

Thematic Article

Social Mobility through Education: Lifelong Learning and the Roma-Minority in Selected Central and Eastern European Countries¹

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Recommended citation:

Óhidy, A. (2023). Social Mobility through Education: Lifelong Learning and the Roma-Minority in Selected Central and Eastern European Countries. *Central European Journal of Educational Research*, 5(1), 58–69. <https://doi.org/10.37441/cejr/2023/5/1/12317>

Abstract

Education plays a central role in supporting or impeding social mobility (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1974; Fend, 1980, 2006). The disadvantaged social and economic situation of the biggest part of the Roma minority (not only) in Central and Eastern Europe is usually seen as the main reason for their low educational attainment and success. And vice versa: the poor educational results are considered the main reason for their social deprivations. Therefore, education and lifelong learning have become the main strategy for improving their situation, especially since the 'Europeanization of the Roma issue' (Ram, 2015) through the European Union. Today, Education and lifelong learning are now the centre of EU-policies for achieving political and economic goals, like economic growth and social cohesion (Óhidy, 2008, 2009). This article analyzes the problems faced by and opportunities presented to the Roma people in selected Central and Eastern European countries, problems and opportunities arisen in the years up until 2020, regarding social mobility through education. In its analysis, this paper focused on the similarities. The article is based on 5 country studies from 2019, written by experts from the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia (see Óhidy & Furray, 2019). The study uses the evidence from the country studies from Markéta Levínska, Dana Bittnerová & David Doubek, 2019 (Czech Republic), Julianna Boros & Eszter Gergye, 2019 (Hungary), Agnieszka Swietek & Wiktor Osuch, 2019 (Poland), Aurora Adina Colomeischi, 2019 (Romania) and Rastislav Rosinsky, 2019 (Slovakia) to explore the similarities in challenges, to increase the participation and success of Roma people.

Keywords: social mobility, roma, Central and Eastern Europe, education, lifelong learning

Introduction

Roma have lived for several hundred years in Central and Eastern Europe. Although at the beginning of their migration from India to Europe in the 15th century they were appreciated for their craftsmanship (Fings, 2019), prejudice soon followed them. Today antigypsyism³ is often seen as a part of European history (Agarin, 2014; Selling et. al., 2015, Tosi Cambini & Beluschi Fabeni, 2017, Kóczé & Rövid, 2017), which has only recently been discussed publicly. Despite the increasing political, scientific and public interest regarding the European Roma minority, there are still many knowledge gaps in relation to them. Not even the correct population number

¹ This article is based on my analysis, published under the title "Conclusion: Participation and Success of Central and Eastern European Roma in Education and Lifelong Learning: Common Challenge, Similar Solutions and Hitherto Unsatisfactory Results" in the book Andrea Óhidy & Katalin R. Furray (Eds.) (2019): *Lifelong Learning and the Roma Minority in Central and Eastern Europe*. Emerald: Bingley, p. 201-208.

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³ Antigypsyism, also known as anti-Romani sentiment or Romaphobia is a form of Group-focused enmity against people, who are recognized as 'Roma'. Group-focused enmity means prejudices and hostility towards various target groups, based on an ideology of inequality (Heitmeyer, 2002). The European Commission defines it as a form of racism against Roma, which "is a historically rooted structural phenomenon that appears at institutional, social and interpersonal levels. It has its origins in how the majority views and treats those considered 'gypsies'. It is rooted in a process of 'othering' that builds on negative as well as positive, exoticising stereotypes" (European Commission, 2020).

of the European Roma is known, though according to current estimates, they are the largest ethnic minority of the continent and in the European Union. Although Roma can be found in every social group and milieu, most members of this minority traditionally live in disadvantaged circumstances, caught in a “vicious circle of poverty and exclusion” (Colomeischi, 2019, p. 163)

The disadvantaged situation is usually considered both a reason for and a result of their poor educational attainment and success. Hence – especially since the ‘Europeanization of the Roma issue’ (Ram, 2015) through the European Union – to increase the participation of Roma in education has become the main strategy for improving their social situation in Europe. Thus, this article takes a look at the social and education situations of Roma in five Central and Eastern European countries: the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia, focusing on the positive effects of education and lifelong learning as regards the upward social mobility of Roma people.

