

*I can say that the greatest achievement is that I have brought a change in my students and I am happy that the parents are more open to their children's school life. Parents understand better their role in the life of the school, I see that they have understood everything I have explained to them so far and they tell each other that the child should go to school and learn and have at least 8 grades in order to get a job because school is life, school can bring food to the table (Bihor County, interview with a school mediator).*

*It took a lot of convincing from me and School C. to make Roma parents get involved. I saw that Roma parents felt great when they were invited to talk about their children's talents and interests at meetings and they told other parents to attend the meetings. They currently partake in bigger numbers in school shows and activities (Botoşani County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 50. Improvement of the community-school relationship**

### **4.3.7. Changes in Teachers' Attitude towards Roma**

As a consequence of improved communication between the school and the community, some mediators noticed a change in some teachers' attitude towards Roma children. The school mediator may help teachers to better understand the realities of the Roma community, which contributes to a change of attitude after becoming aware of the difficulties facing the Roma.

The mediator, that Roma children often perceive as the protector of their interests, may also intervene in case of conflict arising from teachers' discriminatory attitude towards Roma. The mediator's point of view may therefore be a warning sign to the teachers who are not aware that their perceptions and attitudes are discriminatory. Of course, mediator's stance-taking does not necessarily lead to enhanced awareness of the need to treat all children equally, regardless their ethnicity, but it can at least help to set off some thoughts on the discriminatory treatments to which some Roma children are subjected in schools.

What should the school be doing, in your opinion, to keep Roma children in school?

*As I've said, more meetings, involved teachers **who go with me in the community and see how they live**. And then, I think that some of them are perceived with a bit of repulsion, or maybe that's an overstatement, but there is a bit of reluctance towards Roma children because they are not as clean as the majority students. If they went to the community to see their living conditions [no water,*

*no electricity], I think they would look at them differently. **I tried to and I took some teachers in the community. And they changed their views** (Braşov County, interview with a school mediator).*

*This incident happened in a class of Hungarians where a cell phone was missing and the first classroom to look for it was the Roma's. The children came to me in a hurry and told me about it (if they have a problem, they run to me), and **I went and told the teacher that it would help to look in his classroom for starters and then in ours and while he was looking he should be looking in every single classroom, not only in the Roma's** (Bihar County, interview with a school mediator).*

**Box 51. School mediator's contribution to changing some teachers' attitude**

#### **4.3.8. School Mediator's Added Value as a Community Development Promoter**

Facilitating the relations between the Roma community and public institutions, through their knowledge, intercultural competences and the relationship they can develop with local institutions, school mediators can play the role of a resource person in the community. They may sometimes go beyond the role assigned to them in the job description and become a community development promoter in a broader sense. In this respect, we selected some statements presented in Box 52. Whether we talk about practical support to those who have a lower level of education or about initiatives in education, job training or infrastructure improvement for the community, the school mediator is the one who knows the needs of the community and has access to potential solutions provided by different institutions or civil society initiatives.

In this respect, the school mediators' network, interconnected with other networks of people and organisations working for the social inclusion of the Roma minority, is crucial for accessing resources to benefit the Roma communities. Both school mediators and other persons interested in community development and in the improvement of Roma situation have online information networks

(yahoo-groups<sup>161</sup>) at their disposal whereby relevant information is shared about opportunities and successful stories in Roma communities. These networks, the school mediators' access to relevant information regarding the social inclusion of Roma, and the mediator's position as a resource person in the community and as a liaison between the latter and the outside world may all become major vectors of change, as resulting from the statements below.

