

Desegregating Roma schools: a cost-benefit-analysis¹

by Mihai Surdu²

This paper purports to illustrate that segregated schools for Roma in Romania provide inferior quality of education and are a major obstacle to the enjoyment of equal educational opportunities by the children who attend them. In the first part of the paper I define the term segregation as used in this article. Next, I briefly highlight the main causes which have led to the present condition of segregated education of Roma. Finally, I evaluate the quality of education in schools with a high percentage of Romani pupils on the basis of the following indicators: school achievement, school facilities and teacher's qualification. On the last part I summarize policy options in order to raise the quality of education for Roma children.

The main source of the quantitative data used in this article is the database gathered by the Romanian Ministry of Education and Research (MER), the Institute of Educational Science (IES), and the Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL) in 1998. The database contains 5,560 school units from rural areas in Romania. The number of Romani children in these schools ranges between 1 and 100%. This database was obtained

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selecting cases from a larger database of 19,427 units or about 95 percent of the schools in the rural regions of Romania. Cases in the database were selected using as variable *percentage of Romani pupils in school*. Estimation of the percentage of Romani students was done by the school principal of each school.³

Although the database was gathered in 1998, it remains broadly valid today in terms of population, school facilities or teacher qualifications. However is for the first time when an estimation about segregation can be made due to this database. Some of the analyses presented in this article were published recently⁴, in Romania, some of them are new being published here for the first time.

Defining Segregation

The term “segregated schools” in this article refers to schools which according to the Romanian educational standards are “regular schools” - i.e. use standard curriculum and which have over fifty percent Romani students. Although segregation has never been legally sanctioned in Romania, *de facto* segregated schools are an undeniable reality.⁵ Notwithstanding Romania’s obligations to eradicate segregation and discrimination in

³ The MER, IES, RIQL database contains data on schools in the rural area of Romania exclusively. When I use the “entire system” or, “the system”, I refer to rural school system. Due to this limit, the article does not purport to evaluate the extension of segregation for entire educational system.

⁴ *Participarea la educatie a copiilor romi – probleme, solutii, actor*, Ministerul Educatiei si Cercetarii, Institutul de Stiinte ale Educatiei, Institutul de Cercetare a Calitatii Vietii, UNICEF, Editura MarLink, Bucuresti, 2002

⁵ In American literature, *de facto* segregation is described as follows: “Racial segregation resulting from the actions of private individuals or unknown forces, not from governmental action or law. *De facto* segregation is to be distinguished from *de jure* segregation, segregation resulting from governmental action or law. *De facto* segregation is generally the result of housing patterns, population movements, and economic conditions often reinforced by governmental policies not aimed at segregation but having that effect.” See Raffel, Jeffrey A *Historical dictionary of school segregation and desegregation*, Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1998, p. 232.

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education flowing from domestic and international law,⁶ there have been no legal or practical efforts by the state to eliminate these schools.

Segregated schools are usually situated near Romani communities. Most of these communities have a high level of poverty. Such schools are not only physically separated from the majority schools but they are also much poorer as compared to other schools.⁷ Although formally there are no formal barriers⁸ in enrolling or transferring Romani pupils to non-segregated schools, Romani parents encounter a series of economic and bureaucratic as well as obstruction on grounds of racial prejudice.⁹

⁶ Article 32(1) of the Constitution of Romania stipulates: “The right to education is provided for by the compulsory general education, by education in high schools and vocational schools, by higher education, as well as other forms of instruction and post-graduate refresher courses” (official translation).

The Romanian Law on Education recognises “equal rights of access to all forms and levels of education for all Romanian citizens.” See Article 5(1) of the Romanian Law on Education, adopted as the Law on Education 84/1995, amended by Ordinance 36/1997 and by Law 151/1999. (Official translation by the Public Information Department of the Government of Romania).

Moreover, Romania is a party to several international treaties which prohibit segregation and discrimination in education, like for example the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (Article 5(e)(v)) and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (Article 3).

