



CONSTANTINE THE PHILOSHOPHER UNIVERSITY IN NITRA  
FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES AND HEALTH CARE

# INEQUALITIES IN EDUCATION AND ROMA

Proceedings of the conference Inequalities in Education  
and Educational Aspirations of Roma Pupils

**Editor: Jurina Rusnáková**

NITRA  
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# **SUPPORT FOR AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN FROM SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS**

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*Annotation:* As early as 1994, the right of the child to an inclusive education was declared at an international UNESCO conference in the Spanish city of Salamanca. This means that schools should be able to meet the needs of every child, regardless of their physical, intellectual, social, emotional, linguistic or other conditions. In the text, we present the results of selected studies that illustrate the impact of living in social exclusion on a child's educational career, as well as how school and social services, respond to the educational needs of these children.

*Keywords:* inclusion, socially disadvantaged environment, Roma child, support measures

## **INTRODUCTION**

The still often quoted "Salamanca Statement" (1994), defines the principles of inclusive education based on the idea of "school is for all".

In the text we will try to uncover the factors that disadvantage Roma children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds when they enter school and answer the question: how does the school respond to the educational needs of these children and who can be an actor promoting educational success outside the school?

## **1 SOCIAL EXCLUSION AND SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS**

A proportion of children entering school live in social exclusion. Several concepts of social exclusion (Silverová, 1994; Murray, 1996; Mareš, 2006) perceive it as a consequence of the failure of social cohesion due to the existence of different value systems of individual social groups. If social exclusion is perceived as a process of exclusion of a group of people different from the majority, it is also a process in which individuals and whole groups of people lose access to resources necessary for participation in the social, economic and political activities of society as a whole.

In school settings, we use the term disadvantaged pupil to refer to an environment of social exclusion. According to the School Act (Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on education and training (School Act) and on amendment and supplementation of certain acts, as amended), §2, letter o), a child from a socially disadvantaged environment or a pupil from a socially disadvantaged environment means a child or pupil living in an environment which, due to social, family, economic and cultural conditions, insufficiently stimulates the development of the child's or pupil's mental, volitional and emotional qualities, does not support his/her socialisation and does not provide



him/her with sufficient and appropriate stimuli for the development of his/her personality.

## **2 CHILDREN FROM SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED BACKGROUNDS AT SCHOOL – SOME RESEARCH FINDINGS**

Many studies in the fields of medicine and psychology (e.g. Felitti, Anda, Nordenberg, et al., 1998; Schilling, Aseltine, & Gore, 2007) show that childhood in an adverse social environment has a direct link to health and social problems in adulthood.

Earlier research by J. Langmeier (1961) focused on the identification of children immature for school and looked for a relationship with the stimulating environment – while he identified 7 % of immature children in a stimulating environment and 18,5 % in a moderately stimulating environment, in a neglectful environment it was as high as 33 %.

International OECD reports repeatedly state that the Slovak education system shows the highest dependence of children's performance on their social environment in the family. Schools alone are unable to provide sufficient support for children from socially disadvantaged families to thrive in education and not fail from the earliest grades. According to data from the Education Policy Institute (2020), pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds are 8 times more likely to repeat a year than other primary school pupils (12,7 % : 1,6 %). In both national and international tests of knowledge and literacy, pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds perform significantly worse than the rest of the population.

The participation of Roma children in pre-primary education was very low in Slovakia a few years ago. According to World Bank research (2015), in selected municipalities with a high proportion of Roma, only 28 % of Roma children aged 3 – 6 attended kindergarten, and 72 % of Roma children entered primary school without preschool training. In segregated settlements the enrolment rate was even lower. In the geographic area studied, 59 % of non-Roma children attended kindergarten, the national average was around 72 %. According to expert estimates by the authors of the Atlas of Roma Communities (2014), the proportion of Roma children aged 3 – 6 from socially disadvantaged backgrounds in pre-primary education was approximately 5,49 %. As of the school year 2021/2022, compulsory pre-primary education for all children who have reached the age of five is provided for by law. The amendment to the law was also implemented with the aim of eliminating social disadvantages for children entering school.

Foreign longitudinal studies (Payne et al., 2006; Hart, Risley, 2003) show that in families from socially excluded backgrounds, parents communicate less with their children and the language code is limited. The study concludes that at the age of four, there is a significant difference in the vocabulary and communicative experience of a child who lives in a socially disadvantaged environment and a child from a middle-class family. Even if the child's mother tongue is the same as the language of

instruction, the child has a limited vocabulary, very strongly tied to the environment in which he or she lives.

In a study focusing on vocabulary and the ability to use words in sentences (Čerešňíková et al., 2017), pupils with a mother tongue of Slovak achieved a score of 24,66 (the maximum possible score was 30) in the Picture Vocabulary Test when entering school. Pupils with Roma as their mother tongue achieved an average score of 8,88. The difference is, at first sight, almost threefold and tells that a Roma child starts his/her school career with a significant disadvantage after entering school. After one year of schooling, children have expanded their vocabulary, with a more significant increase observed for Roma pupils. However, the overall score still fell short of the level indicating sufficient competence in the language of instruction (mean score 11,46).

In the study, we also looked at the language competence of the Roma child in relation to the degree of social exclusion (settlement in the village, on the periphery, segregated; source: Atlas rómskych komunit, 2014). The results show a significant relationship between the child's linguistic competence and, consequently, his/her school achievement and the level of social exclusion. Roma children living in families that are part of the community, without any spatial exclusion, had a vocabulary range in English at school entry at a level that is considered to be reduced, but successful learning is possible (score 15,7). Children from settlements on the outskirts of the village scored 8 and children from segregated Roma localities scored 3,11.

### **3 INCLUSIVE SCHOOL – A CHALLENGE FOR ALL**

The Slovak Republic is committed to the international conventions and the Council of Europe's calls for social inclusion of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2021, the Strategy for an Inclusive Approach in Education was adopted and a number of systemic measures are gradually being implemented towards desegregation and an inclusive approach in the education of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

National projects in education have supported the creation of professional staff and teaching assistants and the definition of levels of professional support for children and pupils from school level. Thanks to these efforts, we now also have legislation defining, for example, the school support team as a systemic element that can include professionals from different helping professions according to the needs of the school in order to meet the needs of all children in the school. In 2023, a system of support measures was defined in the school legislation, the setting of which reflects the diversity of children's needs in education and upbringing. These include support measures through which direct intervention from the school level towards children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds is possible. Such support measures include, for example, support for the achievement of school competence, the provision of a course in the school's language of instruction or support for its acquisition, action to promote the prevention of school drop-out in the lower secondary years, and support for social inclusion in children's groups and in the school environment. The support

measures also include a support measure oriented towards financing the comprehensive improvement of the conditions of education and training of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

However, school activities should also be supported in an environment that is closer to the children and in which elements of non-formal and informal education are present. In addition to “school” legislation, it seems useful and important to make use of the opportunities offered by social legislation. The Act on Social Services 448/2008 Coll. defines the professional activities to be carried out in crisis intervention services provided to persons in an unfavourable social situation. The professional activity related to the support of education is Assistance in preparation for school attendance and school teaching and accompanying the child to and from school and is defined by law as an activity in a community centre and in a low-threshold social service for children and family. Its main aim is to increase the success of children and young people in a disadvantaged social situation in mainstream education and thus expand the opportunities for free choice of life path, improving their future position in the labour market and their position in society.

School does not impact children in the early childhood period, which is extremely important in terms of the formation of the child's personality (basal personality) and brain development (the basis of cognitive abilities). Developmental intervention in socially disadvantaged environments can be provided by the activities of crisis intervention social services through Mothers' Clubs and Preschool Clubs. Their aim is to foster the mother/relationship bond with the child and to develop the child towards later smooth integration into the pre-primary education system. The pre-school club is not intended to be a substitute for available pre-school and pre-primary education. It is intended to reinforce the acquisition of skills necessary for a successful start in a school career. The aim of work with pre-school children should be primarily to improve communicative competence in the language of instruction (usually Slovak), to develop social skills important for entry to primary school, cognitive development in the context of age-appropriate knowledge, to promote the child's self-confidence, to experience success and to get to know the mainstream environment, including contacts with peers.

## CONCLUSION

Children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, according to the results of the studies cited above, are doomed to fail in their school careers without support in both the school and wider social environment. Multidisciplinary cooperation aimed at supporting parenting in the difficult living conditions of social exclusion, creating a quality learning environment and applying educational support measures whenever the child needs them is the path to inclusion. Not only educational, but also social.

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# CREATING OPPORTUNITIES FOR ROMA EDUCATION IN THE UK:

## Social and economic factors as drivers of change

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*Annotation:* This paper provides an overview of theoretical approaches to motivation in education, such as social identity theory, Maslow's hierarchy of needs, intrinsic motivation theory, and the concept of social capital. It also presents selected results from the dissertation research “An Analysis of the Experiences of Roma Labour Migrants in the UK”, focusing on whether education has had a significant impact on their labour market opportunities and whether it is worthwhile for Roma in the UK to study further. The research uses a mixed methodology and takes into account the support available for education in the UK.

*Keywords:* Roma. Motivation for education. Employment opportunities. Social capital. Mixed methods research.

## INTRODUCTION

Equality of opportunity is fundamental to the development of all children, regardless of their ethnic or social background. This paper provides an overview of the psychological and social psychological theories that influence the educational aspirations of non-Roma children from Slovakia living in Britain, while presenting partial results from research conducted to analyse Roma experiences of the labour market and related factors. The intention was, among other things, to verify to what extent education has an impact on finding a job in a foreign environment, or what are the opportunities for Roma in Britain who have gone there to live, especially for better living conditions. The qualitative interviews revealed that if a parent perceives the need and importance for further education because it is worthwhile in relation to getting a better paid and more sustainable job, then they also support for their children to learn and study at the available secondary or higher education institutions. In the methodology section, we will present some of the results from our dissertation research on the labour mobility and inclusion of Roma from Slovakia living in the UK for longer periods of time. Aspirations for further education among Roma children, and in our case among adults, are shaped by a variety of social, psychological and economic factors.

## 1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

**Social identity theory** analyses how individuals identify with and are influenced by social groups, shedding light on the mechanisms of prejudice, discrimination and intergroup conflict. This framework focuses on how the categorization of "us" vs. "them" can influence the behavior and attitudes of society towards different groups (H.

Tajfel – J. Turner, 1979). More recent research challenges the idea that identification with one's own group automatically leads to the degradation of other groups, and emphasizes that in-group members tend to focus on reinforcing the positive image of their own group rather than actively devaluing out-groups. This shift implies that social identification does not necessarily lead to hostility towards others, but rather to positive in-group evaluation and higher in-group self-esteem. For example, Reynolds, Turner, and Haslam (2000) suggest that people often perceive in-group identity as an important element of their own self-esteem, without feeling threatened by out-groups. Such an approach promotes “internal cohesion” and positive emotions towards one's own group, which may benefit individuals' psychological stability. For Roma from diverse backgrounds, identification with a group that supports education can be crucial to the development of their academic self-image. If they see their community as valuing education as a means to improve their social status, they may have higher educational aspirations and better educational outcomes.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs suggests that basic needs (such as food, security, and social relationships) must first be met in order for a person to focus on ambition and self-actualization (A. H. Maslow, 1943). For Roma facing social and economic challenges, providing basic needs (such as stable housing, nutritious food, a safe environment and access to education) is an essential step to enable them to develop ambition and the desire to succeed in life. The theory of intrinsic motivation and self-determination argues that motivation arises from an intrinsic desire to do something out of personal interest or enjoyment, not just for the sake of extrinsic rewards. Three basic psychological needs – autonomy (control over decisions), competence (ability to perform tasks), and connection (positive relationships) – are key to fostering intrinsic motivation (E. Deci – R. Ryan, 1985). When these needs are met, motivation and satisfaction increase. In the case of Roma children, if the above needs are supported in the school environment, their aspirations and motivation to learn can increase significantly. The key theoretical background for this paper is social capital theory. This theory provides a framework for understanding how individuals and groups acquire resources, opportunities and support through their social networks. Bourdieu (1986) defines social capital as the resources that individuals can acquire through their social networks and relationships. These resources may include access to information, support, or opportunities that help individuals succeed in different areas of life, including education and employment. Social capital includes not only direct financial benefits, but also broader, relational resources that individuals can tap into. Bourdieu distinguishes three main types of capital- economic, cultural (knowledge, skills, educational qualifications) and social capital (networks and relationships that provide individuals with access to resources and opportunities. This approach is particularly relevant when considering the educational aspirations of Roma children, especially in the context of better financial conditions and greater educational opportunities in the UK compared to their home countries.

## **2 METHODS**

In this paper we will not only discuss the theoretical underpinnings of motivation and education, but also the practical aspects of their implementation in real life, particularly in the context of Roma migrants from Slovakia who have settled in the UK (the topic of this dissertation, note by the author). My research has primarily focused on analysing the barriers to work and the experiences of Roma migrants from Slovakia who have integrated into the UK labour market. The research topic focused on identifying barriers to employment and exploring the factors that influence their success in finding and maintaining employment. However, during the course of the research, valuable findings also emerged regarding the education of this community, which were obtained through mixed methods research and an “exploratory model”. It is a research approach that combines qualitative and quantitative methods to develop a comprehensive understanding of the topic under study. Qualitative data is first collected (through interviews or focus groups) to provide an in-depth view of the phenomenon under study and to help identify key concepts and issues. These qualitative findings then serve as the basis for designing the quantitative phase of the research, which tests the identified hypotheses or trends on a larger sample, thereby increasing the general validity of the results. The research sample for the qualitative data collection consisted of 25 individuals, including 15 women aged 30 – 60 years and 10 men aged 22 – 66 years. Interviews were conducted with Roma people living primarily in the North West of the UK (Bradford, Harrogate, Shipley). 66 Roma women and 55 men (Roma of Slovak origin living in the UK) took part in the quantitative data collection. The selection criteria were – experience of moving from Slovakia to the UK; gender (male, female); current working age; current employment status (employed, unemployed); diversity of background in Slovakia (urban, rural). The research was carried out in the UK in the year 2021 – 2022.

### **3 RESULTS**

When examining the employment opportunities and barriers to labour market entry for Roma migrants from Slovakia to the UK, it was necessary to include the topic of education, as education is a key factor influencing employability and success in the labour market. Educational and retraining opportunities, as well as access to education, are essential prerequisites for improving employment opportunities and integration into society. Thus, mixed research has provided, among other results, insights into how education and work experience shape the ability of Roma to enter the labour market. Table 1 below shows the quantitative results of the research, which reveals patterns and trends in Roma job satisfaction, their job opportunities and the barriers they faced in finding work in Slovakia and the UK.



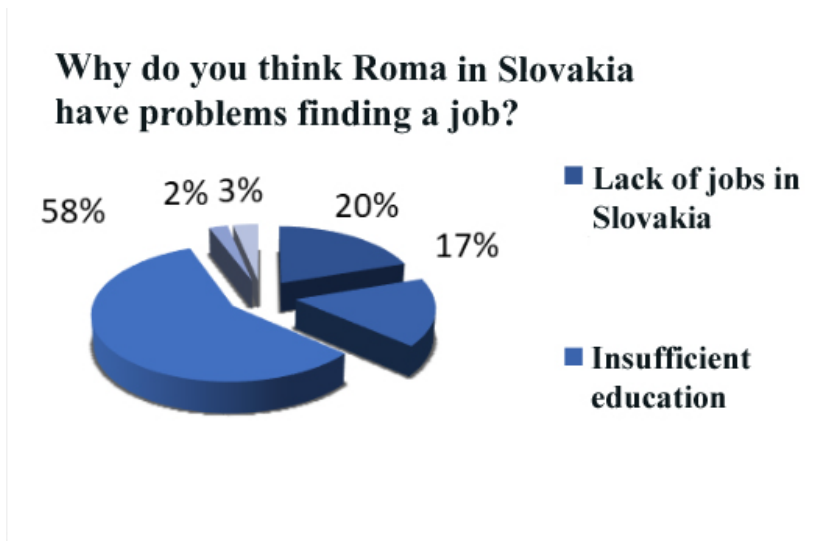
Table 1: Partial overview of quantitative results related to education

<b>Question</b>	<b>Results</b>	<b>Interpretation</b>
<b>If you were employed in Slovakia before you left, how satisfied were you (with your salary)?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Incomplete primary education: 100 % dissatisfied</li> <li>– Secondary education with a high school diploma: 27,3 % dissatisfied</li> </ul>	The majority of respondents with less education were dissatisfied with their salary conditions. This may be related to the low job opportunities for less educated Roma.
<b>If you work in England, how satisfied are you with your salary?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Satisfied: 51,1 %</li> <li>– Very satisfied: 45,7 %</li> </ul>	Respondents with more education are more satisfied with their salary in England. This suggests that education increases the chances of better paid jobs abroad.
<b>If you were unable to find a job in the UK, what was the reason?</b>	Roma are not employed: 50 % (the most common answer for the low educated) Few jobs: 24,3 % (secondary education without high school diploma)	Respondents with lower education were more likely to cite discrimination and lack of job opportunities as the main reason for unemployment. These barriers may affect their motivation to further education and career development.
<b>If you are unable to find a job in England, what is the reason?</b>	They are already working: 49,2 %  Poor health: 15,8 %	– Most respondents with higher education are already working. Poor health is a more common reason for unemployment among respondents with less education, which may indicate barriers to labour market integration.
<b>If you face barriers to working in England, what are they?</b>	Failure to travel for work: 8,1 % for secondary education without high school diploma	Respondents with less education are more likely to cite logistical barriers such as travelling for work, which may indicate lower availability of jobs in their area.