*At the beginning, they didn't welcome me with open arms because they didn't know what role I was playing in the community, (...) right after my arrival they didn't accept me, but after a while, after they saw what my role was, they accepted me and even **came to me for help if they didn't know something or if they didn't know how to fill out an application or didn't know how to write, they would come to me to fill it out or to write statements or whatever they needed** (Cluj County, interview with a school mediator).*

*Another proposition that I would like to make is **to organise qualification courses for those who have sufficient schooling to attend**. For example, at Ojdula, a CRCR<sup>162</sup> programme is underway which would be most welcome and necessary in our commune, too. We have to see if they can help with such qualification courses (Covasna County, interview with a school mediator).*

*I planned school shows with the children, I took part in **ditch cleaning activities in the community side by side with Law 416 beneficiaries with support from the mayoralty, in the kick-off works at the road connecting the Roma community to school, in the power and water mains extension works** (Suceava County, interview with a school mediator).*

### **Box 52. The school mediator as a community development promoter**

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<sup>161</sup> Like for example the group called *scoala\_incluziva\_2005*, initiated as part of the 2005 PHARE project "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" and facilitated by Mr. Gheorghe Sarău. Source: [http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scoala\\_incluziva\\_2005/](http://groups.yahoo.com/group/scoala_incluziva_2005/), accessed in April 2010.

<sup>162</sup> The Resource Centre for Roma.

#### ***4.3.9. Weaknesses and Limitations of School Mediation Policy***

The achievements underlined in the paragraphs above do not cancel out the weaknesses of school mediator's interventions. These are due especially to the manner in which some sections in the MERY Order No 1539 from 2007 were formulated and implemented.

We would like to highlight here a few crucial aspects. The first one concerns the lack of a clear mechanism to ensure sustainability to mediators' intervention. Annex 2 (The Rules regarding School Mediator's Employment, Work and Remuneration) to the Order of the Ministry of Education, Research and Youth No 1539 from 2007<sup>163</sup> stipulates that the mediator may be employed either by pre-college educational establishments or by County Resource and Educational Assistance Centres. This ambiguity regarding the institution in charge of employing the school mediator may lead, in some cases, to responsibility being passed on between these two institutions appointed to handle school mediators' employment and may block the mediator's employment process. School mediator employment procedures must be clear and unambiguous, and the responsibility for their employment clearly defined and assumed. The budget resources used to pay the school mediators must also be clearly specified.

In our research, we identified several cases where the school employed a school mediator during the PHARE programmes, but due to lack of sustainability the position could no longer be retained after these programmes had come to an end. Such an example is presented in Box 53.

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<sup>163</sup>The Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, *Order No 1539/2007 regarding school mediator's employment and work*, available at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/8320> , accessed in February 2010.

What educational resources regarding ethnic groups in Romania does your institution have?

*(...) We had a..., I'm sorry that we don't have one anymore – a school mediator. We had a school mediator who was most welcome; she was very involved, always in touch with the community and...*

But as far as I've understood there is still a mediator?

*Well, there is not because she is no longer paid so of course nobody works for free. So if we could have a school mediator again, she was most welcome! In school we have lots of teaching and learning materials, she had lots of them, we do have clear records, all the topics discussed in this project (...) (Prahova County, interview with a teacher).*

**Box 53. Lack of school mediator employment sustainability**

Another problem regarding school mediators' work is their vulnerable position to the school management. This often entails attempts to cover up undesirable realities in schools. In the interviews with school mediators, we identified some reluctance to talk about discrimination or even the segregation of Roma children, even if the interviews with the teachers or the statistics from the questionnaires applied in schools clearly indicated the presence of such undesirable phenomena. Thus, a school mediator employed in a school having 25% of Roma students stated that *"maybe there is some segregation in school but not much"*, and later asserted that *"there are 8 classes of Roma in school"*<sup>164</sup>. This was clearly identified as a case of non-residential segregation given that the school was 6 km away from the community and the presence of Roma classes was not justified by a high percentage of Roma students in school.