The selected countries were chosen by the most-similar-system-design-concept (Przeworski & Teune, 1970; Hörner, 1993), regarding their geographical situation, their political and economic traditions and current affiliations: They share not only a common geographical position but also a common historical past through their long Soviet occupation in the 20th century: After the Second World War they became so called ‘satellite states’ of the former Soviet Union as formally independent ‘socialist or communist’⁴ societies with a centralized single party apparatus. They defined their society form as a “dictatorship of the working class”, which meant a common state ownership, based on the Marxist-Leninist philosophy. After the Fall of the Iron Curtain within the so-called Eastern Enlargement process of the EU they became member states of the European Union and also of the Schengen area - except Romania, who could not as yet fully join the Schengen area.

The Roma minority in Central and Eastern Europe

Roma form the largest minority group in Central and Eastern Europe. According to official estimates, approximately 10-12 million Roma live in Europe, of which about 6-7 million within the European Union (European Commission, 2011). Most of them, nearly 70%, live in Central and Eastern Europe: Romania has the largest Roma population, estimated at between 1.5-2 million people or more. Another 400 000 to 1 million Roma live in Hungary and Slovakia and there are more than 100 000 in the Czech Republic (Forray & Óhidy, 2019, p. 2). In Poland there are between 17 000 and 35 000 Roma people (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 136). Most of the Central and Eastern European Roma have been living in this region for several centuries and are legally full citizens.

In the so-called socialist/communist period between 1945 and 1990, Central and Eastern European Roma were very often officially forced to integrate themselves into the majority society. Their increasing participation in compulsory education – even if at a lower level than by non-Roma – and hence their improved formal qualifications in the labour market had a positive effect on, while simultaneously being a traumatic experience for Roma families⁵. Some successful Roma had experienced upward social mobility and often became assimilated. After the change of regime, in the 1990s, the social situation of many Roma significantly worsened, so much so that Roma were and still are regarded as the greatest losers of the political and economic changes (Foglalkoztatáspolitikai és Munkaügyi Minisztérium, Oktatási Minisztérium/Egészségügyi, Szociális és Családügyi Minisztérium, 2003, p. 34): They “were pushed to the margins of society” (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 139). For a modern capitalistic economy their qualifications were not sufficient anymore – most of the Roma completed only primary education –, and, therefore, their participation in the labour market decreased. The political liberalization had a very negative side-effect for Roma. Freedom of speech and the (re)emergence of nationalist and racist ideas led to an increase of antigypsyism. “The collapse of totalitarian regimes in Central and Eastern Europe and the triumph of political democracy have paradoxically not calmed but rather ignited anti-Roma tendencies in societies in this region of Europe. Prejudices which seemed latent in deeper layers of social consciousness reemerged with new force” (Jaeschke, 2009, p. 41). In Hungary János Ladányi describes this development as “from concealed selection to open discrimination” (Ladányi, 2009).

⁴ While Western European historians usually use the term “communist“, Eastern European historians prefer the term “socialist“.

⁵ The policy of forced integration included not only mandatory participation in primary education but also measurements such as prohibition of the use of their mother tongue or forced settlement.

Nowadays Roma have, in all countries discussed in this article, special rights as members of a recognized national minority or ethnic group. For example, to disseminate and receive information in their mother tongue, or to establish and maintain educational and cultural institutions are freedoms they enjoy. Nevertheless, they suffer more than before from multi-layered deprivation and social and geographical segregation. In comparison to the Central and Eastern European non-Roma population their social and education situation is significantly less advantaged: Roma have a shorter life-expectancy, more health issues, lower educational qualifications and lower-paid work, less comfortable housing in smaller settlements with less infrastructure and they benefit less from public social services (Óhidy 2019, p. 204). Members of the Roma minority are usually considered doubly discriminated against: firstly, as a member of an ethnic minority group and secondly as member of a social group with low socio-economic status (Council of Europe, 2002). Therefore, it is not very surprising that since the 1990s there is a constant migration of Roma from Central and Eastern Europe to Western Europe, which has increased since the Eastern Enlargement of the European Union (2004-2007), because the Schengen agreement legally allows all EU citizens to live in all member states.