⁷ For example, during my field research in Coltau, Baia Mare County, in 1998, I asked where I could find the local school. I was guided to a school in the center of the village, where Hungarian and Romani children attended separate classes. Later I found that in Coltau there was another school, an all-Romani school. The fact that the villagers did not spontaneously mention this other school, speaks about the marginal position attributed to it. Visiting this school, I saw that the villagers were right not to qualify it as a school. The building was rented from a private person. It had two rooms, 20 square metres each, which served to accommodate 104 Romani children from kindergarten to grade IV. When school attendance was 100%, 3-4 children had to share a single desk. The school building had no inscription or any official symbol to indicate that the building is a public institution, a public school.

⁸ Recent regulations of the Ministry of Education and Research of Romania (MER) allow a pupil to enroll in any school from the system, regardless of residence.

⁹ During my research in Romania in 1998 and 2000 I have had interviews with several dozens of Roma who alleged that they did not succeed to enrol their children in schools where the majority of students were ethnic Romanians or Hungarians. For example, the Romani leader from Coltau, Mr. Covaci told me in a private discussion from the summer of 1998, that he did not succeed to enrol his daughter in the local school with a majority of Hungarian students. The reason of his failure was a hostile attitude from the part of teachers and pupils from the school with a majority of Roma students.

“Romani schools” – physical or social distance?

Historically, Romani segregated schools have appeared as a consequence of residential segregation. As of 1998, according to the Bucharest-based Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL), more than one quarter of Roma in Romania lived in segregated communities (see Table 1).¹⁰ In Romania, Roma were slaves since their arrival on this territory. Abolition was a process which took almost 25 years, slavery being abolished only in the second half of the XIX century. Forcing the previously itinerant segments of the Romani population to settle was a permanent effort of the authorities during the slavery period as well as during the communist period.¹¹ The process of forced settlement of Roma resulted in the appearance of isolated and homogenous Romani communities. These communities are usually situated on the margins of villages or cities. The communist regime tried by its town-planning policy to demolish Romani districts and to disperse the Romani population among majority population by moving Roma from houses to blocks of flats. This town-planning policy was largely unsuccessful, and nowadays the prevailing number of Roma live in Romani districts or ghettos. There are also cases in which Romani settlements are not administratively registered because local

¹⁰ Research Institute for Quality of Life database, 1998

¹¹ Achim Viorel, *Tigani in istoria Romaniei*, Bucuresti, Editura Enciclopedica, 1998, p.155.

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Roma do not have property documents, although several generations have lived there.

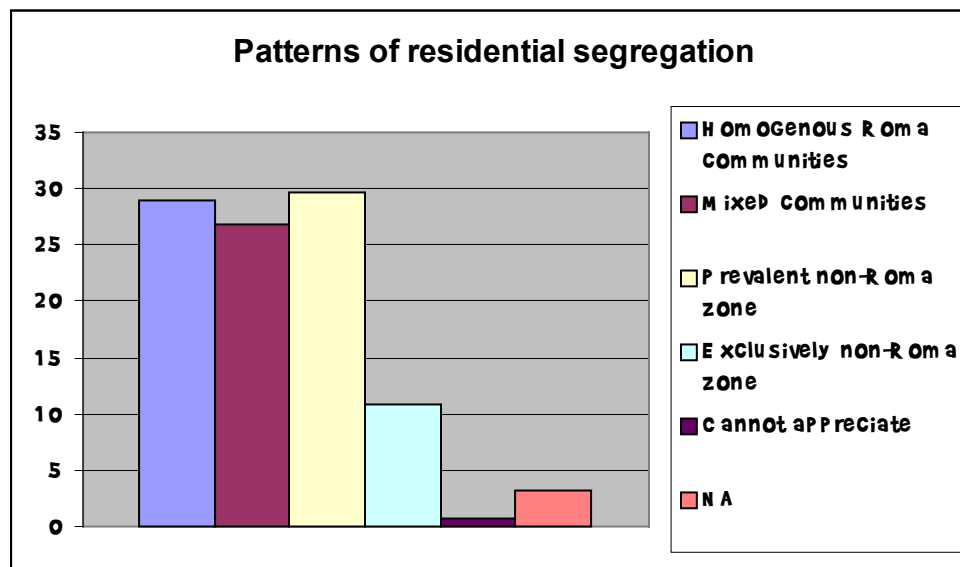


Table 1, *Source of data*: RIQL database, 1998.