The school mediator's vulnerable position to the school management – be it real or perceived as such by the mediator – may bring about a vicious circle where undesirable phenomena, like segregation or discriminatory attitudes towards Roma children, are

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<sup>164</sup> Interview with a school mediator, Bihor County.

tolerated, and the school mediator loses face to the community due to lack of actions in key areas. Just like the Roma teachers interviewed in this research said, there is often the fear of losing one's job, especially in times of economic recession: *"In case of layoffs, we'll be the first to get fired"*.<sup>165</sup> This fear can hamper any real action needed for the school mediator to fulfil their tasks. Point 13 on the school mediator's list of responsibilities from Annex 2 to MERY Order No 1539 is *"To inform the authorities concerned about any violation of child rights and to support their endeavours to solve such situations"*, but because of these fears some school mediators may find it impossible to take effective actions.

An adverse effect of school mediators' work is the fact that they are a stand-in for the school presence in the community, and teachers lose touch with the realities of the community. In the interviews with teachers, we noticed that some of them would pass on to the school mediator the responsibility to communicate with the parents, which opened a gap between the school and the community, which the mere presence of the school mediator could not close: *"Teachers, schoolteachers, and class teachers should get more involved in the education of Roma children, because where there is a school mediator in school, **the mediator is the only one who handles Roma's problems and the schoolteachers, the class teachers, and the other teaching staff leave it all to the mediator.** S/he takes care of everything and the others practically stay out of it. They always come with their problems to the mediator and s/he has to do everything, to try to solve these problems on his/her own. So, I think that the teachers should chip in and whenever we have to go on-site a teacher should come to visit at least one family and see how they live and what it is like."*<sup>166</sup>

In this chapter, we outlined the successful initiatives that we came across during our research in the interviews with teachers and school mediators. Of course, in order to get a clear picture of best practices, more detailed research should be carried out, based on a rigorous methodology to define the term "best practices" starting

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<sup>165</sup>Interview with a teacher, Maramureş County.

<sup>166</sup>Interview with a school mediator, Cluj County.

from pre-established criteria and to envisage data collection from students and parents as well. What we described in this chapter are just a few guidelines that could be a starting point for thinking about what “best practice” could mean when it comes to improving the quality of the school education to which Roma children have access.

This chapter also raised the alarm with regard to the sustainability of some PHARE programme initiatives, as well as to other possible limitations for the current implementation of the school mediation policy. These initiatives, having indeed achieved some success in education, must be further adapted and supported to attain sustainable results.

Box 54 briefly presents the issues tackled in this chapter. The conclusions of the entire research and its recommendations are gathered in a separate chapter hereunder.

1. Some successful initiatives implemented during the PHARE programmes risk to fade out because of **lack of sustainability**.
2. Some schools have taken initiatives that are worth being extensively studied in order to **crystallize best practice models** that can be scaled up and included in the public policies implemented by the Ministry of Education or in structured projects and programmes carried out by the civil society.
3. **The school mediation policy has positive effects as well as limitations requiring amendments in the applicable regulations.**
4. There is a need for **more comprehensive research targeting best practices**, their frame of reference and definition, and for continuous monitoring of the effects generated by the policies and programmes implemented by the Ministry of Education and the civil society.

**Box 54. Conclusions of the chapter on potential vectors of change**

## Conclusions and Recommendations

In almost every public statement of the agencies, organizations and institutions dealing with the issues of the Roma minority in Romania, the need for real access to education for Roma children is recurrent.

The poor quality of the education received by Roma children is justified either by “the little value assigned to education in Roma families” or by the “social exclusion/discrimination to which Roma people are exposed”. This research has tried, and we hope has also managed, to offer a clear picture of the education provided in the poorest Roma communities from Romania, education that theoretically should support Roma children escape the circle of dependency in which their own families are trapped.

As we have demonstrated using qualitative and quantitative data, the issue of the education provided to Roma children in the Romanian education system is much more complex than it seems at a first glance: the cases of direct discrimination leading to the promotion of ethnically segregated classes/schools are, most of the times, accompanied by a highly precarious school infrastructure, a great number of non-qualified or commuting teachers and a lack of basic material resources. At the same time, the fact that the number of researched schools where we identified segregation is alarmingly high makes us wonder if state-run institutions are right when they say that Roma segregation is an isolated phenomenon in Romanian schools, and if such a statement is not based on lack of knowledge about the realities on the ground and lack of statistical data regarding the realities faced by Roma ethnics.