Education as a Vehicle to Social Mobility

“The disadvantaged social, economic and geographic situations of the host of the Roma are a common challenge, which is usually seen as the main reason for their low educational attainment and success and *vica versa*: their educational results are considered as the main reason for their social deprivations” (Óhidy, 2019, p. 204). Education plays a central role in supporting or impeding social mobility. The education system functions as an allocator of social and professional status (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1974; Fend 1980, 2006). On the one hand, it has the potential “to shape learning, education and socialisation across the boundaries of milieus, and at the same time it harbours risks of systematic discrimination of pupils and groups of pupils” (Sturm, 2013, p. 36). In this sense, Fend defines selection and legitimation as basic social functions of the education system (Fend, 1980).

According to Pierre Bourdieu pupils not only acquire knowledge and qualifications in school, which he called ‘cultural capital’ (cf. Bourdieu, 1983, 1997), but also a certain habitus as an identity-forming “incorporated pattern of the social” (Jobst, 2010, p. 68). The production of symbolic capital – a selection of cultural contents, which are considered as valuable and should be learned – is an important task of the education system, where symbolic capital is (re)produced, for example by the teachers, who can decide “whose culture has capital?” (cf. Yosso, 2005). The education system represents the interests of the majority in society and legitimizes their power relations (Fend, 1980). Therefore, those pupils/students who do not have symbolic capital through their social circumstances, often become disadvantaged and/or excluded. Hence Bourdieu describes institutionalised education as a tool for reproducing social inequality, which conceals its own function as a legitimiser of existing social domination (cf. Bourdieu, 2001).

The discrepancy between the demands of school education and the social background-related cultural capital of the pupils/students (e.g. Bourdieu/Passeron, 1974, Bourdieu, 2001) plays a major role in explaining educational inequality, which can be attributed to the lack of recognition of the diversity of pupils/students by school teachers (cf. among others Yosso, 2005). They can also be interpreted as a failure of interaction/communication between teachers and pupils/students (cf. Sturm, 2013). Bourdieu and Passeron describe the ignorance of diversity of pupils/students as an effective tool for disguising inequality under the cloak of neutrality and formal equality and for maintaining an “illusion of equality of opportunity” (cf. Bourdieu/Passeron, 1974). “Against this background, it is precisely the ignorance of institutionalised education towards cultural and social diversity that strengthens the reproduction of social hierarchies” (Jobst, 2013, p. 5). International comparative studies show that the education system in many European countries is very effective in legitimising social privileges and rather unsuccessful in overcoming (especially social) inequality.

Lifelong Learning as a possible solution?

Because of its potential as a vehicle, social mobility education and lifelong learning have become the main strategy for improving the situation of the Roma minority, especially since the ‘Europeanization of the Roma issue’ (Ram, 2015) through the European Union. Across Europe Roma are the most underrepresented group in schools and other educational institutions (EU-FRA, 2012, 2014b). Therefore, improving their access to, and attainment and success in education and lifelong learning are quintessential goals Europe-wide, the central

elements of EU politics aimed at making the situation of Roma better (European Commission, 2004; EU-FRA, 2012, EU-FRA 2014a, European Commission 2020). There are more and more policies and programs to achieve these goals. These were mostly developed in the frame of the European Union, which put education and lifelong learning in focus of its policies from the 1990s to achieve political and economic goals like economic growth and social cohesion (Óhidy 2008, 2009). Since 2000, the main instrument in developing common European policy strategies and measures has been the *Open Method of Coordination*, introduced within the Lisbon Strategy and implemented further in the Programm *EUROPE 2020* (European Commission, 2010). Following the Lisbon-Agenda, the EU has tried not only to establish a common strategy for Roma inclusion in all member states, but also to coordinate, to fund and to monitor their achievements.

After the Fall of the Iron Curtain in the 1989/1990 the post-communist/post-socialist Central and Eastern European countries prepared themselves to become members of the European Union. For this purpose, the *PHARE-program* was established to help them in changing their political and economic systems. It also provided funds to increase the integration of Roma. It should be noted that all countries discussed in this article took part in the PHARE-program.

Furthermore, the *Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005-2015)* was the first Europe-wide policy measure to improve the situation of Roma involving European organizations, national governments and organizations and the Roma civil society as well. Of the Central and Eastern European countries discussed in this article, the *Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia* took part in this measure as well. The policy measures were focused on some priority areas: health, education, employment and housing.

In 2005 the *Roma Education Fund* – a non-governmental organization financed by the World Bank and the Open Society Institute – was founded “to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma, including through desegregation of educational systems in Central and Eastern Europe, especially the countries that have formally joined the Decade of Roma Inclusion“ (Surdu & Friedmann, 2013, p. 36).