However, to explain educational segregation only by residential segregation is not enough. Let's take for example the Tigveni primary school, in Arges county, South Romania. This school, grades (I-IV) is one hundred percent Romani, although it is situated at a distance of just two kilometers away from another school (grades I-VIII) in which the overwhelming number of pupils are from the Romanian majority. In this case, educational segregation cannot be justified only by residential segregation. Research data indicate that as of 1998, **more than half of the schools with over fifty percent Romani pupils were situated at a distance of less than three kilometres from neighbouring schools of the same level with predominantly non-Romani children.**¹² Almost three

¹² See Ministry of Education and Research of Romania (MER), the Institute of Educational Science (IES), and the Research Institute for Quality of Life (RIQL), 1998.

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quarters of the schools with over fifty percent Romani pupils were situated at a distance less than five kilometres away from the schools with another ethnic majority¹³.

Because the physical distance between Romani and non-Romani communities is relatively small (and therefore the distance between majority Romani schools and majority non-Romani schools), the explanation of the continuing educational segregation can be found in the **social distance** between the Romani minority and the majority. Established as a consequence of residential segregation, the segregated schools for Roma have become nowadays overwhelmingly an expression of **the negative stereotypes for Roma**. Regarding prejudices and stereotypes, recent data reveal intense negative perceptions of Roma on the part of the majority (see Table 2).

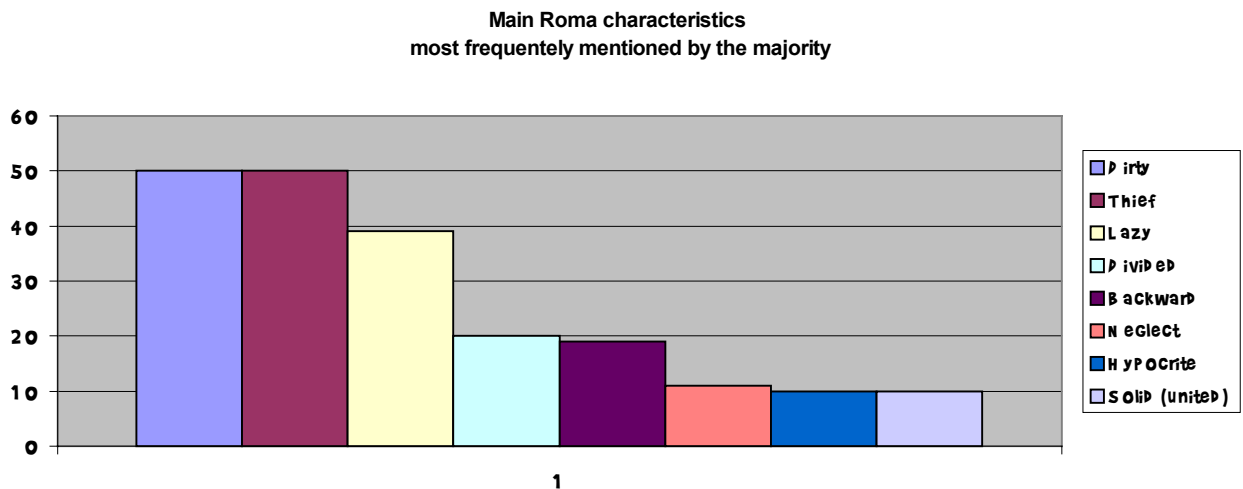


Table 2. Data source: *Interethnic Relations Barometer, made by Metro Media Transilvania for Resources*

Center for Ethno-Cultural Diversity, November 2001, p.11.