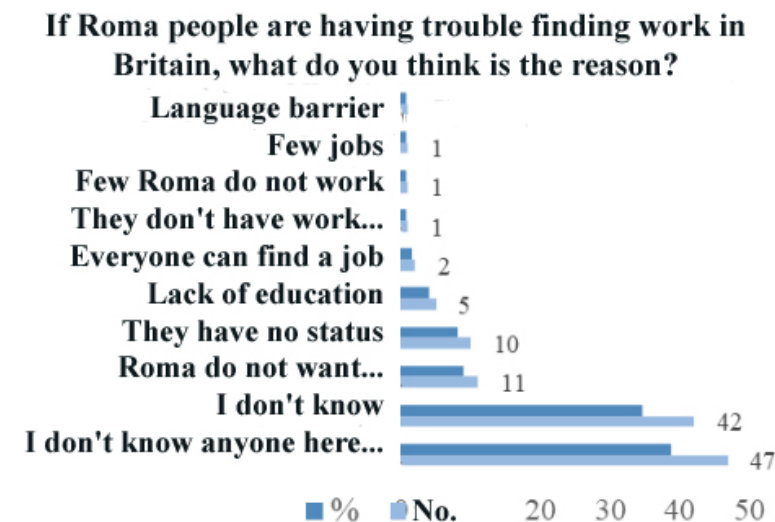
Source: *Lýdia Gabčová*

To illustrate the extent to which education played a role in finding a job in both countries, the figures below show the extent to which education played a role in finding a job.

**Figure 1: Barriers to finding a job in Slovakia**



**Figure 2: Roma views on the types of barriers in finding a job in Britain**



Source: *Lýdia Gabčová*

A comparison of Figures 1 and 2 above reveals fundamental differences in the perceptions of barriers to finding work by Roma in Slovakia and the UK. In Slovakia,

respondents most frequently cite discrimination (58 %), lack of job opportunities (20 %) and lack of education (17 %). These factors point to structural problems and social prejudices that make it very difficult for Roma to enter the labour market. In the UK, “don't know” is the most common answer (47 %), which may indicate that the barriers are less pronounced or that the environment in their country is more inclusive. Discrimination and lack of interest in work are mentioned less frequently (11 %), suggesting a more open approach to Roma.

#### 4 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Social capital theory, as defined by Pierre Bourdieu, is emerging as a key theoretical framework for examining the motivations and aspirations of Roma in the work environment, particularly in the context of their employment in the UK. Social capital encompasses the social networks and relationships that provide individuals with access to a range of opportunities and resources, which in the case of migrants, including Roma, is crucial in their search for employment and education. This concept emphasises the importance of community interactions and support and social connections in overcoming barriers to employment. Research conducted using qualitative research has shown that access to work in the UK is often perceived to be better than in Slovakia, which is an important motivating factor for migration. For example, one respondent stated: *"In principle it is easier to find work here than in Slovakia. But in my experience I know many people who still cannot find a job. Most of the clients in the community centre are also illiterate – they cannot read or write. And these people definitely have a problem with work. And if one tries a little bit, one can find a job"* (female, 36, community worker; Handlová; education – second level university degree). This quote highlights that although there is greater access to job opportunities in the UK, social and educational factors such as illiteracy can still present significant barriers. In Slovakia, by contrast, access to work is limited for many Roma, often due to long-term unemployment and lower educational attainment. On the other hand, research has also shown that social capital can facilitate access to job opportunities even for those with lower qualifications. A respondent who came to the UK with a low level of education stated: *"I worked in Slovakia for a short time in a machinery plant, I've worked here since before my husband and I came here. Later I was offered a part-time job in a school club"* (female, 59, cleaner and assistant in a school club; Martin, primary education). This example shows that community support and social connections can help individuals gain access to jobs, even if they are positions that do not require high qualifications. These findings confirm that social ties and community support play an important role in finding employment and education. The research reveals that community support and social ties contribute significantly to gaining employment, even for less skilled positions. These connections and communities can not only help in the job search, but also increase adult individuals' motivation to learn, which ultimately supports their socioeconomic development and sustainability in the labour market. In the UK, which has long championed a policy of social inclusion, the introduction of a lifelong learning programme such as the Lifelong Loan Entitlement (LLE) appears to be an important step. This programme aims to promote lifelong learning by giving people access to flexible loans, opening up new

opportunities for study and retraining, regardless of age or previous education. It is a key tool for improving social mobility, particularly for groups that have historically faced barriers to accessing education (Gov.uk.2024).

Research focusing on adults suggests the transfer of their experiences and opportunities to younger generations. Today's Roma children growing up in the UK have better access to educational institutions such as secondary schools, colleges and universities where they can choose different vocational courses. Higher education is closely linked to better job opportunities and higher wages, leading to sustainable and better paid jobs in the UK. These findings thus suggest that motivation to learn, supported by theoretical approaches and adult support programmes, plays a key role in the integration of migrants into society and their success in the labour market. Higher education opens up new opportunities, which in turn contributes to socio-economic stability and sustainable careers for Roma.

*The article was written within the project VEGA No. 1/0886/21 Inequalities in Education and Educational Aspirations of Roma Children.*

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# SEGREGATION AS A MANIFESTATION OF ANTI-ROMA RACISM AND A BARRIER TO ROMA SOCIAL INCLUSION

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*Annotation:* Roma segregation is one of the manifestations of anti-Roma racism, which contributes to the social exclusion of Roma and the consequent poverty in which the majority of the population from marginalized Roma communities find themselves. Segregation also causes a significant reduction in the chances of finding employment and also in social inclusion. The aim of the study was to find out to what extent segregation contributes to the success of Roma in entering employment and social inclusion. The research was conducted within the framework of the project APVV-17-0141 in two phases, quantitative and qualitative. For the quantitative part a non-standardized questionnaire was used – n=739 and for the qualitative part a semi-structured interview. The sample in the qualitative part consisted of n=40 participants. Based on the analysed data, it can be concluded that segregation is a significant factor affecting the inclusion of Roma and their success in the labour market.

*Keywords:* Segregation. Anti-Roma racism. Social exclusion. Roma. Inclusion.

## INTRODUCTION

The economic and social disadvantages resulting from marginalisation bring negative phenomena to individuals and society as a whole in all spheres of life. Deteriorating education levels, difficult access to healthcare, substandard housing conditions and high unemployment mean that people from marginalised Roma communities have only minimal chances of escaping poverty (Vlačuha, Kováčová, 2021; Kahanec et al., 2020; Grauzelová, Markovič, 2018). As mentioned in several recommendations, analyses and documents at the European level, employment, together with education, housing and health, represent the horizontal areas where most resources need to be invested, and at the same time, anti-Roma racism in all its forms needs to be eradicated if we want to change the current dysfunctional systemic set-up (OECD, 2019; EC, 2017; European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, 2018; Lajčáková, Hojsík, Karoly, 2020).

These aspects were part of the research *APVV-17-0141 Analysis of barriers to access to employment opportunities for marginalised groups: Selected regions of Slovakia in socio-economic, geographical and socio-anthropological perspectives* and the author was a member of the project team. The project was aimed at investigating the barriers of Roma (especially the inhabitants of marginalised Roma communities) in the labour market.

# 1 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The concept of social exclusion highlights relational issues related to social, cultural and political disadvantage, whether conceived according to the activation paradigm or the social citizenship paradigm (Madanipour, Schucksmith, & Talbot, 2015). Social exclusion in the context of individuals' realisation has come to be seen in recent decades primarily as a lack of participation in social systems and a lack of fulfilment of citizenship (Bergham 1995; Čambalíková, 2007; Čambalíková, Sedová, 2007; Room, 1995; Walker, Walker 1997).

Anti-Roma racism<sup>1</sup> is defined as a type of racist classification of Roma who are stigmatised as “Gypsies” through it. The aim of this racist classification is to construct a false justification and legitimation for their dehumanization, discrimination, exploitation, and opportunities for violence against them. Anti-Roma racism creates non-existent, misleading and negative descriptions, qualities and characteristics based on a supposedly common form of physical appearance; homogenizing and generalizing social, mental and character traits (e.g. asociality, criminality, high fertility, poor hygiene, poverty, superstition, primitiveness, tribalism, nomadism, music/dance in the blood, unrelatedness); essentializing this common form of physical appearance and the above social, mental and character traits for the whole ethnic group (Strategy for Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation, 2020).

Anti-Roma racism uses historical forms of discrimination, prejudice, stereotypes and considers the common form of physical appearance and the above social, mental and character traits as innate in every Roma. Anti-Roma racism attributes to the Roma an irreversible biological and racial destiny from which there is no escape. At the same time, it says that Roma are unable to integrate into society precisely because of these innate characteristics (Albert et al., 2016; Concept of Countering Radicalisation and Extremism, 2021; Lajčáková, Hojsík, and Karoly, 2020).

## 2 METHODS

In this paper, we used data that came from the *APVV-17-0141* integrated research project and followed an explanatory combination approach. In the quantitative phase, the sample consisted of n=739 respondents. In the qualitative phase, we were able to reach n=40 participants from marginalized Roma communities. The collection of questionnaires took place from May 2021 to October 2021. We proceeded to qualitative data collection through semi-structured interviews from June 2021 to November 2021. We then analysed the data collected through interpretative phenomenological analysis.

## 3 RESULTS

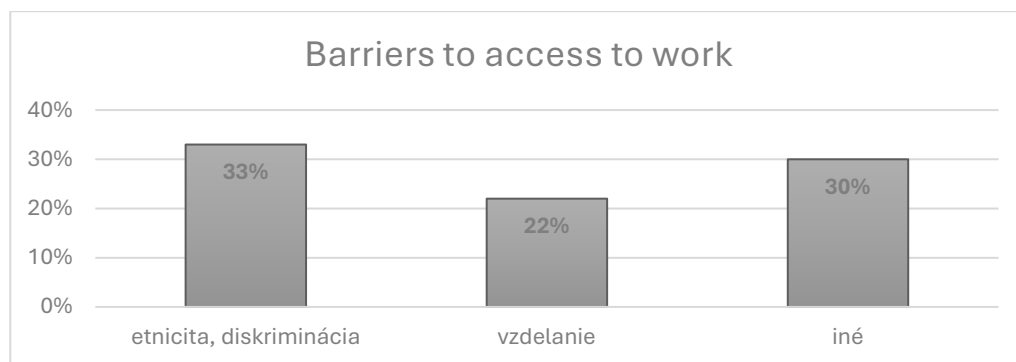
In the analysis of the data collected through the research questionnaire, we focused on the responses related to the question "*What do you think are the most serious barriers or challenges to accessing work?*". The question was answered by n=739 respondents,

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<sup>1</sup> Anti-Roma racism from the English term "angtigypsyism".

with 33 % answering that belonging to the Roma national minority is a barrier to entering the labour market because employers do not want to employ Roma men and women, 22 % of respondents cited lack of educational attainment. Among the responses (30 %) identified as others, barriers such as lack of knowledge about job offers, lack of finances to travel, poor transport infrastructure needed to travel for work, presence of young children in the family, the need to care for a sick family member, fear and uncertainty of losing social security, separation from family and personal problems were cited.

**Figure 1 Barriers to access to work**



Source: Own elaboration

As part of the qualitative part of the survey, we asked whether our respondents had ever experienced discrimination.

**Table 1 Discrimination in finding a job**

<b>Question:</b> Have you ever experienced discrimination because you are Roma? Can you tell us what it looked like?	
Male, 45 years old, Western Slovakia	A: "In one company I was told they don't hire Roma."
Male, 40 years old, Banská Bystrica Region	"I found an advertisement for a job in Austria through an agency. I called them, but I didn't say I was Roma. They told me I could come to the branch, so I went there. And when I rang there, they saw through the camera that I was Roma and told me I could go home and they didn't even let me in."

Source: Own elaboration

## 4 DISCUSSION

To successfully eliminate anti-Roma racism, segregation as a form of social exclusion must be addressed. Our findings are similar to those published by Massey and Denton (1993) in that they confirmed that, by concentrating poverty, racial segregation created a disadvantaged social environment for poor minority residents and living conditions with far fewer advantages for wealthy minority residents compared to majority residents of similar social status. Geographically concentrated poverty results directly from two basic structural conditions in society, namely, the high rate of minority poverty and the high degree of residential segregation of minorities. This process of segregation results in a concentration of the poor in which other structural disadvantages further accumulate (Hess et al., 2019; Massey, Tannen, 2015; Massey, Tannen, 2016).

## 5 CONCLUSION

Anti-Roma racism and the related segregation and social exclusion have a significant impact on all areas of Roma life and ultimately on society as a whole. However, what is crucial in the case of anti-Roma racism is the fact that it does not wish to include Roma in society. If claims that Roma cannot make any progress begin to prevail, then these claims contribute to the failure of Roma inclusion in society through various inclusion programmes from the outset.

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# **A CASE STUDY OF CHILDREN'S EDUCATION PROBLEMS DURING THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC IN THE VILLAGE OF JAROVNICE THROUGH THE EYES OF A SOCIAL WORKER**

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*Annotation:* On the way to Jarovnice, we were shouted at by hundreds of children who had finished their lessons in the largest Slovak school attended only by Roma. More than a thousand of them attend the school. It stands on the outskirts of one of the largest marginalised integrated Roma communities in Europe, in Jarovnice near Sabinov. The aim of this paper was to map, through a social worker's own experience, the problems of primary education for children in this excluded community during the first year of the pandemic. The experience of interviews and meetings with teachers, pupils and parents points to a serious problem.

*Keywords:* Roma. Children. Jarovnice. Education. Pandemic. Teachers.

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the first year (September/2020) of the pandemic, the primary school was attended by 1 153 children and employed 70 teachers and several school assistants. The school building cannot accommodate all the children at the same time, despite a container extension, so classes are staggered according to age. Younger children attend in the morning, older children in the afternoon. We rang the bell at the main entrance, the gym teacher and the janitor opened the door at the same time. We signed a declaration of good health, disinfected our hands, only then could we go inside with a cover. The walls surprised us: they are covered with several metres of brightly coloured paintings of scenes from Roma life. Many schools in Bratislava would not match them in cleanliness and aesthetics. "They were painted by our pupils or Roma teaching assistants," boasts the director, Mária Pavlíková. She is only in her second year in office, having replaced her retiring predecessor after 36 years in education and 19 years as deputy director. "You can only do this job if you have a relationship with Roma children. They are just like any other children. If you hate Roma or have prejudices, you can't teach here," she says. In addition to this one, there is another smaller school in Jarovnice, connected to a kindergarten with 400 pupils, and another special school attended by 180 local children.

## **THE POOREST CHILDREN WITHOUT AN EDUCATION?**

During the first and second year of the pandemic, the school went through one of the most difficult tests of its functioning. From one day to the next, children were left at home, often without electricity, school supplies and adequate parental support.

Directly in the community, home education was coordinated mainly by social workers in addition to teachers. During the widespread closure of schools, workers in the community distributed thousands of work practice sheets, but were faced with parents' indifference to their children's school performance. Digitization was unthinkable. Some pupils live in shacks or shabby brick houses with no running water and electricity hooked up on the sly. "Out of 1 153 laboriously photocopied practice worksheets with assignments for students, we routinely get back about fifty or so. Sometimes they were torn up right in front of us, one school assistant was chased by her mother with a shovel," complained the director. The materials were distributed in the community by Roma auxiliary educators recruited from the ranks of the unemployed from the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family. The school asked for fifteen of them and got five. It is they who help with discipline and hygiene during breaks and when coming and going from school. Sometimes they acted as interpreters. Here, as in other poor Roma communities, face-to-face and online classes hardly worked. In June 2020, when schools opened for a while, attendance was voluntary and 165 children came on the first day. Gradually this declined, on the last day of the school year they had 10 children in the whole school. The problem was nationwide, but it hit children from socially underprivileged backgrounds the hardest. What does the research say? According to research conducted by the Educational Policy Institute (Inštitút vzdelávacej politiky, IVP) in cooperation with the National Institute of Certified Measurement, 52-thousand children did not participate in education after the closure of schools. Of these, up to two-thirds come from regions with the largest poor Roma communities: Prešov, Košice and Banská Bystrica. This is 7,5 % of the total pupil population of primary and secondary schools in Slovakia. In other words, the research confirmed the assumption of multiple social exclusion of the poorest, usually Roma children, mostly from eastern Slovakia. These data are confirmed by the findings of the Roma non-governmental educational institution eduRoma, according to which up to 70 % of pupils from excluded Roma localities were not involved in any form of education at the time of the first wave of the pandemic. The figures are alarming. (Rafael, Krejčíková, 2020) They speak volumes about the state's inability to ensure access to education for tens of thousands of children in times of crisis. Unfortunately, Jarovnice, as our largest marginalised Roma community, has a leading position in this. The number of children who were not systematically educated from March to June is probably much higher. In their report, the IVP analysts at the Ministry of Education report as many as 128 000 children without internet access, 83 % of whom were from primary schools. This is 18,5 % of the total student population. For these children, it was initially assumed that worksheets would substitute for teaching, but this has only partially worked, as confirmed by field findings from socially disadvantaged communities. In special primary schools, the situation was even worse. It was estimated that up to 64 % of these pupils had no access to education. The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Government of the Slovak Republic for Roma Communities with the then Plenipotentiary Andrea Bučková confirms from its findings that the problem is nationwide. "During distance education we identified the lack of material aids, such as colouring books or papers, and the lack of technical equipment for distance education as the main problem for the poorest children,"

Bučková says. A separate chapter is the loss of habits, skills, information and knowledge. According to Jarovnice teachers, they will not catch up with this loss; according to Miroslava Hapalová, former director of the National Institute for Education (ŠPÚ) during the first year of the pandemic, it is important for teachers to focus on key content and not try to catch up with everything they missed in one school year while achieving everything they planned to do at the same time. But let's go back to Jarovnice.