Our research shows that the number of Roma parents who believe that school is not important for their children is extremely low compared to the general public's belief that this is the root cause of Roma's lack of schooling. We came across the same wrong perception when we talked about the direct link between early marriage and school dropout, although the data collected in this research clearly show that the two indicators are overrated in the Romanian public opinion.

And still, what are the causes of Roma's poor access to quality education?

Here, as in other departments, we can identify a few main causes:

- **The education system** – our analysis has showed that the education system is but accidentally connected to realities on the ground. The blame for poor education is placed on the minority group, while those responsible for the quality of education don't make an effort to analyse the deep systemic causes of this situation. Strategic planning in key areas (for example, material investment, teacher training, school-community relationship, dropout early warning, etc.) does not exist or, if it does, it overlooks the real needs of the school population that the educational establishment caters for. There is no data collection system to help responsible institutions address the most urgent issues faced by that educational establishment. We believe the most serious issue is the ambiguity of the related legislation (its application) and the arbitrary nature of school-reported data, which makes us question the information supplied by the Ministry of Education.
- **Discrimination/Exclusion** – As a conclusion of the entire research study, **discrimination goes far beyond some teachers' individual attitude**. The state of affairs described in our analysis dooms schools with limited resources to accumulate a quality deficit in terms of material and human resources as they are assigned the substitute teachers with the poorest periodical appraisal scores. Thus, it is hard for these schools to escape the vicious circle of quality deficit accumulation. The fact that this vicious circle is chiefly encountered in the schools with high numbers of Roma students (as we have repeatedly demonstrated, including through statistical tests), makes this phenomenon an example of the systemic exclusion to which the Roma minority is exposed. School segregation, in all its forms discussed in the study, reveals the scale of Roma discrimination and exclusion and the major challenges in combating this complex phenomenon.

- **Self-marginalization** – an issue that translates into a shorter “school life expectancy” in Roma children compared to the non-Roma population. Of course, self-marginalization can be and is the effect of the long-term exclusion that the Roma have been subjected to. Still, mentalities like “It should be enough if my child knows how to write and count” or “What does s/he need school for because s/he won’t end up a priest anyway?” must be counteracted by offering successful role models of young Roma who ended up “priests” and who have started out from communities considered “hopeless”. Offering models which give value to schooling may be and in fact is one of the solutions that the Romanian society as a whole must never lose sight of to counterbalance the “kitsch values” which unfortunately we come across day by day.

As a final conclusion, we believe that the Romanian education system, as it comes out in 2010 from our research, does not manage to promote access to quality education for Roma children. Phrases like “inclusive school”, “multiculturalism”, “non-discrimination”, “desegregation” are often used in the speeches of the institutions without always having a real base. Nonetheless, we hope that our research can prove a crucial point: unless the system doesn’t offer to Roma children equal opportunities, a learning-oriented environment and an *inclusive school* which stands for a trainer of responsible citizens, the chain reaction will carry on the already profound inequalities in the Romanian society.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS:**

### **To the Ministry of Education:**

1. ***Systematic ethnicity-disaggregated data collection to accurately diagnose the education delivered to Roma children.*** We have to mention that this is prescribed in Law 677 from 2001 for the protection of persons concerning the processing of personal data and the free circulation of such data, as Article 5 paragraph 2(g) mentions that data may be

collected “if they are processed exclusively for statistical purposes, for historic or scientific research, *and if that data stay anonymous while being processed*”.