Through the 2000/43/EC Act (Race Equality Directive – RED) the European Union obligated its member states to give Roma (like other EU citizens) non-discriminatory access to education, employment, vocational training, healthcare, social protection and housing (European Commission, 2011, p. 3) and made several other proposals for its member states.

In 2010, the European Commission’s Roma Task Force emphasized the need for more and more effective measures to promote Roma inclusion. Therefore in 2011 the European Union decided to work out a specific *Roma inclusion strategy to improve Roma inclusion* and asked its member states to develop national programs for it. The EU Framework raised Roma inclusion to the EU level for the first time and linked it with the Europe 2020 strategy for “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (European Commission, 2010).

In its *Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies (up to 2020)* the European Commission described four sectors (education, employment, housing and health) in which the social participation of Roma should be improved while combating poverty and discrimination against them, asking the member states “to adopt or to develop further a comprehensive approach to Roma integration and endorse the[se] [...] goals” (European Commission, 2011a; p. 3). The following goals were formulated to increase the access of Roma to education, employment, healthcare, housing and essential services:

- Ensuring that all Roma children complete at least primary school,
- Cutting the employment gap between Roma and the rest of the population,
- Reducing the gap in health status between the Roma and the rest of the population,
- Closing the gap between the share of Roma with access to housing and to public utilities (such as water, electricity and gas) and that of the rest of the population (European Commission, 2014). According to these goals there are a variety of policy measures, initiatives, programs and projects in the member states, whereby, in most European countries, Roma integration policy was focused on either improving the social disadvantaged situation of Roma or on bettering their recognition as a cultural minority (Furray, 2010).

A public consultation on the *EU Framework* has found that since 2011 there has been no major change regarding the situation of Roma in employment, healthcare, housing and discrimination, *but there has been some advancement in education*. In a press release about first results, the Commission emphasized that there are “first signs of improvement in the lives of Roma” (European Commission, 2014, p. 1), but warned that “challenges remain” (ibid.).

The European Commission in its *Midterm review of the EU framework for national Roma integration* on the one hand confirmed “the added value of the EU framework, the relevance of EU Roma integration goals”

(European Commission, 2017, p. 16), but on the other hand also stressed the existence of “the continued need for a combination of targeted and mainstream approaches, whereby targeted measures can help to eliminate barriers to effective equal access for Roma to rights and services in mainstream public policies” (ibid.). In its ‘reinforced and reformed EU Roma strategic framework’ the European Commission summarized the results of its hitherto actions: “Education is the area that progressed the most, notably by reducing early school-leaving and improving participation in early childhood education and compulsory schooling. However, cases of segregation of Roma pupils in education have increased.” (European Commission, 2020, p. 1).

The European Commission’s report *Assessing the implementation of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies* and the *Council Recommendation on Effective Roma integration measures in the Member States 2016* defined which measures are still needed: “More attention must be paid to offering second chance education and adult learning, facilitating the transition between education levels, including tertiary education. Pursuing active desegregation measures to provide good quality education to Roma children in a mainstream setting should be a priority. Training programs should correspond to real labour market needs to effectively improve employment prospects” (European Commission, 2016, p. 10). As a conclusion of the assessments and critical reviews the European Commission identified two priority goals for the future: To reinforce and distinguish the anti-discrimination and antigypsyism focus both under the EU Framework and in the national strategies, and to promote Roma participation and especially the empowerment of Roma children, youth and women (European Commission, 2017).

Hence, in its *EU Roma strategic framework for equality, inclusion and participation (up to 2030)* the European Commission committed itself in 2020 to improve the socio-economic inclusion of marginalised Roma through

- fighting and preventing antigypsyism and discrimination
- reducing poverty and social exclusion, and
- promoting participation by empowerment, building cooperation and trust (European Commission, 2020).

In 2021 the Council of the European Union adopted a *Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation in all Member States*, “to provide a renewed and strengthened commitment from the EU and its Member States to the shared objectives on Roma equality, inclusion and participation in order to push forward policy measures over the next decade to tackle the enormous inequality gap suffered by the Roma population across Europe” (EURoma, 2021). Providing access to quality inclusive mainstream education is one of its declared goals.