## **JAROVNICE PRIMARY SCHOOL 192**

It is a school where up to 90 percent of children enter the first grade usually without preschool education. Pupils have very poor hygiene habits and a language barrier, and this has a major impact on their education from the very first moments. There is a big difference when a child from an extremely poor background comes to school with no experience of pre-primary education and another child from kindergarten. Such a child already understands, communicates, has hygiene habits, and can handle the first year more easily. Roma school assistants from the local community help with the children and act as interpreters. "For the first few months, we teach most of the first-graders only Slovak and basic hygiene habits," says Katarína Kandráčová, a teacher with 19 years of experience at Jarovnice primary school 192. Teachers say that despite the school's enormous efforts, the children have done more or less nothing for the past six months. As much as 50 percent of the curriculum remained unlearned. Naturally, the pandemic has taken its greatest toll on freshmen. In September 2020, the teachers picked up the textbooks again, teaching the children to read and write, and only later can they begin to study the second year of the curriculum. They are said to catch up with it barely in the third grade. For the weakest children, teachers say, it would be better to repeat a year, which would give them a better start in school and enable them not to fall behind in future years. "I have asked the education minister, who has issued a regulation that children cannot fail during the pandemic, for an exemption so that at least the weakest children, who have mastered only vowels, can repeat a grade. We did not get it. So they all advanced. Some second-graders can read, others can barely a-e-i-o-u," complains director Pavlíková. The Ministry of Education, through the National Institute for Education (ŠPÚ), responded to the letter by referring to objective obstacles on the part of the school that made it impossible to ensure children's access to education. Therefore, the grade retention would be unfair. Where does a director with 36 years of teaching experience see the solution to children failing to thrive? Compulsory pre-school education and also a day care centre where children can learn under the supervision of tutors could help them. The problem, however, is money. There is not enough money in the village budget for after school clubs or to expand the capacity of the local nursery. It can already cater for barely 50 per cent of the enrolled pupils. The municipality is trying to address the situation. The school would welcome more Roma school assistants and much more parental interest in their children's welfare. "We cannot lump all parents together. There are also those who care about the children and want to know how they are doing in school. Maybe if the welfare system was set up differently..." adds the director. They would like to return to an incentive-based scholarship system, graded according to school performance.

Today's automatic social grant of the same 17 EUR does not motivate parents enough to care about their children's benefit. During the first year of the pandemic, the State Institute of Education, through Director Hapalová, responded to the problems in children's education by defining the key educational content on which teachers should focus. (ŠPÚ, 2020) Teachers were offered webinars focusing on methods of differentiated learning for children with varying levels of knowledge. That is, how to teach, how to assign tasks in each subject to those children whose level of knowledge varies in that subject, and how to work with them within the same class, so that each child can move on. However, according to many teachers, there was a problem. "Teachers are not sufficiently prepared for this way of teaching either in universities or in further education, and we want to change that," Hapalová adds. The problem of unavailability of education for tens of thousands of children during the pandemic crisis has laid bare the complex difficulties in the education system. The poorest children will be making up for this shortfall for years. The pandemic is not over, but we are back to normal. It is time to map all the effects of the pandemic on children's educational attainment and to take responsible action.

*The article was written within the project VEGA No. 1/0886/21 Inequalities in Education and Educational Aspirations of Roma Children.*

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# EDUCATION INEQUALITY – A CHALLENGE FOR PROMOTING TEACHER SELF-LEARNING?

**On the topic of innovation in supporting the professional development of  
teachers**

**Ivan Pavlov**

The study was made possible thanks to the support of the KEGA project (006UMB-4/2023) Competence development for adult learning by modern electronic tools of learning

*Annotation:* This paper reflects on the role of the concept of teacher self-learning (informal learning) in the context of understanding inequalities in student learning. It highlights the important role of self-learning in the professional development of teachers and explains its common misinterpretations and how it can be supported in schools.

Keywords: teacher, professional development, informal learning, self-education, self-learning.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Current policy goals, challenges and trends in inclusive education resonate also in school practice, where they are yet to be applied. The search for methods and forms of their implementation is a continuous task for those responsible for educational policies, from decision-makers, through departmental educational organisations, NGOs and schools themselves. Implementing such fundamental and wide-ranging changes in schools requires a well-thought-out and professionally sound strategy that uses a variety of methods and forms of learning support for those who will implement them. In Slovakia, strategies to support the professional development of teaching and professional staff are traditionally and predominantly based on a centrally regulated model of support. This determines, from a ministerial level, best (EU-funded) practice in teacher support. These are mostly free formal training events of varying scope, mostly full-time or combined, led by lecturers from the departmental organisation National Institute of Education and Youth (NIVAM), who specialise in these topics. In recent years, a network of Regional Centres of Support for Teachers (RCPÚs) has been set up, bringing together activist teachers from schools who work on a part-time basis to provide mixed forms of non-formal education and guidance to colleagues in schools. Schools use the resources of the Recovery and Resilience Plan and the European Structural and Investment Funds to outsource the delivery of accredited training programmes for both teaching and professional staff from a range of providers. There is no evaluation mechanism on the quality of educational services provided by public or private providers of professional development programmes. There are no tools to measure the effectiveness of the support not only on the basis of the participants' satisfaction with the forms and methods of training implemented, but especially on

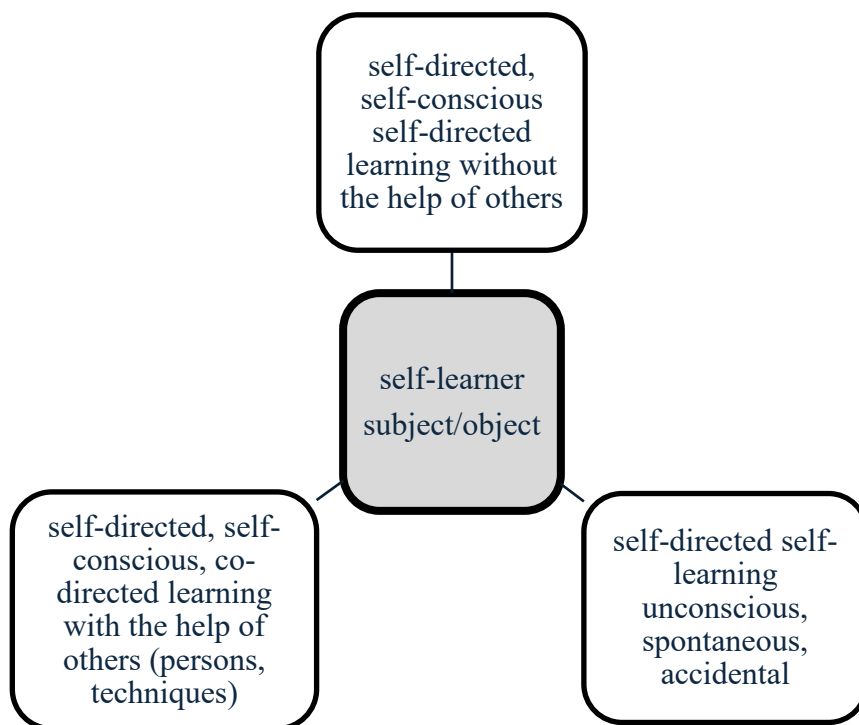
how effectively they intervene in the development of their professional competences and how they change pedagogical practice. A particular problem is the sustainability of the changes induced by education in the professional development of teachers, which is beyond the interest of both decision-makers and schools. The question of what results have been achieved in pedagogical practice with the considerable public and European funding invested in supporting the professional development of teachers thus remains unanswered.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The current understanding of lifelong learning processes relies on formal education, informal education and informal learning, which is currently gaining socio-economic importance and scientific attention. A strategy for supporting the professional development of teaching and professional staff in schools should include, in addition to the well-established (not effectively implemented) formal learning activities, a broad offer for non-formal learning activities and an equally balanced offer for self-learning/self-education or, in the language of European education policies, informal learning. Personal and social competence and the competence to learn to learn have an important place in the promotion of lifelong learning (EU 2018). Informal learning is the result of everyday activities related to work, family life or leisure and is not organised or structured according to learning objectives, time or support; informal learning does not have to be intentional from the learner's point of view (EU 2012). Self-learning is characterised as a lifelong, conscious, voluntary, planned, active, individual learning activity that is determined by many factors (both internal and external), thereby forming a capacity for docility (learning to learn) that is perfected throughout life. A person independently (or with support) realizes his/her learning needs in order to synchronize the tension between what he/she does not know and what he wants to learn. As a result, the process of self-learning leads not only to the acquisition of the intended learning content (knowledge, skills and attitudes), but also to the cultivation of one's personality (confidence in one's own abilities, motives, will, character, ideals, values, etc.) (Pavlov – Valášková Vincejová 2024). Self-learning in particular has so far remained marginalised in terms of interest and targeted support from those responsible. The share of self-learning (provided it is active) in professional learning processes is dominant in terms of the time adults devote to it and the importance they attach to it (compared to formal and informal learning). This is not to overvalue informal learning, which is associated with an underestimation of the importance of support structures (e.g. formal teaching, guidance, educational institutions). It is about creating a support system and framework that encompasses all the components of lifelong learning as complementary to the development of an adult's individual learning potential. Creating the conditions for effective self-learning by individual adult teachers is extremely challenging and requires at least as much concentrated effort as other support activities. From a psychological point of view, the factor of self-direction of one's own learning processes is significant in assessing informal learning activities. This creates three possible approaches to managing self-learning depending on the assistance provided, awareness or non-awareness of the

learning processes (Diagram 1). Průcha (2014 p. 71 – 76) states that in the psychology of learning, new concepts are gradually taking shape, which make it possible to clarify certain aspects of informal learning processes. These are mainly qualitative methods e.g. interviews with subjects of learning, where questions are asked about what adults learn, how is learning implemented, what factors influence learning. The difficulties with this type of research are that informal learning is visible, it is not seen as learning by the subjects involved, the resulting knowledge is seen as part of the subject's overall ability rather than something learned, the interviewees are often unable to explain the nature and complexity of the experience gained. To investigate these phenomena, he recommends applying the phenomenological approach of the psychology of learning. The prevailing belief is that in this way it is possible to better explain the subjective, hidden aspects of human learning processes and to understand the course of learning.

**Diagram 1 Approaches in the management of self-learning**

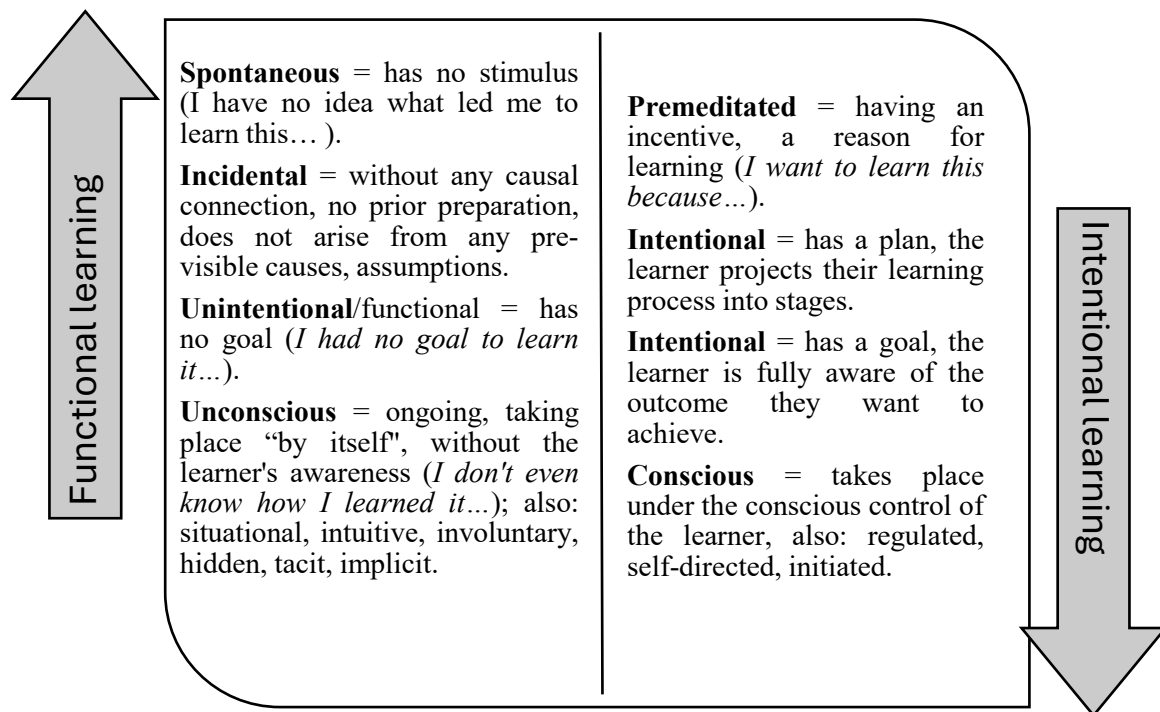


Source: author

The complexity of research and subsequent interventions in promoting adult self-learning is also due to the interrelationship and intermingling of functional and intentional factors (manifestations) of learning (Diagram 2).



**Diagram 2 Characteristics of informal learning (self-learning)**



Source: author

## CONCLUSION

We focused on the underdeveloped concept of self-learning in teacher professional development, which has as yet untapped development potential and is hampered by contradictions that hinder its systematic promotion in schools. The contradiction lies in the massive application of strategies to promote formal and informal education and the absence of support for teacher self-learning activities. The topic of inequality in education in the Slovak pedagogical context does not have any coordinated efforts to promote awareness and understanding of the nature, manifestations and instruments of change among teachers. There is a lack of empirical evidence on how we educate teachers (what support they receive in professional development) on the topics of inequities in education (supply of educational programs, teacher interest over time and location, quality of teaching resources and their availability, success in completing programs, changes induced by education in teaching practice, sustainability of outcomes, etc.). It is essential to reflect and design innovations in the implementation of new approaches on educational inequalities in the context of new trends in supporting teachers' professional development. It is also necessary to strengthen not only proven formal methods of professional development and the offer of non-formal learning activities, but also incentives, opportunities for informal learning. Stimulating informal learning (self-learning) activities is possible through the use of appropriate, widely available learning resources in electronic and print formats, video demonstrations, educational stories illustrating educational inequalities, case studies,

as well as study visits, internships and "shadowing" the work of successful school managers and school-based educators. These are organisationally challenging and costly methods of promoting self-learning in settings and environments that offer inspirational professional experiences for learning in addressing educational inequalities. In recent years, the forward-looking concept of andragogical counselling – counselling for learning (and self-learning) – has also begun to develop in the practice of teacher professional development, allowing for the individualisation of support according to the specific learning needs of self-learning individuals (Pavlov 2020).

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# **A SYSTEM OF SUPPORT MEASURES AS PART OF A STRATEGY FOR AN INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO EDUCATION**

## **The contribution of multidisciplinary cooperation**

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*Annotation:* Inclusive education involves a continuous process of improvement of educational institutions aimed at the use of existing resources, especially human resources. The key theme of the paper is the presentation of the system of support measures in the context of a qualitative shift towards the participation of all actors in the educational process. The introduction of a system of support measures in education and training should contribute to the school system being able to respond more directly to the diverse individual and special educational needs of children and pupils in order to fulfil their educational potential and their success not only in education, but also in life and society. The implementation of support measures requires a thorough identification and understanding of the child's and pupil's needs, abilities and specificities, as well as increased multidisciplinary cooperation between all parties involved (educational and professional staff, members of the school support team, the child's and pupil's legal representatives, staff of guidance and prevention facilities and others).

*Keywords:* Inclusive education. System of support measures. Multidisciplinary approach. Pupils and children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Most European countries recognise inclusive education as a means of ensuring equal rights to education for all children and pupils. However, definitions and implementations of inclusive education vary widely. They are discussed in relation to a narrow and broad definition of inclusive education, distinguishing between the horizontal and vertical dimensions of the concept. However, no country has yet managed to build a school system that meets the ideals and objectives of inclusion as defined by various international organisations.

Inclusive education is a topic that has begun to resonate in Slovakia in recent years, both in pedagogical theory and in practice. Although the debate is often narrowed down to the issue of children and pupils with special educational needs, it also concerns the readiness and ability of schools to respond adequately to the needs of all. It is therefore a legitimate part of any discussion on education reform and new forms of the education system currently underway in Slovakia. The commitment to implementing inclusive education is not achievable immediately and at the highest possible level. We have an obligation to take systematic and concrete steps towards

their fulfilment. However, inclusive education is not reducible to desegregation alone or to the mechanical integration of different groups of children and pupils. It is a broad spectrum of strategies, processes and activities that take existing educational programmes as their starting point. The meaning and goal of education is the same for all. We need to provide the conditions for everyone to work towards these goals.