2. The Ministry of Education should coin **a definition for dropout** as the final stage of the student's gradual disengagement from school. **Clarifying the dropout definition** and harmonising the way in which educational settings and the Ministry of Education measure and report this indicator. Such a definition would imply dropout prevention measures, and an early warning system much more effective than the measures schools take after the child has left school.
3. Thus, it is recommended to design **a dropout early warning system**, effective dropout prevention measures, training of teachers on these measures and monitoring school application of dropout prevention measures.
4. It is recommended that **schools take full responsibility for dropout**, and consequently stop resorting to the police in order to “remedy” the situation. A much more efficient means to prevent school dropout is getting the psychologist and the school counsellor involved.
5. **Harmonise the methodology of second-chance programmes with the dropout definition**, to allow the reintegration in school of all drop-outs regardless the time passed since they left the education system.
6. Allocate **additional resources for remedial education** destined to dropout prevention and fight, and associate them with integrated support measures for children from disadvantaged families (such as a hot meal a day).
7. **Double-check the efficiency of social scholarship provision mechanisms** in schools and perfect them to increase the number of social scholarships given to children from disadvantaged families (families with both parents unemployed, single-parent families).
8. **Adopt measures to render schools with high numbers of Roma children more attractive**, by investing in their material resources, employing resource staff (psychologists and school counsellors, school mediators) and motivating qualified teachers to work and achieve high performance in these

schools. It is thus recommended to take measures for these schools to become in fact “magnet schools”.

9. ***Continuous monitoring of the education quality in the schools with high percentage of Roma students***, motivating their teachers and making them more responsible.
10. ***Intensify courses on inclusive education and intercultural education*** for teachers from multiethnic schools, with a focus on raising awareness of discriminatory stereotypes and their consequences on the quality of education.
11. ***Address the issues of discrimination and intolerance in the new Education Act*** and establish clear sanctions applicable to schools in case of discriminatory child practices.
12. ***Conduct comprehensive research on the schools facing Roma segregation***, in order to detect all relevant cases, to analyse the reasons having led to continued segregation despite recent years’ provisions, and to draw up personalised intervention plans for each of these schools. When drawing up such plans, it is recommended to consider all factors involved (Roma and non-Roma parents, teachers, local community, children, school climate, etc.)
13. ***Set up specialised committees to monitor the schools where Roma segregation has been detected***, and apply desegregation measures tailored to each case.
14. ***Make the management more responsible in the schools where Roma segregation has been detected***, and establish sanctions applicable for non-observance of the desegregation plan.
15. ***Monitor the provision of additional resources to the schools with a high percentage of Roma***, as proposed in the new Education Act, to avoid the adverse effect of teachers’ maintaining ethnicity-based segregated schools to draw additional resources and consolidate their own positions.
16. ***Conduct more comprehensive studies to identify best practices in education for Roma children and scale up identified measures***. It is necessary for more resources to be allocated to successful projects and measures, instead of investing in new pilot projects. The success which has been reached so far must be capitalised and included in public policies.

### To the civil society:

1. Stronger endeavours to ***make interventions in the areas of inclusive education, intercultural education, and the training of teachers from multiethnic schools***, with a focus on the issue of discrimination and its negative consequences.
2. ***Based on indicators agreed by the Ministry of Education, make annual reports monitoring Roma access to education.*** These reports are more than necessary as the Ministry's data collection is quite lacking. Moreover, the views expressed by the Roma civil society can become early warning signs for various adverse effects which may arise after the application of public policies in education.
3. Run ***lobby and advocacy campaigns which can offer NGO's or state-run institutions the chance to scale up educational positive experiences.*** This endeavour should however rely on the effort to define the indicators that must be considered for recognising an intervention, a project or a programme as "best practice".
4. ***Continuous monitoring of the education quality in the schools with a high percentage of Roma children.***

### To donors:

1. ***Finance research*** conducted by the civil society, in partnership with academic and research partners, on the impact of educational interventions in order to establish successful practices that are worth being scaled up. Effective educational interventions can succeed only if they start from a real scientific evidence-based diagnosis of Roma school participation.
2. Review the financing philosophy, in the sense of going back to ***successful intervention replication, and drifting away from a quest for "innovation" and "originality" at all costs*** in educational projects. Most of the time, simple solutions are the most effective, incurring smaller long-term costs than the current trend of endlessly financing pilot projects.
3. Raise awareness of the fact that ***investments should mainly go to improving the quality of the school education***

**available to Roma**, which will normally enhance their school participation. The focus on interventions aimed at “keeping Roma children in school” loses sight of the major issue of education quality deficit which can generate dropout.