Similarities of the Education Situation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia

In the following section I will describe and discuss the similarities in the education situation of Roma in the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovakia: 1) the low level of attainment and achievement of Roma children on every level of the education system, 2) the limited and sometimes contradictory results of the hitherto measures, initiatives, programs and projects within the Frame of the European Union’s Roma Integration Strategy, 3) and the biggest problem: the continuous segregation of Roma children in education institutions.

Low level of attainment and achievement of Roma children on every level of the education system

Attainment and achievement of Roma in the education systems are usually significantly lower than for the non-Roma population. This is true for all Central and Eastern European countries discussed in this article. Furthermore, there are still high rates of illiteracy amongst Roma accompanied by a higher rate of absenteeism and drop-outs.

Preschool education

The gap between Roma and non-Roma begins already in preschool education, which is usually mandatory for one year in the countries discussed in this article. Although participation in preschool education is regarded as an important prerequisite for a successful school career, especially in the case of disadvantaged children (Szoboszlai, 2006; Havas & Liskó, 2006), very few Roma children benefit from it, despite legal measures: Hungary adopted in 1993 the *Law on Public Education (közoktatási törvény)*, which has declared a visit to a

kindergarten for all children to be mandatory and as a precondition for receiving various welfare payments. However, statistics show that many Roma children do not or only at a later stage attend the kindergarten/preschool (Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 105). In the *Czech Republic*, according to the law, parents are obliged not to neglect preschool preparation for their children, otherwise they risk prosecution by the Authority for Social and Legal Protection of Children (OG CR, 2017, p. 29). However, concerning Roma children there are tendencies to neglect sending children to preschool (Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p. 80). The reasons for the low level of participation among Roma children in preschool education are diverse, but they very often stay at home because their mothers are housewives (*ibid.*). In *Romania*, due to the inadequate infrastructure, there is a shortage of places available within preschools and – especially in rural areas – the lack of possibilities for children to travel safely from home to kindergarten affects enrolment of Roma in preschool (see Colomieschi, 2019, p. 169). In *Slovakia* there is a ‘year zero’ policy for children of compulsory school age with disadvantaged socioeconomic background. According to qualified estimates, this group is made up of 80% Roma (Rosinský, 2011) who are considered to be insufficiently equipped to master the educational program in the first year of primary school (Rosinský, 2019, p. 194).

Primary education

Primary education – which is mandatory – is usually the sector where most Roma children participate: In *Poland* in 2003-2015 the rate of Roma pupils who attended school as part of mandatory education varied between 82% and 93% (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 146). In *Hungary* 76.5 % of the Roma born in 1971 finished primary school while this rate was 93 % among those born in 1991 (Hajdú, Kertesi & Kézdi, 2014, p. 270 see Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 106).

In *Romania* the current enrolment rate of Roma is 78% but that of non-Roma living nearby is nearly 95% for those 7-15 years of age. In 2013 about 6.9 % of Roma children aged 6-16 had dropped out of school and 8.9 % of Roma children never been enrolled in compulsory education at all (see Colomieschi, 2019, p. 170). In the *Czech Republic* in 2016 there were 4,141 primary schools attended by 906,188 pupils, of which 3.7 % were Roma pupils (see Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p. 81). In *Slovakia* in 2013 approximately 50.17 % of Roma left school after completing their primary level education and 30.37 % of Roma failed to complete primary education (Rosinský, 2019, p. 193). In primary education absenteeism, high drop-out rates and discrimination are still major issues.

Secondary education

On the secondary education level – which is only partly mandatory (usually until the 16th birthday) – both participation and achievement are significantly lower than in primary education. For example, in *Poland* according to the census from 2011 around only 7% of the Roma have completed secondary education (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 144). In *Slovakia* in 2013 only 10.33% of Roma pupils completed secondary education (Rosinský, 2019, p. 195). In *Romania* – according to the World Bank (World Bank, 2014) – the number of Roma children completing secondary school (12% for boys and 6% for girls) was very low, which was 47 % lower than for non-Roma children. Early school leaving rates for both Roma and non-Roma are considerably higher in *Romania* than in any other EU member state. (Colomeischi, 2019, p. 170). The reasons for the low attainment and success can be explained through different factors: For example, early marriages among Roma from traditional families or a strong labour market orientation seem to play an important role in it (Havas, Kemény & Liskó, 2002, p. 172). In *Slovakia* the financial situation and social insecurity of parents are also important; for, they fear to let their children go away from home to study in a town far away. Another factor is the fact that, for Roma families, the value attributed to education is quite low (Huttová, Gyarfášová & Sekulová, 2012, see Rosinský, 2019, p.195). In the *Czech Republic* there aren't any statistical records available about the number of Roma graduates from secondary schools and universities. Absenteeism among Roma pupils seems to be linked to socio-economic problems because many Roma parents are not able to pay for transportation and meals (Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p.82). These factors – which we can find in every Central and Eastern European country discussed in this article – can be considered as generally impeding factors.