Inclusion as one of the basic principles of education and training is provided for in Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (School Act) on Amendments and Supplements to Certain Acts, as amended (hereinafter referred to as the "School Act"). In implementing the principle of inclusion in education and training, the Slovak Republic is based on the idea that inclusion concerns everyone in the school environment, i.e. all children, pupils, students, teachers, educators, parents and other actors in education and training. However, in a broader context, it also includes all related policies, e.g. youth support policies, employment and other areas of life in Slovak society.

The need to introduce a more inclusive approach in education is demonstrated by a number of indicators and alarming figures. Lack of inclusion in education is consequently reflected in significant differences in labour market participation. Among EU countries, Slovakia has the highest unemployment rate for people with low educational attainment – up to 29 %. The Slovak Republic has the highest proportion of primary school pupils in special education in Europe – up to 5,88 % (the European average is almost four times lower: 1,62 %). At the same time, according to the OECD, the impact of social background on the educational performance of primary school pupils in Slovakia is one of the highest among developed countries. Pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds (SEN) are eight times more likely to repeat a grade than other primary school pupils (12,7 % – 1,6 %). The failure of the system to provide effective support is also reflected in the results in both domestic and international tests, where pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds perform significantly worse than the rest of the population ([www.minedu.sk](http://www.minedu.sk)).

The consideration of individual needs, abilities and interests in education is also insufficient for children and pupils without recognised learning needs. Schools lack support tools for pupils at risk of academic failure. These include, for example, children and pupils with insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction, children and pupils who are sick and disabled, gifted or experiencing emotional stress for various reasons, or who are at risk of not having their basic and developmental needs met in the family environment. As a result, if educational support is not provided in a timely and sufficient manner, many children and pupils fail in their education, drop out early, with negative consequences for their future life and labour market prospects. The lack of personalisation of education, the segregation of pupils with disabilities into special education and the strong influence of socio-economic background on educational outcomes are, among other things, a consequence of the previously legislated concept of SEN (ŠVVP, Special Educational Needs), which makes a child and pupil eligible for educational support solely on the basis of a health disadvantage, giftedness or socially disadvantaged background. The establishment and gradual

transition to a system of support measures in schools based on the needs of all children and pupils requires an analysis of the current situation, taking into account the strengths and weaknesses of the options offered and identifying the areas to be covered in the future, taking into account both formal and non-formal education.

## **1 THE SYSTEM OF SUPPORT MEASURES**

One of the reforms committed to by the Government of the Slovak Republic in the Recovery and Resilience Plan (2021) to contribute to the accessibility, development and quality of inclusive education (Component 6) is to change the definition of the concept of special educational needs of children and pupils and to create a model of eligible support measures in education and training. At the same time, the need for change in the provision of educational support has been repeatedly presented by both quantitative and qualitative analyses. Slovakia has long lacked an effective system of support provision that reflects the individual needs of learners and is able to create appropriate conditions for them to participate fully in education.

The biggest change in the modern history of inclusive education in Slovakia began in May 2023, when an amendment to Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (School Act) and on Amendments and Additions to Certain Acts came into force, introducing 21 support measures into the education system. The new system of support measures has been in force since September 2023 and provides support in education and training to every child and pupil with any barriers. The intention is to improve the quality of inclusive education. The different support measures respond to the diverse educational needs of children and pupils and can be both temporary and permanent. On the other hand, they may reflect the health, living or other conditions in which the child and pupil find themselves. At the same time, § 145a of the amendment to the School Act also specifies what the Catalogue of Support Measures ([www.podporneopatrenia.minedu.sk](http://www.podporneopatrenia.minedu.sk)) contains and lists all 21 support measures. The procedure for the allocation of support measures is subsequently determined by § 145b of the Education Act. The catalogue precisely defines the educational support measures that can be provided by a school or school establishment to a child and pupil. These are measures that will help them to participate fully in education and to develop their potential.

The model of eligible support measures represents a change from the current horizontal division of children and pupils according to categories of health and social disadvantage or giftedness to a vertical model, based on an assessment of the severity of permanent and/or current barriers to learning and the resulting need for the support measures that are necessary for the full development of the learner's educational potential. Support measures cover a variety of areas related to the learning itself, but also to the opportunity to participate in it, as well as new support measures that are currently absent in schools, e.g. facilitating attendance at classes. The support measures put in place are necessary to ensure a full education for all, taking into account children's and pupils' health, specific developmental, socio-economic and cultural backgrounds or other living conditions, and may be provided for varying

lengths of time, including for a transitional period which, for a variety of reasons, is problematic for the child or pupil.

## **2 MULTIDISCIPLINARY COOPERATION IN THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN AND PUPILS**

The school is one of the most important institutions through which every child passes, it is a key intervention setting with many opportunities for multidisciplinary collaboration. In its uniqueness, it allows to capture and support the child and his/her family from an early age of life, regardless of whether or not his/her primary environment perceives this need (Krnáčová, Križo, 2022). It is an environment or group of people who, regardless of differences, are able to appreciate differences, which allows them to communicate effectively and openly and work together to achieve common goals. The school must become an organisation that, by communicating and collaborating with its partners, directly facilitates the involvement of all children and pupils in the learning process.

In the context of inclusive education, if schools as educational institutions are to provide effective support and assistance to all children and pupils, they cannot be a mere “sum total” of individual professionals working individually. It is important that their activities are interlinked and internally coordinated, that the members of the working team communicate openly with each other, have common goals and work together to achieve them. A multidisciplinary approach is thus becoming key in the education of children and pupils, ensuring that everyone receives adequate support and help. It also enables teachers and other school staff to be supported in meeting the educational needs of all children and pupils, so that incoming difficulties can be adequately addressed (modified: Krnáčová et al., 2020).

The draft budget for 2025 foresees that an additional 131 million euros will be added for support measures. In total, 232 million euros will be spent on support measures next year, which means that funding for support measures will more than double compared to this year. Most of the additional money will probably go towards support staff already working in schools. In addition, however, 937 new teaching staff are also expected to be added to schools. The budget shows that these will probably be teaching assistants and teaching assistants. We really need to strengthen the staff in schools, and it is therefore positive that the number of staff should also increase next year.

## **CONCLUSION**

Slovak schools and educational institutions face a multitude of challenges, both general (which affect schools everywhere to varying degrees) and some specific (which are linked to the transitional peculiarities and particularities of school reform in our country). Among the general ones, the most important are: globalisation, the cognitive society and its demands, the massiveness of schools and their democratisation, education and the world of work (the entrepreneurial paradigm and the deviation of the logic of the market economy in education), the decline of the role of the state in education, the diversification of the educational field and of the social

resources of education, the preference for pragmatic and commercial values over humanistic ones in education, etc. Among the challenges we can mention: the crisis of educational goals, distorted and contradictory educational policy, incoherent discourse on the social role of schools, degradation of the social status of schools and the identity crisis of the profession, anomic culture of schools (incoherence of values, etc.).

An important element of the school is a functioning multidisciplinary inclusive team. The presence of on-site support staff can contribute significantly to the creation of a pro-inclusive environment, and professional expertise and variability can bring benefits to all school stakeholders. The work of inclusive team members makes individualisation processes more effective, as children and pupils receive immediate professional and targeted support. But inclusive culture or practice is not changed by their mere presence. What is important is that they have the space to carry out the activities that are within their remit so that they can contribute to solving the problems of all children and pupils. A clear idea of the workload and competences of the individual team members is a prerequisite for their successful collaboration.

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# GENDER INEQUALITY AS A BARRIER TO ROMA WOMEN'S EDUCATION

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## *Annotation*

The paper addresses the current issues of gender inequality in the education of Roma girls and women. It defines the basic concepts related to the subject and identifies key variables in the elimination of gender discrimination in education. It points to the necessity of conducting current representative research in the field of educational aspirations of Roma women and girls and offers a basis for applied practice.

*Keywords:* Gender Stereotype. Discrimination. Gender-Sensitive Education. Inequality. Gender.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Inequality between women and men in Slovakia<sup>2</sup> is manifested in several interrelated areas. Its causes are diverse – social expectations that directly or indirectly limit the opportunities of women and men, low knowledge of their own rights and the possibilities of protection and prevention of discrimination, but last but not least, insufficient opportunities to reconcile family and working life and the lack of remuneration or adequate appreciation of unpaid work, which is mainly performed by women for the benefit of their loved ones and society (Strategy for Gender Equality, 2021). Gender equality as one of the key indicators of real democracy and human rights is still a hot topic (not only) in professions primarily working with people. Helping professions, as those tasked with levelling inequalities (in the broadest sense of the word), are those on whom increased demands are also made in this area (Bosá, 2011). Gender is a category that helps us organize our worldview, that makes it easier to navigate society. Gender influences children's educational experience, outcomes and life choices and is therefore an integral part of pedagogy. We can use the principles of non-sexist education as a basis for gender-sensitive pedagogical practice. Children need to be reassured that gender does not limit their education, their achievements, or the choices they make in their lives and that they see in others. Gender-sensitive education must be presented first and foremost as equitable education. Children may cease to respect or feel threatened by a teacher who presents the world differently from everyone else. However, as long as gender relations are named and gender equality is

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<sup>2</sup> In our society, for example, masculinity is associated with performance and rationality, so in the labour market, in politics, in science or wherever performance and rationality are the defining value, women are perceived as less suitable or even less valuable. On the other hand, femininity is more associated with emotionality, caring and sacrifice, which causes men to be perceived as "second-class" parents. There is a perception that fathers are not able to take care of the child as well as mothers. The structures that produce such perceptions are gender roles, norms and stereotypes.

talked about as an effort that ensures equity, this approach has a better chance of acceptance among children (Babanova, Miskolc, 2007, p. 25).

## 1 DEFINITION OF BASIC TERMS

*Gender equality* means equal visibility, equal status and equal participation of women and men in all spheres of public and private life. It aims to promote the full participation of women and men in society. Formal (de jure) equality is only the first step towards real (de facto) equality. Gender mainstreaming and gender equality planning are important strategies for achieving gender equality (Filadelfiová 2009, p. 68). In order to identify the mechanisms that lead to gender (in)equality, a thorough understanding of the concept of gender itself is essential. Gender is an analytical tool that enables an understanding of society and social relations and inequalities in their complexity (it reveals the “invisible” mechanisms of the persistence of asymmetries between women and men). It also provides a tool for identifying problems and developing possible solutions in promoting gender equality and civil and political rights in society (Bosá, 2011). From a gender perspective, the Slovak labour market is considered a “*dual labour market*” (Křížková 2003, Barošová, Perichtová 2007). This term refers to gender segregation – the fact that one set of activities (occupations) is performed more (or almost exclusively) by men, while another set of activities is performed predominantly (or even exclusively) by women. When we talk about gender segregation, it is important to realise that segregation occurs both at the horizontal level (different types of work, roles or entire sectors performed by men and women) and at the vertical level (different positions represented by women and men in the hierarchy of the organisation). It is vertical segregation that results in unequal pay and unequal prestige for women and men even in the same occupational fields (Kimmel, 2008). Here, too, we see the effect of gender-stereotyped expectations, which are linked to ideas of men as performance-oriented, capable of wielding power, and of women as providing support and “odd jobs” or “ready to sacrifice themselves for others” (in our case, to work even for almost nothing and without recognition).

*Gender stereotypes* can be understood as norms that determine the right and wrong characteristics, behaviour and actions of men and women. They determine the role of women and men in the world. This is how gender inequalities are created, because the right man is considered to be strong and powerful, and the right woman is considered to be subordinate and weaker (Kiczkova, 2011). Gender stereotypes are simplistic, unrealistic images of “masculinity” and “femininity”, idealised and expected patterns that accompany us in all areas of life (Rác, 2010).

*Gender-sensitive pedagogy* is a pedagogical approach that enables boys and girls to develop a wide and varied range of interests, abilities and behaviours that are not constrained by gender-stereotyped limitations. It encourages children to develop all the possibilities of their personality that will make them competent, caring, confident and reflective adults (Bosá, Minarovičová, 2006). It assumes that feminine and masculine gender roles are the result of social construction, that “femininity” and “masculinity” are not innate qualities, but that certain ways of behaving are acquired through education, upbringing and socialization. A look at other cultures and back to

the past confirms the possibilities of development or change of gender roles and thus the feasibility of the goals of gender-sensitive pedagogy (Cviková, Juráňová, 2003). It understands gender-specific socialization as part of social diversity (which consists of, for example, age, ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, and others). A gender-sensitive approach presupposes a comprehensive way of thinking that is not based on exclusion and strict demarcation, but seeks above all to perceive continuity. Gender-sensitive pedagogy is part of the everyday relationship between the teacher/educator and girls and boys. It is a personal stance that assumes that all human action and thought is gendered. Gender sensitivity implies the ability to reflect this fact (Barsha, 2002).

## 2 THE CURRENT STATE OF THE ART

Roma children lag behind their non-Roma peers in all indicators related to education<sup>3</sup>. Only about half (53 %) of Roma children aged between four and the age of compulsory school attend pre-school education. On average, 18 % of Roma aged 6 – 24 attend a level of education below their age. The proportion of Roma with early school leaving is disproportionately high compared to the general population. Segregation in schools is still a problem in Bulgaria, Greece, Hungary and Slovakia, despite the fact that this practice is prohibited both by law and by recent case law of the European Court of Human Rights (FRA, 2018).

Back in 2009, the Cultural Association of Roma in Slovakia carried out a research<sup>4</sup> whose main aim was to capture part of the situation in the implementation and observance of women's human rights in segregated and segregated Roma communities. The area of education and the labour market was monitored, attention was focused on the availability of various goods and services, the obstacles that Roma women encounter on the way to their ideas of life, as well as the gender structure in the domestic sphere. The research attempted to capture similarities and differences in the real experiences of Roma women and men, as well as in attitudes and views on the fundamental role of women and men in society<sup>5</sup>. The research included Roma men and women from segregated and segregated settlements or parts of villages and towns in three regions of Slovakia – Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica. The experience and opinion of 310 adult Roma women and 308 men were compared. Roma women and men from 98 localities of different sizes and types were represented in the final research sample. The sample was diverse in terms of the established classifying features, with different patterns of partner cohabitation and parenting represented in each group. One of the aims of the research was to find out how those in non-integrated

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<sup>3</sup> Despite several positive trends in recent years, the main, but not the only problems in this area in relation to children from the MRC (Marginalised Roma Communities) still include access to quality early childhood care, low completion rates in pre-primary education, the deliberate creation of Roma classes and schools, excessive and not always justified inclusion of Roma children in the special education stream and repetition of grades in primary schools, respectively. Early school leaving (Roma Equality, Inclusion and Participation Strategy 2030).

<sup>4</sup> Cultural Association of Roma in Slovakia. Roma Women's Human Rights Data, 2009.

<sup>5</sup> More up-to-date data is mapped in the Carpathian Foundation's 2022 research entitled *UPre women: the status and empowerment of women in selected marginalized Roma communities*.

communities envision their future lives before entering adulthood, to what extent they are able to fulfil their ideas and what they see as barriers to their dream life path.

- It turns out that they dream of ordinary things – a happy family and working life, a job, their own housing, education, financial and material security.
- Overall, women's dreams were more specific, more family-related and more often directed towards breaking traditional patterns – of women's education and employment as well as family cycles and patterns.
- The non-integrated environment is generally unfavourable to life plans, but seems even more unfavourable in the case of Roma women. They saw the obstacle to fulfilment most often in their lack of education and gainful employment, but also in their family – family of origin, parental or their own.
- This was followed by beliefs about barriers stemming from ethnicity, parental inhibitions and health problems. Four times as many women as men experienced unfulfilled dreams due to childcare and family care.
- Women were also more likely to mention barriers and inhibitions from parents, such as parental disapproval of a girl's further studies or lack of finances to provide for her studies.
- Roma women also spoke of a lack of parental support for further education, as well as poor family circumstances that forced the girl to prioritise home care over study and education.

### **3 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Roma women in Europe are discriminated against more than any other social group, facing racial and gender discrimination (Frazer, Marlier, 2011, Bartos, 2017), resulting in global inequality (Morell, 2016). Discrimination against Roma women has structural features (Voicu and Popescu, 2009), is cumulative and long-standing, and is embedded in many European cultures and communities (OHCHR, 2018).

Discrimination has many consequences that are often more far-reaching than assumed (Voicu, Popescu, 2009). Roma women experience different levels of discrimination from the majority society (Toth, 2005; Reimer, 2016), face many challenges arising from marginalisation, gender, social and ethnic issues in communities and the majority society (Morell, 2016), and face discrimination in education (Lynch, Feeley, 2009).

Discrimination against Roma women is a combination of inequalities that result from gender, poverty, social exclusion and inequality in communities (Frazer, Marlier, 2011). Roma women are still discriminated against in terms of equal access to work, education, housing and healthcare (United Nations, 2006; Cekota, Trentini, 2015). The limitation of women's access to the labour market is influenced by social inequalities that stem from the nature of the patriarchal Roma family (Bogdanowicz-Gregorczyk, Caban, 2016). The traditional division of labour and household care responsibilities gives men full power and is reflected in the social order (Bordieu, 2001).

Therefore, the first and basic starting point for eliminating gender discrimination in the education of Roma women is to promote education and raise their educational level as a key factor in eliminating gender inequality. Roma women and girls face double discrimination, the consequences of which affect their entire lives. Women are often discriminated against in the labour market because of their background and finding employment is complicated for many by the view of the "traditional" role of women and mothers, which is shared by both the majority and many Roma families and communities. Lack of qualifications is also a challenge for some Roma women, particularly those from or living in socially excluded or economically deprived communities. However, qualifications cannot be obtained without quality education and work experience, to which, as mentioned above, many Roma girls and women have no or very limited access.