4. **Finance interventions in the areas of inclusive education, intercultural education, and training of teachers from multiethnic schools** to improve perceptions of Roma and attitudes towards children, and thereby enhance communication between teachers and Roma students. This would improve the school climate and the quality of school education.

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## Annex 2: Tables and Statistical Tests

### Specialised labs available \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Specialised labs available	yes	19	16	11	8	54
	no	1	3	5	10	19
Total		20	19	16	18	73

**Table I. Specialised labs available based on the percentage of Roma students**

### Linear regression model for specialised labs available

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.580	.354		4.458	.000
Share of Roma students in total student population	.143	.042	.370	3.437	.001
Area	.078	.176	.076	.443	.659
Distance to town	-.048	.040	-.195	-1.199	.235
Type of school based on educational stage	-.093	.038	-.301	-2.479	.016
Total number of students	.000	.000	-.126	-.953	.344

a. Dependent Variable: Specialised labs available

**Table II. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the variation in the availability of specialised labs ( $p>0.95$ )**

**Average-based number of books \* Share of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Average-based number of books	below average	7	8	9	10	34
	above average	10	8	2	2	22
Total		17	16	11	12	56

**Table III. Number of books per student based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for number of books per student**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	58.369	16.130		3.619	.001
Share of Roma students in total student population	-6.929	1.604	-.488	-4.319	.000
Area	-5.179	7.396	-.141	-.700	.487
Distance to town	-1.998	1.668	-.221	-1.198	.237
Type of school based on educational stage	.599	1.668	.044	.359	.721
Total number of students	-.031	.010	-.456	-3.275	.002

a. Dependent Variable: Number of books per student

**Table IV. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the variation in the number of books per student ( $p>0.95$ )**

**Computers that students have access to \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Computers that students have access to	yes	17	18	14	14	63
	no	0	0	2	4	6
Total		17	18	16	18	69

**Table V. Computers that students have access to based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for computers that students have access to**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.740	.276		2.685	.009
Share of Roma students in total student population	.078	.032	.312	2.442	.017
Area	.150	.137	.225	1.096	.277
Distance to town	-.012	.031	-.076	-.396	.693
Total number of students	.000	.000	.161	1.017	.313
Type of school based on educational stage	-.021	.029	-.104	-.720	.474

a. Dependent Variable: Computers students have access to

**Table VI. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the number of computers available in schools ( $p>0.80$ )**

**Gym/athletic field \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Schools grouped based on the percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Gym/athletic field	yes	17	13	8	4	42
	no	4	6	8	14	32
Total		21	19	16	18	74

**Table VII. Gym/athletic field available based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for gym/athletic field**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.949	.404		4.827	.000
Share of Roma students in total student population	.154	.047	.350	3.277	.002
Area	-.235	.201	-.201	-1.174	.245
Distance to town	.050	.045	.176	1.093	.278
Total number of students	.000	.000	-.271	-2.047	.045
Type of school based on educational stage	-.077	.043	-.216	-1.784	.079

a. Dependent Variable: Gym/athletic field

**Table VIII. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the availability of a gym/athletic field ( $p>0.95$ )**

**Qualified teachers based on average \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Qualified teachers based on average	above average	15	12	13	9	49
	below average	2	6	5	10	23
Total		17	18	18	19	72

**Table IX. Qualified teachers based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for qualified teachers**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.373	.398		.937	.352
Share of Roma in total student population	.149	.055	.353	2.716	.009
Type of school	.015	.026	.083	.594	.554
Total number of students	.000	.000	.088	.649	.518
Distance to the Roma community	-.012	.011	-.139	-1.107	.273
Area	.302	.148	.270	2.043	.045

a. Dependent Variable: Qualified teachers based on average

**Table X. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the variation in the share of qualified teachers ( $p>0.95$ )**