Tertiary education

The number of Roma who attend tertiary education has long been nearly negligibly comprehensible. Newer surveys show about 0.2-2 % of Central and Eastern European Roma attend universities or colleges. In *Slovakia*

according to the survey from 2013 only 726 Roma earned a university degree, about 0.22 % (Rosinský, 2019, pp. 196). In *Hungary* Gábor Kertesi calculated on the basis of official statistical data, that of all Roma children, who began school in 1981/82, only two people started to study in 1993/94 (Kertesi, 2005). Kemény, Jánky and Lengyel found in their study that in 2003 only 1.2% of the then 20-24-year-old Roma or Gypsy people attended a university (Kemény, Jánky & Lengyel, 2004 p. 89, see Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 106). In *Poland* in the group of adult Roma only about 2% have completed their higher education (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 144). In *Romania* among the general population in the age group 30-34 years, about 1% are Roma, who achieved a degree in tertiary education. Among the Roma in tertiary education there is an increased participation of Roma women: According to a study in 2013 the share of Roma women with tertiary education doubled from 0.7 % to 1.6 %, between 1998 and 2012, In the case of Roma men, it remained stable at around 1% (Colomeischi, 2019, p. 171). Katalin R. Forray and András T. Hegedűs described two different ways of school paths regarding Hungarian Roma students: “classic” and „detour”. The “classic way” means that students attend a secondary school directly after completing primary school. They complete their high school degree and after that they go directly to university and complete their studies in regular time. The “detour way” means that students complete their degree with delays and breaks, mostly in evening courses in addition to family obligations and work. In general, this “detour” way can be seen as typical of Roma students in *Hungary* (Forray & Hegedűs, 2003; Óhidy, 2018). According to *Katalin R. Forray* in Hungary there are increasing activities of different churches to establish colleges of advanced studies in higher education for Roma or non-Roma students with an extremely low sociocultural status to obtain a higher degree in education. They seem to be helpful for a great number of young Roma people to achieve a degree in higher education (Forray, 2018). In the *Czech Republic* the example of the Masaryk University – where in 2016 there were ten Roma students in the preparatory program – shows that special courses can help Roma students to increase their attainment and success in higher education: “In ten years, more than one hundred and fifty Roma students took part in preparatory courses for further education of adults at Masaryk University. Around one hundred have been accepted to social education studies, 46 successfully completed their Bachelor’s or Master degrees, and one graduate completed a PhD study program and graduated as an associate professor” (Gulová & Střelec, 2016, p. 131, see Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p. 83).

Adult education

The participation of Roma in adult education is usually also very limited. Negative experiences in mandatory schools seem to have a negative effect on learning motivation and participation in adult education. In *Hungary* these courses often take place in institutions of secondary and tertiary education, very often even in the same buildings and rooms, and often with the same teachers. They are therefore not very attractive for the host of the Roma (Óhidy, 2009; Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 107). In *Poland* courses and training, including vocational courses (e.g. – guards, chef/kitchen staff, construction workers and florists), are offered free of charge for the Roma. In courses to obtain a driving licence and the preparatory courses for Roma, school assistants are also very popular. According to *Wiktor Osuch* and *Agnieszka Świątek* these provide short-term training that is necessary for poorly educated Roma to find jobs requiring basic qualifications (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 149). In *Romania* the participation of all people in Lifelong Learning programs is very low, especially among Roma. Different surveys show that Lifelong Learning participation is five times higher among non-Roma women (25%) than among their female Roma neighbors (5%), and almost three times higher in the case of non-Roma men, compared to Roma men (see Colomeischi, 2019, p. 171). In *Slovakia* young people, who dropped out of compulsory education and wanted to participate in adult education training programs, faced an almost insurmountable problem, because they needed to complete primary education and prepare for secondary education first. To solve this problem, *second-chance schools* were established. Secondary schools also offer the possibility to achieve secondary education through distance learning. Generally, there is a big number of requalification courses and further education courses for those looking to continue their education outside of traditional schooling (Rosinský, 2019, p. 196ff)

Many and manifold policy measures, initiatives, programs and projects within the Frame of the European Union’s Roma Integration Strategy, with limited results

Within the Frame of the European Union’s Roma Integration Strategy there are a variety of policy measures, initiatives, programs and projects in all the member states discussed in this article: The *Polish* government at the beginning of the 2000s developed a nationwide “*Program for the Roma community in 2004-2013*”, on which the “*Program for the integration of the Roma community in Poland for the period 2014-2020*” was based.