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# CAUSES AND CONSEQUENCES OF GRADE REPETITION IN ROMA PUPILS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

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EduRoma

*Annotation:* The paper is based on the results of the 2022 survey, the main aim of which was to further understand and subsequently identify and name the main causes and barriers that lead pupils from excluded communities to repeat a year in primary school. The survey was conducted from the perspective of social and community workers, teachers and school principals. It discusses the individual barriers of pupils and their parents, as well as their lack of material, technical and systemic support from educational and state institutions.

*Keywords:* grade retention, Roma pupils, disadvantage, stigmatization, educational and life trajectories.

The paper is based on the results of a survey conducted in 2022 by the civic association eduRoma, whose main goal was to understand and subsequently identify the main causes and barriers that lead pupils from excluded communities to repeat a year in primary school. We believe that our contribution will contribute to the debate, which will enable a critical rethinking of the very existence of the institution of grade repetition in the Slovak education system.

We identified Roma pupils in our research 1. on the basis of their ascribed ethnicity 2. in combination with their social exclusion by social workers and teachers. In the area of social exclusion we meant pupils who, according to the respondents, come from either marginalized Roma communities (MRC) or socially disadvantaged backgrounds (SDB). We conducted the survey from the perspective of a) 20 field social and community workers who have been working with socially excluded families for a long time and could therefore provide us with more in-depth information in the survey, and b) from the perspective of 34 primary school teachers who educate Roma pupils.

The questionnaire survey was conducted in the months of April – June, 2022 in the Košice, Prešov and Banská Bystrica regions. The findings from the survey were supplemented by 10 additional individual in-depth telephone interviews with selected social workers and school principals during September – October, 2022.

From the results of the survey it is clear that the factors influencing directly or indirectly the repetition of the grade of pupils from excluded communities are much broader and are not only *a)* of the nature of individual motivation and life aspirations of pupils and their parents, but *b)* are also characterized by the unavailability of necessary services and material and technical assistance, or are related to *c)* the quality of the educational process itself, or are *d)* generated by systemic deficiencies in the education system.

The results show that schools in Slovakia still do not have detailed strategies for cooperation with parents from excluded localities and that contact between teachers and parents is minimal. It is obvious that tutoring and leisure activities for Roma pupils from excluded communities are more supported by field social and community workers than by schools and school children's clubs. Pupils from excluded communities themselves miss school because of frequent illnesses caused by – among other things – unhealthy eating habits, irregular diet or difficult access to health care. children's school attendance is also affected by inappropriately adjusted bus schedules.

The problem of school failure and consequent grade retention among Roma pupils from excluded communities is also due to the fact that schools do not make any use of the opportunities already offered by the current school system. Some of the reasons for the ineffectiveness of support measures identified by school inspectors include, for example<sup>6</sup>, the fact that schools were only involved to a small extent in summer schools, that only 34 % of underachieving pupils attend the school children's club, and that schools do not cooperate with the community centre, in a fifth of the primary schools inspected, the head teachers did not contact the legal representatives about the extraordinary deterioration of pupils' performance and the possibility of conducting a board examination for their child; the inspectors also noted the didactic unpreparedness of teachers, the failure to report neglect of compulsory school attendance, etc.

The education of Roma pupils in Slovakia is often funded by European subsidies, but these are irregular, administratively demanding and, most importantly, not all schools receive them. Moreover, the way in which they are used is often ineffective. An example from November 2021 is the support from the Recovery Plan, which, according to the Ministry of Education, was intended to increase the participation of Roma pupils in tutoring and leisure activities in school children's clubs (SCC). These are now run by municipalities and pupils' families have to finance them themselves<sup>7</sup>.

In our survey we state that the participation of Roma pupils in leisure-time activities of the school is very low not only because of the lack of financial resources. But also because of poorly adjusted bus timetables or because Roma pupils do not feel comfortable together with other pupils from the majority background. In the survey, we find that even parents are unable to participate in their children's home preparation, for example, because of their low educational level and their lack of linguistic competence in the Slovak language. According to our findings, we know that field social and community workers are much more involved in tutoring pupils, but tutoring and preparing pupils for school is not part of their job duties and is not systematically

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<sup>6</sup>Read more about the findings here: <https://www.ssi.sk/2022/06/30/opakovanie-rocnika-v-skolach-s-rocnikmi-1-4-tzv-malotriednych-skolach/>

<sup>7</sup>Read more here: <https://romanoforum.dennikn.sk/na-chudobnych-ziakov-davame-malo-spoliehame-sa-pri-tom-na-eurofondy-a-aj-tie-zle-cielime/>



and financially supported. Often this is a service they provide to children on a voluntary basis.

According to teachers in our survey, repeating a grade is beneficial for pupils, mainly because it helps pupils to learn and understand missed, unmastered material. The paradox is that if a pupil fulfils such an expectation, a teacher's request, when repeating a grade and as a result (later) moves up a grade, the school system remains punitive towards him/her. Not only does it stigmatise them throughout their future school career, but it continues to put them at a disadvantage in applying for higher quality education compared to pupils who have not repeated a year.

In the context of grade repetition in Slovakia, there are also significant limitations in terms of completing primary school in adulthood through secondary education, which is still underdeveloped and under-accessed in Slovakia. According to research<sup>8</sup> by the Slovak Governance Institute (SGI) in 2021, courses to complete primary school are also accompanied by the following barriers:

The legislation defines secondary education very broadly. This means that it does not provide information on the minimum or recommended duration of such training, nor does it even provide further guidance for schools on how to implement the course for completing primary school, how to approach its organisation methodologically, for example with a diverse group of learners. This is because the course is often attended by people with different years of primary school completion, which can cause complications in the design of the curriculum and the organisation of the training. There is also no clear indication in the Education Act that graduates of special primary schools are also a potential target group for primary school completion courses.

Another problem is the amount of the normative contribution for primary schools, which, for example, for 2020 amounted to 1 989,80 EUR (already after taking into account the coefficient of the qualification structure), which implies that the normative per pupil of the course for completing primary school was about 198 EUR for the whole year. On this basis, it can be argued that it is not financially worthwhile for schools to run a course where they have a low number of candidates. This is also why the number of primary schools offering primary school completion courses has shown a marked downward trend in recent years.

Teachers in our survey report that repeating a year is intended to enable pupils to catch up on what they have missed and to understand the material sufficiently to be on a par with their classmates who have not repeated the year. One can only agree with the assertion that pupils need time to catch up and learn what they have missed and not

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.governance.sk/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/DruhosancoveVzdelavanie.pdf> , p. 71 – 72

mastered. However, the problem with the institution of grade retention is that it puts this group of pupils at a disadvantage throughout their lives.

Instead of it being more important for the school system whether the pupil has mastered, caught up with, and understood the material due to repeating the grade in the final, it is unfortunately much more important that the pupil has not mastered the material at the time and therefore needs to continue to be punished and disadvantaged – even after remediation – throughout his/her life. Moreover, as we find in our research, grade repetition among Roma children from excluded communities is often influenced by objective factors – systemic barriers and various obstacles that both the children themselves and their parents are unable to remove. On the contrary, the state, which has the necessary tools and means to remove these barriers, does not act in this way in the long term.

The result must therefore be a series of practical – curricular, didactic and systemic – measures that will serve as an effective preventive measure against grade repetition as much as possible, while the institute itself should only be used in rare cases, for example, for pupils who have been ill for a long time and objectively could not take part in daily lessons, etc.

After all, the current institution of repeating a year in the Slovak school system has not only psychological but also wider social and professional impacts on pupils, which negatively affect their further educational and life paths. In such a case, the well-established adage that repetition is the mother of wisdom certainly does not apply, as many educators in Slovakia would normally wish.

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# SEGREGATION OF ROMA STUDENTS AT SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

## Provision of Education Within the Framework of the Elocated Workplaces of Secondary Vocational Schools

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*Annotation:* The segregation of Roma students in the Slovak education system, including the elocated workplaces of secondary vocational schools, deepens the social isolation of the Roma community. The research focused on the impact of these schools on the development of social capital and Roma integration. The findings show that although the policy of elocated schools was intended to be inclusive, in practice it is a segregated education that limits students' interactions outside the Roma community and reduces their chances of social mobility and better employment.

*Keywords:* Roma. Secondary vocational schools. Segregation. Educational policy.

### INTRODUCTION

Segregation of Roma students is a discriminatory trend in the Slovak education system, which represents inequalities in the education of Roma students. Segregation as a discriminatory practice is also pointed out by court decisions<sup>9</sup> that have been issued in relation to some schools at the primary school level. This kind of violation of rights in the education of Roma children has been highlighted by international institutions such as the European Commission, Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), as well as by experts at national level. So far, however, only segregation has been proven at the level of primary education in Slovakia. That is why it is important to deal with the topic of secondary vocational schools, which is an insufficiently researched topic in the field of education of Roma students at the level of secondary education, and at the same time it is a topic that receives insufficient attention not only from researchers, but also from experts and policy-makers.

### THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The research is based on Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory, according to which social capital is a set of useful resources from which people can benefit as individuals or as a community. According to the author, social capital is unequally distributed within social groups and can be used to access opportunities.

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<sup>9</sup> E.g. the judgement on segregation in the context of primary schools in Šarišské Michaľany or Stará Ľubovňa.

## METHODS

The qualitative research is based on the analysis of documents, which are specific strategic and conceptual documents adopted by the Government of the Slovak Republic in relation to secondary vocational schools. Field data collection was carried out in several localities in Eastern Slovakia through ethnographic interviews with Roma students and graduates of education at an elocated workplace of one of the secondary vocational schools and with other representatives of selected Roma communities. According to experts, ethnographic interviews provide a deeper and more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon under study (Hockey & Forsey, 2012).

The method of conducting semi-structured interviews was also applied in the research, which allows for a deeper penetration into the areas of interest and to follow up on unexpected findings (Creswell, 2013). They were conducted with selected students, graduates and young people from these schools, as well as with institutional actors such as school staff, representatives of municipalities and Roma-focused inclusion projects such as outreach social workers and health assistants, and with selected Roma parents.

## RESULTS

The policy of creating secondary vocational schools' elocated workplaces was supported for the first time in the context of the Roma population in the Mid-term Concept of Developing Roma National Minority in the Slovak republic: Solidarity – Integrity – Inclusion 2008 – 2013 (2008), which aimed to support the integration of the marginalised Roma population. The document recognised the need for a comprehensive approach to addressing Roma problems, including keeping Roma children in schools and improving their access to the labour market. However, the authors also pointed out that previous solutions ignored the specific needs of Roma. They identified ethnic segregation in education as one of the main barriers to integration and suggested measures such as increasing funding for vocational secondary schools and introducing educational programmes "*in which Roma students can be very successful*" (p. 87), such as programmes for making musical instruments or construction work – which are stereotypical in their own way. The document does not indicate on what findings or conclusions this proposal is based. They also recommended that secondary vocational schools should set up secondary vocational schools in the vicinity of localities with a high proportion of Roma population, emphasising cooperation with municipalities.

In the same year, the idea was also supported in the Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Students including the Development of Secondary and Higher Education (2008). The aim was to support the establishment of secondary vocational schools in localities with a high proportion of Roma population, as the document states that these areas face high levels of unemployment and poverty.

However, although the authors of the documents aimed at Roma integration, these schools further deepen geographical and social isolation (Balážová, 2015, Hall a kol., 2019). These are schools that are mostly attended exclusively by Roma students because they are opened in localities with a high proportion of Roma population. Many times they capture students who attended a purely Roma primary school, often right in the village they come from, as well as students who were successful at primary school, but for reasons such as low self-esteem, the uncomfortable feeling of facing new situations and a new environment without the presence of friends, or the recommendation of a primary school representative to attend a local secondary vocational school, they decide to attend such a school. Reports by the National School Inspectorate (2020, 2022) and a study by the Institute of Financial Policy (Hellebrandt a kol., 2020) show that these schools are ineffective because students are often absent from class or leave school early. Findings from the field confirm this phenomenon. Equally, in some cases they indicate very unprofessional classroom management and the absence of some compulsory subjects anchored in the national curriculum, thus pointing to low quality education.

The research findings also show that social capital building in secondary vocational schools is limited to relationships within the school. Students from the research sites had limited opportunities to interact and build relationships with peers and other people outside of their community, limiting them to interactions predominantly with peers from segregated schools and the same community. This limitation was particularly evident in cases where graduates or those who had completed their education were only looking for work within relationships established in the local Roma community, or when trying to think about potential employers, where respondents were limited to those they knew already employed someone from the local Roma community, despite the more diverse range of employers and professions in the vicinity of the locality in question.

## **CONCLUSION**

The aim of the policy of creating secondary vocational schools was to improve the education and employment of Roma and to contribute to positive social change in this respect. However, the isolated education of Roma students in ethnically homogeneous schools is another form of segregation of Roma children and young people in education. Segregation has an impact on the quality of life of individuals. The results of my research suggest that Roma attending an elocated workplace of secondary vocational school have limited opportunities to build social capital outside the Roma community in which they live, and so their chances of benefiting from social relations in employment or in everyday life are disproportionately low compared to the majority population.

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# THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF CHILDREN FROM MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

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*Annotation:* Marginalised communities, including ethnic minorities, low-income families, and migrant or displaced populations, often face systemic barriers that can hinder educational attainment. Understanding the factors that shape the educational aspirations of these children is essential for developing effective interventions and policies to promote educational equity. This article synthesises existing studies on the educational aspirations of children from marginalised communities, exploring the influences of family background, community identity, school environment and wider societal factors.

*Keywords:* Family. Community Identity. School Environment. Structural Inequality.

## INTRODUCTION

Educational aspirations are seen as an important part of children's development, especially at a time when they are exposed to social and economic disparities. For children from minority groups, the path to education is often more complicated, as they face not only the challenges associated with education but also barriers specific to their social, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The topic of the educational aspirations of minority children is therefore a topical societal issue that has far-reaching implications for their opportunities and integration into society. Educational aspirations are not only about success at school, but also about the development of a sense of self-confidence, a sense of belonging and the opportunities that may arise in the future. It is therefore important to understand the factors that shape these aspirations and to identify steps that can help remove existing barriers.

## FACTORS INFLUENCING THE EDUCATIONAL ASPIRATIONS OF CHILDREN FROM MARGINALISED COMMUNITIES

Educational aspirations play a key role in shaping children's life goals and career options. Children from marginalised communities – often defined by their economic, social or cultural isolation – face unique challenges that can shape their attitudes towards education and their opportunities to achieve it. The factors that most often appear in research studies that influence the educational aspirations of these children are complex and include:

- family background,
- community identity and social capital,
- school environment,



- structural inequalities and discrimination.

Understanding these factors is essential to creating an inclusive learning environment that supports and empowers the aspirations of all children, regardless of their background.

## **THE ROLE OF FAMILY BACKGROUND**

Family background plays a key role in shaping the educational aspirations of children from marginalised communities. The family environment is one of the most significant factors that influence children's educational aspirations. For children from marginalised communities, who often live in environments with limited economic resources and low levels of parental education, the perspective on education may be different. Research suggests that parents who have not had access to higher education, or who have grown up in an environment where education is not emphasised, may not always be able or willing to motivate their children to achieve high educational goals. Parents of children from marginalised groups often face a lack of education and low incomes, which can lead to limited expectations for their children's education (Slepičková & Fučík, 2018; Tomšík et al., 2020). These factors can affect not only children's motivation but also their ability to succeed in the school system. In addition, lack of exposure to educational opportunities and to educational resources such as books, technology, or extracurricular activities can also negatively affect their academic performance (Slepičková & Fučík, 2018; Tomšík et al., 2020; Özbaş, 2020). Studies show that the socioeconomic conditions from which a child comes to school can lead to lowered expectations of academic success, as parents may prioritize immediate economic needs over long-term educational goals (Bradshaw et al., 2015). That parental education level, socioeconomic status, and cultural values significantly influence children's aspirations is also evidenced by other research from the opposite spectrum. For example, children of immigrants often show higher educational aspirations compared to their peers from non-immigrant families, driven by a desire to fit in with their peer community while meeting parental expectations (Nygård, 2021). This phenomenon, often referred to as the “immigrant advantage”, highlights the importance of parental aspirations in motivating children to continue their education despite challenges (Feliciano & Lanuza, 2016).

## **COMMUNITY IDENTITY AND SOCIAL CAPITAL**

Community identity and social capital have been shown to be critical factors influencing the educational aspirations of children from marginalised backgrounds. A strong sense of community can provide emotional support and encouragement, thereby fostering aspirations for higher education in youth. For example, research suggests that children from socioeconomically disadvantaged communities who feel a strong connection to their community are more likely to engage in education (Bradshaw et al., 2015). This sense of belonging can counteract the negative effects of stigma and discrimination that are prevalent in marginalized communities (Bradshaw et al., 2015). Also, Rosinsky (2006) found that identification with the needs of the community is the strongest factor for Roma in motivating them to learn.

In addition, social capital, defined as social networks and relationships that facilitate access to resources, also plays a key role in shaping learning outcomes. Children from communities with strong social networks often benefit from mentoring and support systems that enhance their educational aspirations (Rusnáková et al., 2015; Thackrah et al., 2021; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018). Collaborating with local community leaders and organizations can also provide children with role models and opportunities that may otherwise be unavailable (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018). Social network analysis can provide valuable information about how children from marginalized groups engage in the educational process and what relationships they form in the school environment (Lintner, 2020). These analyses can reveal how children support each other and what factors influence their educational decisions. For example, children who have strong social ties with peers who have high educational aspirations may be more motivated to strive for success in school (Lintner, 2020).