**Presence of a school mediator \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Presence of a school mediator	yes	5	9	7	10	31
	no	12	9	9	8	38
Total		17	18	16	18	69

**Table XI. Presence of a school mediator based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Presence of a school counsellor \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Presence of a school counsellor	yes	10	11	4	6	31
	no	7	7	12	12	38
Total		17	18	16	18	69

**Table XII. Presence of a school counsellor based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Existence of a student board \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Existence of a student board	yes	15	11	5	10	41
	no	1	7	11	7	26
Total		16	18	16	17	67

**Table XIII. Existence of a student board based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for existence of a student board**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.669	.476		3.507	.001
Share of Roma students in total student population	.099	.056	.226	1.774	.081
Area	-.107	.236	-.094	-.453	.652
Distance to town	-.006	.053	-.022	-.114	.910
Total number of students	.000	.000	-.214	-1.355	.180
Type of school based on educational stage	-.028	.051	-.078	-.545	.588

a. Dependent Variable: Existence of a student board

**Table XIV. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the existence of a student board ( $p>0.80$ )**

**Dropout rate based on the national average \* Percentage of Roma students in total student population**

		Percentage of Roma students in total student population				Total
		Percentage of Roma <25%	Percentage of Roma between 25% and 50%	Percentage of Roma between 50% and 75%	Percentage of Roma >75%	
Dropout rate based on the national average	below the national average	7	8	4	4	23
	above the national average	3	8	12	8	31
Total		10	16	16	12	54

**Table XV. Dropout rate correlated with the national average based on the percentage of Roma students**

**Linear regression model for student appreciation of school**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.534	.055		9.748	.000
Declared appreciation of teachers' behaviour	.273	.040	.265	6.870	.000
Self-appreciation of school results	.142	.034	.178	4.147	.000
Parents' expressed or perceived appreciation of school results	.108	.030	.171	3.641	.000
Teachers' expressed or perceived appreciation of school results	.023	.023	.046	1.034	.302
Declared appreciation of classmates' behaviour	-.066	.032	-.077	-2.074	.038

a. Dependent Variable: Declared appreciation of school

**Table XVI. Variables which influence student appreciation of school**

**Linear regression model for non-promotion rate**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	.055	.066		.826	.412
Share of Roma in total student population	.017	.008	.278	2.148	.036
Area	-.050	.033	-.295	-1.498	.139
Distance to town	.005	.007	.124	.670	.505
Total number of students	-6.326E-5	.000	-.210	-1.330	.188
Type of school based on educational stage	.013	.007	.267	1.834	.071

a. Dependent Variable: Non-promotion rate: total number of non-promoted students out of total students

***Table XVII. The “percentage of Roma students in total student population” variable influences the most the non-promotion rate***

**Linear regression model for absenteeism**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	-.121	.133		-.912	.362
Frequency of family visits to school	.293	.039	.273	7.426	.000
Declared appreciation of school	.356	.090	.156	3.957	.000
Declared appreciation of teachers' behaviour	.144	.091	.061	1.581	.114
Self-appreciation of school results	.068	.077	.037	.892	.373
Parents' expressed or perceived appreciation of school results	.138	.070	.095	1.977	.048
Teachers' expressed or perceived appreciation of school results	.171	.064	.126	2.681	.008
Declared appreciation of classmates' behaviour	.260	.070	.133	3.720	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Absenteeism

**Table XVIII. (In-school) Variables which influence absenteeism**

**Linear regression model for absenteeism**

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	1.153	.203		5.685	.000
Gender	-.079	.051	-.063	-1.557	.120
Area	-.044	.102	-.029	-.436	.663
Distance to town	.024	.024	.067	1.009	.313
Parents' illiteracy	.109	.033	.134	3.289	.001
Income earning - Mother	.183	.074	.113	2.487	.013
Income earning - Father	.116	.070	.074	1.651	.099

a. Dependent Variable: Absenteeism

**Table XIX. (Out-of-school) Variables which influence absenteeism**



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