The aim was to improve the education situation of Roma, including a bundle of measures to support teachers and Roma school assistants to the introduction of curricula about Roma culture and languages, to provide psychological and pedagogical support for Roma students and their parents to funding scholarships and to develop new teaching material as well (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 149ff). In *Romania* the Ministry of Education established many projects, some of them in cooperation with NGOs, such as “*Food for schools and kindergartens*” or “*Bread and milk*” to provide Roma students with meals or educational materials, or the “*Second Chances program*” or the project “*Roma Children and Parents want to school!*” to increase their participation in general education and higher education. Special training projects for teachers, who work with Roma pupils and for Roma teachers, were established. In 1996 the first project for Roma school mediators started by the NGO, Romani Criss, in cooperation with the Intercultural Institute Timișoara. This project was developed into an educational policy and since 2002 mediators have become a recognized occupation in the Classification of Occupations in Romania (Colomeischi, 2019, p. 176ff). In the *Czech Republic* there are state-funded grants for Roma, e. g. the “*Support for socially disadvantaged Roma students at secondary schools, art schools and higher vocational schools*” (OG CR, 2017) and also several NGO-funded projects – such as *Slovo 21*, *Romea.cz*, the *Open Society Fund*, *Drom* and *Verda Fund*. They provide scholarships and learning support for Roma students in secondary and higher vocational schools and in universities (Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p. 84ff). Many policy measures for the educational support of children with disadvantaged socio-economic backgrounds have been established in *Slovakia* too, which also target Roma students. For example, several community centers were created for offering social services, crisis interventions, and different educational activities (such as remedial education, prevention programs, and leisure time activities) for disadvantaged children and youth (see Rosinský, 2019, p. 199). A successful but contradictory discussed policy measure for children with disadvantaged backgrounds was the *Year Zero* program. It aimed to develop interest in achieving good results through success and related positive experiences and to find purpose for learning and work. Although the project was evaluated as the most suitable, existing, compensatory education program for Roma children unprepared for school education and coming from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, it has been criticized as a tool for segregation of Roma children (Klein, Šilonová & Rusnáková, 2012, see Rosinský, 2019, p. 197). Another special measure established pedagogical assistants at schools to help pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds, among them – based on the initiative of the non-profit organization Wide Open School (*Školadokorán*) – Roma teaching assistants (see Rosinský, 2019, p. 198). In *Hungary* many supporting programs for Roma on all education levels have been established. On the primary school level, the project *Tanoda* offers support to students through extracurricular programs. On the secondary level several boarding schools – such as *Hegedűs T. András Vocational Training* and *Vocational Secondary School and Dormitory* and the *Gandhi High School* – have been founded to minimize early school leaving among Roma students and to guide them towards graduation. The second chance type educational institutions – such as *Dr. Ámbédkár Secondary School* (Sajókaza), *Kis Tigris Secondary School* (Alsószentmárton), *Dr. Hegedűs T. András Alapítványi Vocational Training* and *Vocational secondary school and Dormitory* (Szolnok) – provide ‘second chances’ for those who return to their studies after dropping out of elementary or secondary school. The number of these institutions has increased. On the tertiary level the ‘*Invisible College*’ of the Romaversitas Foundation offers a scholarship and mentoring system for Roma students. In 1998 the University of Pécs established the *Department of Romology and Sociology of Education* for providing a scientific background for teaching and representing knowledge about the society, language and culture of the Roma population in higher education. There are training programs for teachers to become Roma Cultural and Boyash or Romani language teachers. In 2001 at the Romology Department the *Wislocki Henrik Student Collage* was founded to help Roma students through their university studies (see Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 108ff).