## **SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT**

For children from marginalised communities, school is often the first environment outside the family where they can gain a broader view of the world around them. The school environment provides them with access to educational resources, teachers who can be role models, and opportunities to develop social skills that may not be available to them at home or in the community. A supportive school climate that prioritizes inclusivity and cultural responsiveness can positively influence students' aspirations. Research shows that when schools actively engage parents from diverse cultures in the life of the school and staff enter into the lives of the student community, educational outcomes improve (Thackrah et al., 2021; Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018; Rosinsky, 2023). At the same time, when a school adapts educational content to the identity of its students into the curriculum, it fosters a sense of belonging and increases students' motivation to learn (Jackson-Barrett & Lee-Hammond, 2018; Preston et al., 2012).

Early childhood education also plays a key role in shaping the educational aspirations of children from marginalised communities. Access to high-quality kindergarten programs has been shown to improve academic readiness and long-term educational outcomes (Kearney & Levine, 2015; Geoffroy et al., 2010). For children from disadvantaged backgrounds, early entry into formal education can promote positive attitudes towards learning and raise aspirations. Programmes that focus on the holistic development of pupils, including social-emotional learning, while engaging families in the educational process are particularly effective in supporting the aspirations of marginalised children (Roberts, 2015; Cefai 2022). By involving families in the educational process, these programmes can help bridge the gap between home and school and reinforce the importance of education in children's lives.

Another important factor is the support of teaching and professional staff. School staff who can identify solutions to the unique challenges faced by marginalized students can help guide their educational aspirations. Studies suggest that positive teacher-student relationships and high expectations of educators correlate with increased student motivation and aspirations (O'Connor et al., 2020). Conversely, negative experiences,

such as perceived discrimination or lack of support in school, can lead to frustration and reduced educational aspirations (Bradshaw et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2011).

Overall, a school environment that is inclusive, supportive and offers ample resources and positive experiences can have a profound impact on the educational aspirations of children from marginalised communities, helping them to overcome the constraints of their backgrounds.

## **STRUCTURAL INEQUALITIES AND DISCRIMINATION**

The impact of structural inequality and discrimination on the educational outcomes of children from marginalised communities is a multifaceted problem deeply rooted in systemic barriers. These barriers manifest themselves in a variety of forms, including socioeconomic disparities, discrimination based on ethnicity or religion, and lack of access to educational resources. The interplay of these factors creates a cycle of disadvantage that significantly affects the educational outcomes of children in marginalised communities. One of the main contributors to educational inequality is the socioeconomic status of families. Children from low-income backgrounds often attend underfunded schools that lack basic resources such as highly qualified teachers, adequate equipment and learning materials. This lack of resources directly correlates with poorer educational outcomes as highlighted by Musisi & Kiggundu (2018). The lack of economic resources of the family stifles their social and economic mobility (Musisi & Kiggundu, 2018). Similarly, Amin (2023) highlights that regional disparities, exacerbated by socio-economic factors, present significant impacts on students' educational outcomes, thus reinforcing the cycle of inequality. The cumulative effect of these disadvantages can lead to lower academic performance and higher dropout rates among children from marginalised communities.

Discrimination also plays a critical role in shaping learning experiences and outcomes. Kumar's (2021) study reveals a link between students experiencing systemic discrimination within educational institutions and feelings of alienation and exclusion. This discrimination can manifest itself in various forms, including biased treatment by teaching and professional staff as well as peers, which adversely affects students' self-esteem and academic engagement. Educational policy also needs to take into account legislative aspects relating to the education of children from marginalised groups. In many countries, there are efforts to improve access to education for these children, but legislative barriers and lack of funding can hinder the effective implementation of inclusive education programmes (Ďulíková, 2020; Kostelecká, 2018). Cojocariu & Boghian (2019) illustrate the detrimental effects of discrimination in the Romanian education system, where children from marginalised backgrounds experience physical and psychological problems, including anxiety and disinterest in school. Such experiences can hinder their academic performance and overall educational engagement. Children who face social disadvantage may have lower self-esteem and feel that their aspirations are unattainable. Supporting children's psychological health and emotional development is therefore essential to their success in the school environment (Dankovičová et al., 2014). Moreover, the implementation of community-based learning initiatives has shown promise in addressing some of these

disparities (Rosinsky, 2023). This is confirmed by Zubaidi (2023) when he found investigated how the impact of community participation in education governance can increase interest in education among marginalized children. By engaging communities in the educational process, these initiatives can help tailor educational approaches to better meet the needs of marginalized students, thereby improving their educational outcomes. This approach underlines the importance of community involvement in mitigating the effects of structural inequalities.

## CONCLUSION

The intensity of each of the above factors contributes to locking in the disadvantage of children in marginalised communities, which in turn has an impact on the educational aspirations of other children in the community. Addressing these issues requires comprehensive strategies that include community engagement, equitable resource allocation and targeted interventions aimed at eliminating discriminatory practices within education systems. To ensure their success, a comprehensive approach that takes all these aspects into account and provides the necessary support and resources is needed. The education of children from marginalised groups should be a priority for all stakeholders to ensure equality of opportunity and equitable access to education for all.

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# **EXAMPLES OF RECORDS ON THE PROVISION OF SUPPORT MEASURES TO ROMA CHILDREN AND STUDENTS AT RISK OF SOCIAL EXCLUSION**

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*Annotation:* In this paper, we provide two specific examples of records of provision of support measures. Based on these examples (but not limited to them), we conclude with recommendations for keeping records on the provision of support measures.

Keywords: support measures, support areas, recording the provision of support measures

## **INTRODUCTION**

In the paper we focused on the experience of educational groups (partly also other forms of methodological support and counselling for pedagogical and professional staff) in the programmes on the topic of providing support measures (hereinafter referred to as SM) at the regional workplace of the NIVaM (The National Institute of Education and Youth) in Banská Bystrica. The following examples are directly related to the provision of SM to Roma children and pupils.

On the basis of the analysis of selected distance tasks submitted by participants in the innovative training programmes, as well as the analysis of the feedback provided by the lecturer and lecturers, we try to point out examples of good practice.

## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

The support measures system represents a modern model of providing support to all children and students. Redefining the concept of special educational needs is a commitment to which the Slovak Republic has committed itself in the Recovery and Resilience Plan. Specifically, in Component 6 – Accessibility, Development and Quality of Inclusive Education.

Among other objectives of this part of the reform, those related to the gradual reduction of the influence of the socio-economic status of families on educational outcomes are particularly relevant in relation to Roma children and students. Similarly, there is an emphasis on reducing early school leaving. In the text, we have focused on examples that particularly affect Roma children and students from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, especially marginalised Roma communities.

In the Slovak Republic, Roma children from segregated communities have long been one of the most at-risk groups in the population in relation to school achievement. The National Institute of Education and Youth guarantees and provides several forms of



methodological support to schools, educational establishments and institutions, and social assistance, also in view of the fact mentioned in the previous sentence. At the regional workplace in Banská Bystrica we provide support to pedagogical and professional staff mainly through:

- Innovative learning programmes
- Professional events
- Direct methodological advice and support

In this paper, we will focus on the experience with regard to selected support measures, which in the first year of the existence of the Catalogue of Support Measures (hereinafter referred to as CSM) and the accompanying methodologies (hereinafter referred to as AM), we registered with the participants of the education programmes as those that also provide specifically for Roma children and students.

## **METHODS**

Analysis of distance learning assignments. Analysis of feedback on distance learning assignments. Reflection on direct experiences from learning groups.

## **RESULTS**

We will briefly give two examples in the context of the provision of these support measures and examples of specific practices in some areas of support, as a result of targeted work with CSMs and relevant SMs.

### **Support measure 3.c):**

The provision of activities for the development of motor skills, sensory perception, communication skills, cognitive skills, social-communication skills, emotionality, and self-care, the purpose of which is to alleviate or remove barriers to the child's/student's education and learning to ensure the development of the child's/student's abilities or personality and the attainment of an appropriate level of educational attainment through interventions (CSM, p. 34).

In the following areas: motor skills, sensory perception, cognitive skills, communication skills, social-communication skills, emotionality, self-care, for example, the following procedures can be applied:

- Rhythm, movement, articulation, breathing and phonation exercises such as hold breath, exhale forcefully, echo, phone, what has changed?, word chains and others (see SM Interventions pp. 11 – 13 for details).
- Fine motor skills exercises such as squirming, tearing, modelling, drawing, bumping, folding, stringing and changing, fastening and unfastening, and others (see SM Interventions pp. 14 – 15 for details).
- Articulatory and oromotor mobility exercises, such as strengthening tongues, lips, chewing muscles – sucking, licking, blowing, teeth sucking, lip

movements, tongue movements, etc. (see SM Interventions pp. 15 – 18 for details).

- Exercises for visual perception and exercises to promote sensorimotor coordination, such as perception of colours, shapes, surfaces – folding, stacking, determining... (see SM Interventions pp. 30 – 32 for details).
- Tactile exercises, such as sorting by size, material, marking off a certain distance, selecting, inserting different objects, sifting and many others... (see SM Interventions pp. 36 – 40 for details).
- Auditory perception exercises, such as negotiated response to sound, repetition of animal sounds, objects, discrimination of short and long sounds, loudness, similar expressions, words, identification of first, last syllable and many others (see in detail SM Interventions pp. 41 – 49).

### **Support Measure 3.e):**

The provision of a course in the school language of instruction or other support for the acquisition of the school language of instruction, the aim of which is to improve the linguistic competence of children/pupils in the school language of instruction by supporting the acquisition of the school language of instruction of children/students whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction of the school they attend and of children/students whose knowledge of the school language of instruction is below the age-appropriate knowledge of the school language of instruction (CSM, p. 44). The accompanying materials for this support measure also include an “Entrance test to determine the level of Slovak language proficiency”.

In particular, it is recommended to establish and maintain eye contact with the child when communicating, to use steady simple instructions, to comment on what is happening in the classroom, to use precise but not very simple language, to visualise educational content, to orient in space, the mode of the day, etc. Possibilities of support in acquiring the language of instruction (Slovak) of the school – Slovak as a second language):

- Always greet the child on arrival to the classroom, greet each other with established expressions, similarly when saying goodbye, leaving the school – Welcome. Good morning. Hello. How are you? Goodbye. Have a nice day.
- Comment on events, situations, interactions in which the child and I are involved with strong non-verbal communication (especially facial expressions, gestures) – Sit here. You choose the toy. You play with the dice. You open a book. Eva laughs. You're sad... You're happy...
- We visualize events, contents, themes, work with pictures, pictograms – common objects in the classroom (chair, pen, book, school bag, etc...), common objects in life (food, clothes, means of transport, etc...), people (people of different ages and genders, professions...), animals and

plants (domestic, common, exotic...), common activities typical for the age, context at school, at home, in public space (sitting, running, lying down, reading, playing, shopping, travelling, dressing, washing, sleeping...).

- We use translation of some key expressions into Romani language – food, living, objects, clothes, names of days, months, persons... (see in detail the Roma-Slovak Dictionary, ŠPÚ, 2019, available here: [https://www.statpedu.sk/files/sk/o-organizacii/projekty/erasmus/vystupy-vysledky/romsko-slovensky\\_slovník.pdf](https://www.statpedu.sk/files/sk/o-organizacii/projekty/erasmus/vystupy-vysledky/romsko-slovensky_slovník.pdf)).

Of course, for Roma children and students, especially those at risk of social exclusion, other support measures are also relevant, in addition to e.g. adjustments to objectives, methods, forms and approaches (SM 3.a)), or adjustments to content and assessment (SM 3.b)), especially e.g.:

### **Support measure 3.d)**

Activities to support the achievement of school competence

### **Support measure 3.g)**

Improving the conditions for the education and training of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds

### **Support measure 3.j)**

Action to promote social inclusion

## **DISCUSSION**

In the text above, we have not paid attention to the descriptions of the circumstances of the provision of these support measures. We focused on examples of descriptions of specific practices in the submitted distance learning assignments (slightly modified, rather formal) inspired by the use of the CSM and accompanying methodological materials.

It turns out that the examples of good practice that we have direct experience with from the training groups implemented within the NIVaM, regional office in Banská Bystrica, mostly demonstrate teamwork in the provision of support measures. These are not necessarily school support teams according to Section 84 a) of Act No. 138/2019 on pedagogical staff and professional staff. They are often two-, three- or sometimes more-person teams that are formed operationally with the intention of helping a particular child/pupil or a whole group/class. The division of roles and responsibilities is effective and often used, including when researching accompanying methodological materials.

Whether working in a team or not, it is important to find an appropriate way of systematically recording the circumstances of the provision of support measures. Ideally using digital technologies. Sharing these records with clear rules and strict protection of the data subjects' personal data appears to be an appropriate approach.

The form and content of the recording of the provision of SMs will certainly be the subject of more discussion, but there is undoubtedly a rationale for a uniform structure of these records. So far, we have found it useful to follow the following recommendations when recording the provision of SMs:

- Accurately and consistently record the support measure provided, the name according to the SM Catalogue.
- Identify the objective and focus of the SM in question in the case concerned. Obviously in accordance with the results of the pedagogical, orientation or diagnostic assessment carried out at the counselling and prevention facility.
- If relevant, name, specify the area in which the SM is provided.
- Indicate the specific procedures agreed by the team in relation to the child/student, group/class.
- Continuously reflect and evaluate the impact of the provision of SMs, modify, adapt or add to them.
- Communicate expectations, prognosis, in higher grades, career orientation.
- Record minutes of important team meetings or meetings with the child's or children's legal guardians in a folder/folder (personal file or "class" file).
- Observe the basic principles when mentioning the sources used. Refer to specific parts of the PO Catalogue as well as the accompanying methodological materials. Likewise, when using other relevant sources.

It remains only to state that the recommendations on recording the provision of SM are of a univesal nature, they do not concern "only" the provision of SM to Roma children and students.

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# LANGUAGE ACQUISITION BY ROMA-SLOVAK BILINGUAL CHILDREN OVER TIME AND BY THREE TYPES OF ROMA COMMUNITIES

[short version]

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*Abstract:* This research<sup>10</sup> aims to determine the significance of the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma-Slovak bilingual children in their first year of schooling, differentiated by three types of Roma communities (type 1, type 2 and type 3) at the beginning of the school year (test) and at the end of the school year (post-test). The partial aim is to analyze the context and relationships of the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma children, determined by the type of Roma community in which individual children live. As one of the important findings, this study has shown statistically significant differences between Roma-Slovak bilingual children from type 1, type 2 and type 3 Roma communities in L1 and L2 at the beginning and the end of the school year. Moreover, the research has shown statistically significant differences in the acquisition progress in L1 and L2 between children from the type 1, type 2 and type 3 communities at the given time. The main research problem arising from the findings is that the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma-Slovak bilingual children is determined by the type of Roma community in which the Roma children live. Furthermore, the findings show a relationship and connection between the development in the first and second language acquisition and the type of Roma community in which the children live.

*Key words:* Roma, Roma community type, bilingualism, acquisition, Romani, Slovak.

## INTRODUCTION

Linguistic and non-linguistic factors influence the processes taking place in individual speakers in the community, but also among Roma communities of various types. Communities of the same type are also diverse and differ in many ways. Comparisons between different types of communities and individual language development within one type of community may differ from each other. For example, the volume, intensity and extent of contact with L2 forms one of the factors of contact-induced changes in the bilingual Roma community. Hence, the language situation in Roma communities also varies and requires different ways of research: “Multilingual situations differ in

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<sup>10</sup> This article is a shortened version: Samko, M., & Rosinský, R. (2023). Language acquisition by Roma-Slovak bilingual children over time and by three types of Roma communities. *East European Journal of Psycholinguistics*, 214-226.

so many ways that each researcher has to decide for himself/herself how to best systematize or organize many obvious differences” (Fishman, 2004, p. 114). From the spatial point of view, this study is based on three types of Roma communities as language communities, with the strategic goal of their linguistic characteristics. These communities include: 1. communities concentrated in a municipality [Roma inhabitants living within a municipality but only concentrated in part thereof], 2. communities concentrated on the outskirts of a municipality [Roma inhabitants living concentrated in the outskirts of a municipality] and 3. communities concentrated outside a municipality [Roma inhabitants living in a settlement remote or separated from a municipality by some kind of a barrier]. One of the characteristics of Roma settlements and poverty is the link with social exclusion, including its spatial expression, where part of the Roma living in segregated communities is considered to be the most endangered by poverty and social exclusion (Rusnáková, Rochovská, 2016). Sociocultural and socioeconomic factors with their influence on the acquisition of both languages represent another characteristic of Roma communities. Collins, Toppelberg examined sociocultural and socioeconomic factors as predictors of Spanish and English language skills in Spanish-English bilingual children who speak primarily Spanish at home and are exposed to varying amounts of English. They found that sociocultural variables assumed proficiency in Spanish and socioeconomic variables assumed low to zero knowledge of English (Collins, Toppelberg, 2020). González critically evaluated the literature on sociocultural and socioeconomic factors influencing development in children of linguistic minorities and proposed recommendations to broaden the current understanding of the interaction effects of these factors (González, 2001). Our broadened approach to research into the acquisition of Roma languages in different types of Roma communities can demonstrate different language processes, while contributing to their greater understanding of the subject matter. Although Roma are bilingual in all the countries in which they live, research on bilingualism in the context of SLA (Second Language Acquisition) in language pairs, which include L1 - Romani and L2 - various languages, is rather rare (Hancock 2006, 2012). Kyuchukov deals with this issue on an international scale, namely focusing on the linguistic, sociolinguistic, but mainly psycholinguistic aspects of Roma bilingualism (Kyuchukov 2000, 2005, 2014, but also his other works).

## **METHODS**

This research aims to determine the significance of the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma-Slovak bilingual children in their first year of schooling, differentiated by three types of Roma communities (type 1, type 2 and type 3) at the beginning of the school year (test) and at the end of the school year (post-test). The partial aim is to analyze the context and relationships of the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma children, as determined by the type of Roma community in which individual children live. The research tests the following research question: (RQ) What is the acquisition progress in L1 and L2 in Roma children in their first year of schooling, differentiated by three types of Roma

communities (type 1, type 2 and type 3) at the beginning of the school year (Test) and at the end of the school year (Post -test).

### ***Participants***

The research group as a whole (n = 68) consists of Roma children with L1 - Romani and L2 - Slovak in their first year of schooling. Subsequently, the research set is differentiated into three groups by the type of Roma settlement in which they live: type 1 - municipal and urban concentrations (n = 22); type 2 - settlements located on the outskirts of a city or municipality (n = 23); and type 3 - settlements spatially remote or separated by a natural or artificial barrier (n = 23).

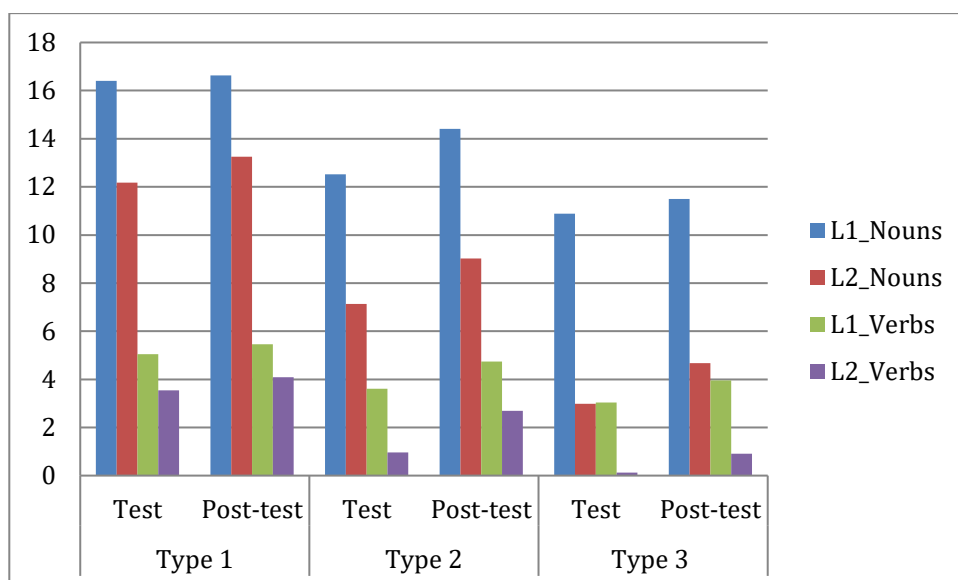
## **RESULTS**

**Table 1** *Progress in noun and verb acquisition in Romani L1 and Slovak L2, summary for type 1, type 2 and type 3*

	<i>Roma children, community 1, 2, 3</i>					
	N	M	SD	SEM	Z	p
<i>Test_L1_Nouns</i>	68	13.23	3.51	.43	-3.799	<0.001
<i>Post-test_L1_Nouns</i>	68	14.15	3.62	.44		
<i>Test_L1_Verbs</i>	68	3.88	1.55	.19	-4.650	<0.001
<i>Post-test_L1_Verbs</i>	68	4.71	1.47	.18		
<i>Test_L2_Nouns</i>	68	7.36	4.85	.59	-5.516	<0.001
<i>Post-test_L2_Nouns</i>	68	8.92	4.56	.55		
<i>Test_L2_Verbs</i>	68	1.51	1.93	.23	-4.555	<0.001
<i>Post-test_L2_Verbs</i>	68	2.54	2.11	.26		

When comparing the language skills of Roma children achieved in the September test and the June post-test, we found a statistically significant increase in correctly marked nouns and verbs in both Slovak and Romani languages. The Wilcoxon test values ranged from -3.799 to -5.516. The significance of differences was at the level of  $\alpha \leq 0.001$ . In Romani, the difference represented 0.83 points for verbs and 0.92 points for nouns. In Slovak, the difference represented 1.56 points for nouns and 1.03 points for verbs. In summary, the progress is shown in Graph 1.





**Figure 1** Progress in the noun and verb acquisition by Roma children by community type

Graph 1 shows statistically significant differences between Roma-Slovak bilingual children from the first, second and third type of Roma communities. This is shown in Graph 1 at L1 and L2 at the beginning of the school year and at the end of the school year. It also shows statistically significant differences in both L1 and L2 acquisition progress between children from Type 1, Type 2 and Type 3 communities at the same time. According to the success rate in the first measurement (test), the second measurement (post-test) in both L1 and L2 for both verbs and nouns, the highest success rate was achieved by children from community type 1, followed by children from community type 2, and the lowest success rate was achieved by children from community type 3.

## CONCLUSION

The results of this research provide mainly knowledge about the progress in the language acquisition and their differences determined by three types of Roma communities. As one of the important findings, this study has shown statistically significant differences in L1 and L2 between Roma-Slovak bilingual children from type 1, type 2 and type 3 Roma communities and, at the same time, between the beginning and the end of the school year. Moreover, the research has shown statistically significant differences in the acquisition progress in L1 and L2 between children from the type 1, type 2 and type 3 communities at the given time. According to the success rate in the first test at the beginning of the school year (test) and the second test at the end of the school year (post-test) in L1 and L2 in both verbs and nouns, the highest success rate was achieved by children from type 1 community, followed by children from type 2 community and the lowest success rate was achieved

by children from type 3 community. At the same time, children from all three communities achieved a higher success rate in L1 than in L2 in both the first and second tests. Furthermore, the findings show that children from all three communities achieved lower success rate in verbs than in nouns in both L1 and L2. In the case of nouns, we saw higher acquisition progress in L2 than in L1 in all three types of communities. However, in the case of verbs, we saw a higher acquisition progress in L2 than in L1 in type 1 and type 2 communities, while we saw a higher acquisition progress in L1 than in L2 in type 3 community. These findings also indicate that children from different types of Roma communities are exposed to different amounts of Romani and Slovak language input. The findings clearly show that children from different types of Roma communities need different support and different approach to acquire competences in both languages. The main research problem arising from the findings is that the progress in the first and second language acquisition by Roma-Slovak bilingual children is determined by the type of Roma community in which the Roma children live. At the same time, it is a research problem of the relationships and connections between the progress in the first and second language acquisition and the type of Roma community. This study is mainly limited by the non-existence of a standardized research tool to evaluate Roma-Slovak bilingualism and by the fact that the research set is only limited to Roma community types in the region around Spišská Nová Ves. Therefore, the results of this research cannot be considered to apply throughout the entire Roma language community, or to apply for sets of individual types of Roma community. This research primarily raises questions about the direction of further language research differentiated by the types of Roma communities. These are mainly questions concerning the diversity of factors and predictors in the context of the extent and scope of their fundamental influence on the first and second language acquisition differentiated by the type of Roma communities.

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# INFORMAL EDUCATION OF ROMA PUPILS IN SLOVAKIA

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*Abstract:* The topic of non-formal education of Roma pupils is crucial for a better understanding of the ways in which we can eliminate the barriers they face in traditional forms of education. Non-formal education includes learning outside the standard school environment, e.g. community centres, low-threshold clubs, after-school activities or educational programmes of non-governmental organisations. These activities play an important role in supporting the development of Roma pupils' competences, their social integration and improving their educational outcomes. In this paper, we analyse the existing literature that points to the impact of non-formal education on the self-assessment and motivation of Roma pupils, as well as on their active participation in the educational process. Research studies and many authors discuss the fact that Roma male and female pupils face discrimination and segregation by traditional educational institutions, which leads to their non-participation in education and poorer educational outcomes.

*Key words:* Non-formal education. Roma pupil. Segregation. Roma community.

## INTRODUCTION

Individuals belonging to the Roma ethnic minority in Slovakia are often associated with the characteristics of vulnerable groups of the population who are at risk of social exclusion and poverty. This has long been highlighted by research that discusses their subsequent impact on the lives of individuals and families (Padová, Pirová, 2014; Rusnáková, Rochovská, 2014). Roma are the largest and most heterogeneous (see Rusnáková, Polák, 2016) ethnic minority in Europe. Of the estimated 10 to 12 million Roma in the European Union as a whole, there are approximately 6 million<sup>11</sup>. A significant number of Roma live in poor and difficult socio-economic conditions. The aforementioned social exclusion, discrimination and segregation they often face combine to reinforce their limited access to education and difficulties in entering the labour market, resulting in them being among the lowest income groups of the population (Lecerf, 2024). Consequently, this is linked to the fact that they achieve lower educational outcomes than majority children in countries such as Bulgaria, Hungary, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Northern Macedonia, the Czech Republic, Poland and the United Kingdom (Rogers, 2021; Trbojević et al., 2023). Therefore, their participation in quality early childhood education (ECE), which enables disadvantaged children to gain some ground and bring them closer to the

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<sup>11</sup> Estimates of the proportion of Roma in different Member States range up to 30 %. In Slovakia, the average is 6,5 %. According to 2019 data, Roma tend to be younger (25,1 years), the average age of the Roma population in the European Union is 40,2 years. However, these figures are not an accurate reflection of their numbers. The lack of this data makes it difficult to get an accurate picture of their socio-economic situation in the European Union (Lecerf, 2024).

developmental level of advantaged peers, becomes a key issue (Heckman et al., 2010; La Paro and Pianta, 2000; Schweinhart et al., 2005; Sylva et al. 2008).

The paper focuses on the field of education of Roma pupils in Slovakia, in the context of their non-formal education. The formal education system in Slovakia, which includes Roma pupils, has long been associated with issues of segregation and unequal access (see O’Nions, 2010; Balážová, 2015; Čokyna, 2019; Havírová, Šatara, 2021). European Union rules touching on racial equality strictly prohibit discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in key areas of education. However, in Slovakia, Roma children are often placed in special schools for pupils with mild intellectual disabilities. Also, many children who are part of mainstream education are often segregated in separate classes or schools. In his publication, Lukáč (2015) paid attention to two key phenomena that have long been the subject of professional, political, as well as lay reflections on Roma education. The first is the long-standing low educational attainment and the second phenomenon that has received attention is the issue of integration and the aforementioned segregation in Roma education. The causes of the low educational level are seen in their permanent and long-term existence on the margins of society.

It can therefore be stated that one of the main objectives in working with young Roma men and women is, on the one hand, the development of their personality, creative thinking and action and, on the other, their integration and the alleviation of inequality in society. In order to ensure these key tasks, our society should use non-formal education in addition to formal education to create a supportive learning environment for Roma children and youth.

Roma integration in the context of reducing social inequalities and achieving equal treatment in the European area is a political priority that has long been advocated at the level of the entire European Union (Commission of the European Communities, 2008). Every country in the European area has prepared strategic and conceptual materials, such as the *Strategy for Equality, Inclusion and Participation of Roma by 2030*, which include commitments for education. The vision of this strategy is to increase the real participation of children and pupils from marginalised Roma communities in quality mainstream education.

## **1 CONCEPTUALISATION OF NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA**

In the international context, the definition of what we currently know as systematized education that takes place outside the framework of formal education for adults and minors, or outside the space defined by traditional classrooms, has changed significantly over the last decades (Pastor-Homs, 2001; Almeida et al., 2024). At the national level, the aforementioned topic has been addressed by Nemcová and Šolcová (2020), who have published a publication focusing on non-formal education for children and youth.

Non-formal education is considered as learning that takes place outside the formal education system, such as school, college or university. It can be delivered in a variety

of settings (e.g. the workplace) most commonly through the work of non-governmental organisations. Furthermore, the definitions of foreign authors also work with the concept of 'informal learning', this is 'learning' that takes place in everyday life. Unlike formal and informal learning, informal learning does not always have to be intentional. Therefore, its participants may not recognize how it contributes to their knowledge and skills (Mackú, 2011; Jeffs, Smith, 2021). To complement the previous conceptualization of "non-formal education", we can further emphasize that non-formal education, has a relatively planned process and curriculum, elaborated into a certain timetable and an assessment system. Non-formal learning is therefore learning that takes place outside the formal education system (e.g. extra-curricular activities) and does not usually lead to a certificate, certificate or diploma (see ISCED 2011). It can include many different types of programmes that target adults or youth, such as life skills programmes, cultural or social development programmes (Pereira et al., 2019). In contrast, 'informal' learning in 'everyday life' refers to the learning and knowledge that we gain from everyday experiences, such as from family, peer groups or other people in our social environment, in family settings and in formal and non-formal educational institutions (Maiztegui Oñate, 2006; Souto-Otero, 2021).

According to the ISCED 2011 international classification, non-formal education is a complement or alternative to formal education in the lifelong learning process of individuals. Aimed at all ages, it is usually implemented in the form of short courses, workshops or seminars. Non-formal education can include programmes that contribute to literacy development for youth, adults and education designed for children outside of school, such as programmes focusing on skills, job skills and social or cultural development (UNESCO, 2012). In conjunction with youth work (in terms of social work), it is good practice to help young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to overcome the disadvantages they face and to support them to actively develop their communities and society as a whole (European Council, 2024). From this perspective, non-formal education is a voluntary learning process that occurs outside of school and builds on a variety of initiatives that have been developed to address social challenges, usually associated with processes of social exclusion (Dean, 2021).

As Kalamárová (2010) states, there are NGOs in Slovakia that are dedicated specifically to the challenges associated with the Roma minority. Their priority is to engage in issues of education, outreach work and active leisure time. By implementing a variety of educational and non-educational projects, they seek in this way to include, activate and integrate young Roma men and women into wider society.

In Slovakia, there are also low-threshold facilities for children and youth, which provide publicly beneficial services aimed also at the target group of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds. Low-threshold facilities and clubs mainly provide contact work, social assistance and psychosocial support, which are combined with leisure and educational activities. The aim is to create a space to work with individuals and groups outside of a formal setting. Community centres also play a role in the system of work with children and young people from socially disadvantaged backgrounds and in efforts to address their situation comprehensively. They provide,

among other things, low-threshold programmes for children and young people, education and training, prevention of socially pathological phenomena, and leisure-time activities. Usually they also provide space for the implementation of school tutoring, which is covered by volunteers (Fudaly, Lenčo, 2008). Despite the current importance attributed to non-formal education, this area has only been the subject of scientific research for a few years. This is due to the fact that education has been reduced in priority to the school system (Hoppers, 2006). It is also a fact that there are no international, European, national statistics that quantify non-formal education.

## DISCUSSION

Non-formal education involves individuals and their social relationships, while it stems from their interests and needs. Czech authors Kalenda and Kocvarová (2022) highlighted the position and role of the non-formal education model in a risk society. Which is confirmed by Willems (2015) who says that it is used in less developed countries as a mechanism to reduce asymmetries in human development. Non-formal education plays a key role in the preparation of Roma pupils for the reason that it responds or tries to respond to the limitations of the formal education system, which does not reach all communities and does not provide all the new competences and skills that are necessary for the integrated development of communities. Despite the differences between formal and non-formal education systems, Terrazas-Marín (2018) considers that there is a complementarity between them, which underlies the importance of non-formal education as a means of providing alternative ways of learning.

The role of non-formal education becomes even more important in the context of countries where significant asymmetries in access to education are emerging (Almedia et al., 2024). This is also relevant to the education system in Slovakia, where discrimination and segregation are occurring, as confirmed by a survey carried out by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights in 2021. In Slovakia, 65 % of Roma pupils aged 6 to 15 attend schools where all or most of the pupils are Roma, an increase of 5 percentage points compared to 2016. Slovakia is thus among the countries with the highest level of segregation of Roma in education (FRA, 2021).

Segregation in the education system translates into the separation of Roma pupils in the informal school curriculum - e.g. separate meals, separate sanitary facilities, separation of pupils in leisure activities, school trips (Lajčáková, 2017). Almedia et al. (2024) in their paper say that non-formal education can be the answer to social problems. It is also a suitable alternative, for groups of people who find it more difficult to adapt to the conditions in formal education (see Pienimäki et al., 2021). This is also emphasised by Benková et al. (2020), who stresses that non-formal education indeed proves to be a more effective learning environment in providing learning opportunities for those who are not integrated into the education system for various reasons.

Social work also has its place in the field of non-formal education of Roma pupils. Šebová et al. (2015) have developed a *Methodology of non-formal education for social workers* who work directly with the development of competences of helping

professionals working with children and youth. The Ministry of Education, Research, Development and Youth of the Slovak Republic (2017), in turn, developed the national project *School Open to All*, in which they set the goal of supporting the schooling of children from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, especially from marginalised Roma communities. Non-formal education seems to be a suitable tool for this.