Biggest problem: continuous segregation of Roma children in education

The results of these measures and programs are still limited and sometimes also contradictory, because they have not been able to achieve the inclusion of Roma pupils and students (yet). The biggest problem is the continuous segregation of Roma children in schools, which takes different forms:

- Segregation in schools or classes for the mentally handicapped;
- Segregation in substandard schools or classes in the mainstream educational system;
- School segregation resulting from residential segregation “Gypsy ghetto schools”;
- Exclusion from the school system;
- Abuse in schools, including racially-motivated physical abuse” (ERRC n. d., p. 2).

In the Central and Eastern European countries discussed in this article many Roma students experience discrimination in education institutions and segregation as well:

In the *Czech Republic* 24.3% of Roma children were educated in primary schools where 50% pupils/students were Roma (OG CR, 2017, p. 30, see Levínská, Bittnerová & Doubek, 2019, p. 81). In *Slovakia* approximately 15 000 Roma children attend special schools, which means that around 60 % of all children in special schools are Roma (Friedman et al. 2009, see Rosinský 2019, p. 195). In *Hungary* the number of Roma pupils in schools for special education is also above average: According to a research study by Kemény, Janky and Lengyel in 2003, about 8% of Roma and Gypsy children visited a school for special education and 6.5% a so-called 'helping class' (Kemény, Janky & Lengyel, 2004, see Boros & Gergye, 2019, p. 106). In *Poland* the segregated 'Roma classes' – established towards the end of the 1980s – which were exclusively attended by Roma children who should have, after a special three-year preparatory course, continued their education in 'Polish' schools with 'Polish' children, were abolished in 2003, because they "perpetuated divisions along the nationality line among children and constituted an example of segregation" (Świątek & Osuch, 2019, p. 145).

Helen O' Nions differentiates between two forms of segregation: discriminatory segregation, based on ethnic stereotypes, and benevolent segregation, based on the motivation to better address the needs and to refer to the wishes of the Roma parents (O' Nions, 2015, p. 7). She emphasized that "Educational authorities do not necessarily act with discriminatory intent", sometimes they just try to refer to the wishes of the Roma parents. She seeks the reasons of their wish for separate schooling in their negative education experience, illiteracy levels and concern that school education may challenge aspects of Roma culture and family life. In other cases, there are protests from non-Roma parents against inclusive schooling, which avert desegregation (O' Nions, 2015, p. 7). The most serious form of segregation in the education system is sending Roma children to schools for the mentally retarded, who very often have no intellectual shortcomings. Here cultural prejudices and antigypsyism play a role among the decision-makers (Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre, 2015).

Conclusion

Summarizing the findings of this article we can state that there is a common challenge to change the disadvantaged situation of the Roma minority in Central and Eastern Europe in education but not only there. There is a colourful bundle of policy strategies, measures and projects, which offer similar solutions on the national, regional and local levels of the countries discussed here. However, despite these manifold efforts on the European, national and regional/local levels the results are still limited and sometimes also contradictory: On the one hand there is an "emerging middle-class among Romani people in the CE Countries" (Kozma & Forray, 2018, p. 1), especially in the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary. This is a small minority, whose members were able to improve their social position with the help of the educational system and have practically become a part of the middle class (Óhidy, 2018). On the other hand, the national education systems of most Central and Eastern European countries rather reinforce the deprivation of Roma, not helping but impeding upward social mobility for them: "School is an institution that translates socio-economic differences into distinct educational outcomes. In the case of Roma children, schools perform a negative selection, often by tracking Roma into segregated classes and schools and directing many of them into special education" (Surdu & Switzer, 2015, p. 24). Especially the continued segregation of Roma pupils and students on every level of the education system is a warning sign that the results even now are still unsatisfactory.

The goal of Roma inclusion has not yet been fulfilled. In my opinion, to offer the opportunity of upward social mobility for the whole European Roma community (not only in Central and Eastern Europe) through education and to achieve their inclusion, a common Europe-wide cooperation – for example within the planned European Education Area – is needed. As the European Commission formulated in its new Roma strategic framework: "Achieving equity and inclusion calls for increased use and better channelling of resources, and the involvement and partnership of Roma communities, all government levels, sectors and stakeholders (national governments, EU institutions, international organisations, civil society and, as well as industry and academia). Close cooperation between the European and the national level is particularly crucial" (European Commission, 2020, p. 1).

Acknowledgements: We thank Johnathan Dabney for the English language editing.

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