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# ROMA PARENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF A QUALITY LANGUAGE PROGRAMME FOR SLOVAK LANGUAGE ACQUISITION/IMPROVEMENT<sup>12</sup>

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*Annotation:* In this paper, the authors present the results of a qualitative study, the aim of which was to find out what Roma parents' perceptions of a quality language programme (LP) for the acquisition/improvement of Slovak language are. The analysis of semi-structured interviews with 12 Roma parents showed that, despite the fact that they do not have pedagogical education, they can quite clearly identify the factors that influence the process of learning Slovak and describe the features of the quality of such a programme. Five categories of meaning were identified: 1) teacher/lecturer characteristics, 2) teaching methods and strategies, 3) LP organization and forms, 4) climate, 5) identity.

*Keywords:* language program, Slovak as a second language, Roma children, multilingualism

## INTRODUCTION

Slovakia is a multicultural country, a place of permanent or temporary residence of many nations and ethnic groups. In terms of mother tongue, at least 26 language groups have been identified according to the latest Slovak Population and Housing Census. The dominant language of the school is Slovak. In the 2023/24 school year, 93 % of primary school pupils were educated in Slovak (CVTI, 2024). Although the Education Act No.245/2008 Coll. (§12) states that members of national groups have the right to education and upbringing in their language, many children are educated in a second language or are in the situation of acquiring a second language (L2) and learning it simultaneously. In terms of the implementation of linguistic human rights, sub-dimensional, so-called “sink or swim” programmes are applied in relation to children of several minority groups in Slovakia (compare Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000). The most controversial issue is the unresolved question of the education of Roma children in their mother tongue. The Roma minority constitutes 7,6 % of the population and only 35 % of them speak Slovak at home. Romani is the preferred language in almost 50 % of Roma communities (Atlas rómskych komunit, 2019).

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## **THEORETICAL BACKGROUND**

Roma children come to school with different levels of Slovak language acquisition. In pre-school they have acquired Romani, the local dialect of Slovak and other languages. In the home environment, language acquisition took place in natural communicative situations. They become bilingual or plurilingual without a purposeful effort to learn vocabulary or grammatical rules. Most encounter the written form of Slovak rather sporadically. Mostly only while watching television or playing school games led by older children (Kubáňik, 2015). Two facts follow from the above: 1) many Roma children are disadvantaged after entering school, as they are forced to be educated in the academic Slovak language, and 2) they learn this language in a new way – through learning individual concepts, grammatical rules, which are contrary to natural and unguided acquisition (Hajská, 2015). Many Roma pupils can be described by the term "multilingual". This term was introduced by J. Cummins (2020) to highlight giftedness and potential linguistic endowment (proficiency in multiple languages).

Slovak legislation uses the term child with a different mother tongue. Several support measures apply to this group of pupils. One of the key ones is extended language education within a compulsory subject, an elective subject or a course focusing on the acquisition of the school's language of instruction (Višňovská, Píšová, 2023). The issue of quality LP comes to the fore.

The design of a LP ("curriculum design") requires a comprehensive approach based on a scientific analysis and synthesis of the three pillars (Nunan, 1988; Hutchinson, Walters, 1987). In their construction, we draw on answers to three questions: 1) WHO? (analysis of the needs of the target group) 2) WHAT? (analysis of conceptions of language/linguistic theory) and HOW? (analysis of conceptions of learning).

## **METHODS**

In this paper, we present partial results of a partial research task that addressed the question WHO? The analysis of the needs of the target group is more complex. Due to the limited scope of this paper, we only present findings that relate to the objective: *To find out what are the perceptions of parents of multilingual children on the features of a quality LP.* The presented results of the qualitative research concern the opinion of Roma parents.

The data collection was carried out through a semi-structured interview method with 12 parents of Roma ethnicity (10 women and 2 men) from three localities: Prešov, Jarovnice and Zvolen. The sample was formed through a combination of available and purposive sampling, in which the use of the Roma mother tongue was a decisive feature. The interview was conducted in Romani and was conducted by a trained researcher proficient in the language.

The data were evaluated through qualitative content analysis based on the identification of overt content through open coding. The unit of analysis was the interview transcript.

## RESULTS

At the beginning of the interview, we ascertained what parents perceived as the source of their acquisition of competence to communicate in Slovak. We identified four factors in the responses: 1) family support, 2) being in kindergarten or primary school, 3) media, and 4) bilingualism. Children learn Slovak thanks to the support of their parents, who act as language mentors. Older siblings are also helpful by helping with homework or reading books. The children's stay in kindergarten or primary school, where they can be in contact with non-Roma, was also identified as an important factor. It was clear from the interviews that they consider contact with the majority to be important. They also considered the media (internet, TV, etc.) as a natural factor for acquiring Slovak. Some parents consider it crucial that their children are bilingual, which facilitates their path of learning Slovak.

Roma parents perceive the need for the existence of quality LPs. They agree that an intensive Slovak course is a path to which they would send their children without hesitation. They justified this mainly by the need to get out of segregation and life of exclusion. They are aware that the lack of interaction with the majority affects their ability to communicate in Slovak at a level that would enable them to study and enter the labour market.

We summarized the identified features of a quality LP into five categories: 1) teacher/lecturer characteristics, 2) teaching methods and strategies, 3) LP organization and forms, 4) climate, and 5) identity.

Table 1: Identified meaning categories - features of a quality language program

Meaning categories	Meaning subcategories	
	kind and patient approach	<p>– "[...] so that teachers care about children, so that teachers who don't like children don't do it [...]" (RR5)</p> <p>– "I would convey to them that it is important for teachers to have understanding and feeling." (RR4)</p>
	creativity and flexibility	– "To have some motivational activities. For example, after class they could play with them or play

Teacher/lecturer characteristics		<p><i>them a story – as a reward"</i> (RR8).</p> <p>– <i>Teachers should be creative and it shouldn't work like in a regular school."</i> (RR4)</p>
	expertise	<p>– "[...] <i>to be able to teach well</i>" [...] <i>"to have a good school/qualification"</i> (RR3).</p>
	respect and equality	<p>– <i>"Not to be judged because they don't know Slovak, because they only speak Romani."</i> (RR12)</p> <p>– <i>"Teachers should not be shy to work with Roma children, they should not make differences between children."</i> (RR5)</p>
	openness to cooperation with parents	<p>– <i>"Communication is essential especially when working with parents. Everything can be done if you want to."</i> (RR4)</p>
	cooperation with teaching assistants	<p>– <i>"A teaching assistant, especially one who can also speak Romani, to be able to help and understand them."</i> (RR6)</p>
Learning methods and strategies	communicative methods	<p>– <i>"They should learn how it works in life."</i> (RR1)</p>
	experiential learning methods	<p>– <i>"Children shouldn't just learn, they like to play. It should be play activities."</i> (RR1)</p>
LP organisation and forms	group vs. individual	<p>– <i>"Individually especially for children who are, for example, behind, so that they don't feel bad among the other children."</i> (RR5)</p> <p>– <i>"In my opinion it should be a bigger group – more children so that they fit in better."</i> (RR6)</p>
	heterogeneous vs. homogeneous groups	<p>– <i>"[...] ideally, mixed Roma-Negro groups would be ideal"</i> (RR2)</p>

		– <i>"Since he knows the basics I would put him in a mixed group, but if he only knows Romanes I would put him only in the Roma group"</i> (RR5).
	after school	– <i>"[...] it should take place after school at an ideal time e.g. after lunch so that the children are fed."</i> (RR5)
Climate	fostering positive relationships between children	– <i>"So that children don't hate each other, so that they don't swear at each other, but so that they also learn something from non-Roma children."</i> (RR12)
	safe and supportive environment	– <i>"For me it would be important that on a course or programme like this the children work together, that there is no bullying."</i> (RR3)  – <i>"Children who are scared will not move on."</i> (RR4)
Identity	development of the Roma language	– <i>"We also need a course where children can learn Romani, not just Slovak, so they don't forget their language."</i> (RR11)

**Teacher/lecturer characteristics.** According to the respondents, the teacher should be positive, kind and understanding towards the children so that they do not feel scared or rejected. He should be sensitive to their emotions and show empathy. A good teacher should be able to motivate children, be creative and flexible in adapting activities to children's interests and personal work pace. They defined professionalism through pedagogical competences and qualifications. Another important aspect of teacher quality is the teacher's willingness and ability to cooperate with parents. According to the respondents, teachers should not only teach Slovak, but also know the environment from which the children come. At the same time, it is important for the teacher to explain to the parents what is going on and give them feedback. A number of parents consider the presence of teaching assistants who are proficient in Romani to be important.

**Learning methods and strategies.** Respondents often stressed the importance of a communicative approach. In their opinion, their children should learn Slovak through active communication, where the emphasis is on developing the ability to use the



language in real or simulated situations (e.g. going to the doctor, shopping, ordering in a restaurant). Several respondents acknowledge that it is also important for children to understand basic grammatical rules in order to master the formal structure of the language. They particularly emphasised the need to learn to read well. There was a more frequent call for the use of experiential learning methods.

**Organisation and forms of LP.** Parents were also aware of the power of group dynamics for language development and peer learning. They recommended group learning; some also saw the need for individual learning. They differed on whether groups should be ethnically homogeneous or heterogeneous. The language programme should take place in the afternoon.

**Climate.** On the issue of climate, respondents appealed to the role of the teacher in developing relationships between Roma and non-Roma children, creating an environment of safety and support, and preventing any manifestations of non-acceptance, discrimination or even bullying.

**Identity.** The analysis of the responses showed that parents were concerned that their children should not lose contact with their culture, which was particularly evident in their demand not only to respect but also to develop the Roma language.

## CONCLUSION

Despite the fact that the Roma parents did not have pedagogical education, they were able to name the features of a good LP and to identify the factors that influence the acquisition/improvement of Slovak quite specifically. Compared to Ukrainian parents, who constituted the second research set, they communicated more the need to master Slovak. They were aware that it was crucial for their children's future and their inclusion. They were more sensitive to whether the specificities of their children and who works with them were taken into account. Their experiences of non-acceptance and majority prejudice seemed to have heightened their sensitivity to the climate of the classroom or group. At the same time, there was also a call to respect and develop their cultural identity, especially in relation to the Roma language. The interviews showed that Roma parents have quite clear ideas about what a good LP should look like.

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# THE BENEFITS OF PEER MEDIATION IN THE SCHOOL ENVIRONMENT

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*Annotation:* Tolerance in the school environment is the acceptance of different opinions, different behaviour, different relationships, but also tolerance and patience in relation to others. Conflicts in the school environment are a natural part of school life, they mainly indicate the presence of differences. Conflict resolution through **school mediation** represents the ability not only to perceive, understand, but above all to resolve conflict situations. School and peer mediation can be a way to teach pupils to form strong friendships, even in an environment of diversity and difference; it can also be a preparation for inclusive schooling.

**Keywords:** Pupils. Diversity. Problem. Difference. Conflict. School mediation.

## INTRODUCTION

It is most effective to start with education and training for respect and tolerance already in pre-primary education, because the main goal of pre-primary education is to achieve an optimal perceptual-motor, cognitive and emotional-social level, i.e. the basis of readiness for schooling and for life in society. In this century, interpersonal education and multicultural education are among the prerequisites for successful social development as important as the scientific or technical achievements of this time.

The school environment is a place where the pupil is allowed to make mistakes and, at the same time, in this environment he or she can look for proven ways to eliminate or prevent them, of course under the tact of the pedagogical or educational staff member of the school. In this way, responsibility for one's actions, how to tolerate and accept differences, what is the appropriate way to communicate, how important mutual respect is in life are built in children. They also learn to deal with negative phenomena and their own negative emotions. Children do not yet have sufficient competences to be able to defuse tensions in a conflict, for example. The pressure to perform, the increasing level of 'caste' (designer clothes, holidays, mobile phones..., the virtual world, all these are phenomena that they also encounter at school.

## 1 SCHOOL AND PEER MEDIATION

School and peer mediation is a way to teach pupils to form strong friendships, even in an environment of diversity and difference.

Mediation is particularly suited to the field of education because it often involves "sensitive matters" in which the parties are often concerned with confidentiality and also with the efficient and rapid resolution of disputes.

The following groups of conflicts are most often resolved through mediation in schools:

- *Slander* – a she-said-he-said argument, talking behind their backs – individual statements are perceived by one of the parties as inadequate, offensive, untrue, mocking and crashing, etc...
- *Verbal quarrels* – verbal exchanges between individuals or groups - misunderstandings, personality and individual differences, disagreements, slander, shouting, "getting on each other's nerves"...
- *Harassment* – both verbal and non-verbal behaviour that is perceived by the other person as harassing, threatening, sexually unpleasant or challenging – ranging from stares, gestures, verbal harassment – teasing, name-calling to physical, sexual harassment and bullying.
- *Classroom behaviour* – disturbing other classmates during class so that they cannot concentrate on the teaching process – annoying describing, joking, talking, jerking, joking, etc...
- *Jealousy* – between classmates (friends), of classmates, of friends, jealousy of success at school or in extracurricular activities, jealousy of a classmate's (classmate's) partner relationship, of dating another (another), etc...
- *Fighting or anticipated fighting* – use of physical force or threat of physical violence.
- *Invasion of privacy* – stealing private belongings, borrowing and using them without permission, disclosing confidential information about a classmate, friend, other person, etc...
- *Dating of boys with girls* – disputes about who is dating whom, why they are dating and stopped dating and who took over who's girl, boy – jealousy of so called school partners.
- *Intergroup conflicts* – opinion, racial or minority conflicts, verbal and physical attacks between antagonistic (contradictory, hostile) groups – metalheads, skinheads, punks, junkies, etc...
- *Territorial disputes* – disputes concerning the appropriation of territory – at school appropriation of a certain place by a group, appropriation of a place to sit, on a trip quarrels over a bed in a hut, who will sit where at the beginning of the school year or in the cinema, who will stretch out how in the bench, etc...
- *Class or group decisions* – where to go on a trip, how to spend the money saved for the graduation, when, where and under what conditions to have a party, who will represent the class in a school or extracurricular event...
- *Discriminatory and segregative practices, we include here also bullying* – the dignity of the pupil is violated, difference is not tolerated, the personality of the pupil is hurt, humiliation, condemnation, judgement, disrespect. (Vanková, 2021)

School mediation focuses primarily on creating a favourable atmosphere in which there will be an opportunity for both sides to seek solutions. Two forms of mediation have also become established in schools in Slovakia:

- ✓ ***School mediation***: resolves conflicts between pupils, between teachers, between pupils and teachers, between parents and teachers, between teachers and management. In such mediation it is advisable to have a professional mediator present as well as leading the whole mediation process.
- ✓ ***Peer mediation***: peer mediation, is suitable as a service for pupils, students (primary, secondary school), which helps pupils to resolve disputes at school, but also to acquire negotiation, communication skills. It is also a preventive method of resolving small disputes that have not yet grown into larger ones, thus increasing the overall positive climate and culture of the school. Peer mediation contributes to the development of children's psychosocial competences and pro-social behaviour. The positive side of peer mediation is the decrease in the number of conflicts at school resolved by aggression, the conflicts that arise are resolved by the pupils among themselves and do not have to be dealt with by the teachers. The peer-mediation training programme is completed by teachers and a selected number of pupils, who are then active as mediators and the whole school is made aware of the possibility of resolving their conflicts through mediation (Vanková, 2018).

It is built on two basic principles:

- *The peer principle* – after training, pupils themselves are able to help resolve conflict between classmates without teacher intervention.
- *Mediation principle* – a third person (pupil, teacher) helps the parties involved to resolve the conflict.

## 2 SUPPORT TOOLS

### *School Parliament*

Before introducing peer mediation at school, it is advisable to set up a school parliament, composed of two elected pupils from each class.

Representatives of their classmates express their views and interests in the parliament, make suggestions for new activities in school and find solutions to current problems.

The aim of the parliament should be to achieve cooperation between teachers and pupils in the creation and implementation of plans for joint activities, to replace the passive participation of pupils in social events by their direct activity in the selection, preparation, implementation and evaluation of various events: to teach pupils to speak in public, to argue their opinions and those of their peers appropriately, to take some

responsibility for the life of their school and at the same time to promote self-confidence, independence, creativity and to enable pupils' self-realisation, to experience democracy and life in a small school in an experiential way. It is appropriate to remove teacher-pupil barriers, which contributes to their independent thinking and action. It is also advisable to remove and prevent mutual misunderstandings.

### *Mediation box*

In pedagogical practice, a wooden box placed in a visible place in the school lobby has proved to be a good choice for mediation. The box should be locked and the keys should be kept by the teacher-coordinator who is responsible for the running of the school parliament at the school. Pupils can contribute to it with suggestions and also with various complaints, not only about fellow pupils but also about teachers.

## **CONCLUSION**

School mediation teaches tolerance, it brings pupils to the ability to perceive things from different perspectives. Clarifying attitudes is a matter of patiently explaining, completing ideas, justifying, arguing, rephrasing statements that provoke negative emotions. It cultivates the skill of allowing decisions time. By sharing the feelings that triggered a particular attitude, it brings an element of respect and deference to communication, helping to understand each other's differences. When the resolution of agreements is in the hands of peers, pupils are more willing to accept responsibility for fulfilling them, the pupil enters the mediation process with confidence, increasing the chances of greater openness in expression. Mediation gives pupils the space to understand their own emotions in contact with the emotions of others, teaches appropriate responses that take into account the stage of the conflict, its intensity, leads to the processing of emotions, critical thinking, questioning, active listening, teaches independence. Thanks to mediation, pupils have a greater need to share common themes and to discuss even those that might seem to divide them. Peer mediation improves the atmosphere in school. Establishing the ability to solve a problem through mediation is not a matter of chance, but of patient explanation. Its results appear in the form of fewer conflict situations that the teacher would have to resolve.

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