¹³ We use here the term “another ethnic majority” and not simply Romanian majority, because there are two counties (Harghita and Covasna) where the majority is constituted by ethnic Hungarians. In some other counties are localities with a ethnic Hungarian majority.

The social distance between the Romani minority and the majority is further enhanced by **socio-economic discrepancies**. Statistics show much higher poverty levels among Roma as compared to non-Roma. For example, as of 1998 62.9% Roma in Romania lived under the minimum level of subsistence¹⁴ as compared to 16% of the whole population.¹⁵ Poverty is usually associated with a lower social status, and is therefore a cause of negative public perception of the poor.

Summing up, although segregated schools are a consequence of residential segregation which was enforced on Roma in the years of the communist rule in Romania, the social distance between Roma and the majority population has a strong influence in maintaining the *status quo*.

Dimensions of educational segregation

According to the percentage of Romani children in them, rural schools which are subject of the present analysis, fall into the following categories:

- **Mixed schools** - 1-50% Romani children
- **Schools with a Romani majority** – 50.1%-70% Romani children
- **Schools in which Romani pupils prevail** – 70.1 %-100% Romani children.

¹⁴ The minimum level of subsistence has been defined in Romania as “[e]xpenses on basic goods and services; clothes and shoes expenses for adults were not included, considering that these goods already exist in the household. The level of subsistence ensures the living expenses during relatively short term life sequence. To continue the living under this level it will have as consequences malnutrition and health depreciation.” (See C. Zamfir, E. Zamfir, *Dimensiuni ale saraciei*, Bucharest, Expert Publishing House, 1995, p.128.)

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As of 1998, eighty-seven percent of the school units analysed were mixed schools, 6.4% were schools with a Roma majority, and 5.8% were schools in which Roma prevailed.

The number of Romani children who attended schools with over fifty percent Romani students was 38,334 or 12.2% of the total number of Romani children in all of the 5,560 schools analysed.

According to the database, segregation tendencies were more salient for compulsory education¹⁶. More than half of the schools with over fifty percent Roma were primary schools.¹⁷ Almost one third were secondary schools. Most of the cases of Romani segregated schools were in compulsory education due to the fact that a high number of Romani children drop out of school after the eighth grade. A research of the Institute for Quality of Life from 1998 indicates that at least 11,6% from the Roma children in the age group 7-16 years drop out the school in the compulsory education. I say “at least” because 8.7% from the cases are in the category of non answers. In my opinion most of this “non-answer cases” are in fact “drop out cases” but not declared as such because of social undesirability.

Quality of education evaluation in schools with a high percentage of Roma pupils

¹⁵ Zamfir and Zamfir, p. 28.

¹⁶ Compulsory basic education (*învatamânt obligatoriu*) includes the first 4 grades of primary school (*primar*) and 4 years of lower secondary school (*gimnaziu*), grades 5 to 8. Upper secondary education includes 4 and 5-year academic high schools (*liceu*), 4-year technical high schools, and 2 and 3-year vocational schools (*scoala profesionala*).

¹⁷ The number of Romani children who study in schools with over 50 percent Romani children in primary education is 21,014; in secondary education this number is 10,640; and in kindergartens it is 6,680.

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The factors determining quality of education can be categorised as follows: a) educational inputs (curricula, textbooks, school buildings, etc.); b) educational processes (teaching, classroom organisation, and time-tabling, etc.); and c) educational outcomes or learner achievement. This section presents an assessment of some of the factors listed above, illustrating disparities between the schools with high percentage of Romani pupils and mixed schools.

Learner achievement in educational units with a majority of Romani pupils

*The ratio of pupils who obtain capacitate certificat*¹⁸ is an indicator informing about schools' resources to prepare pupils in order to pass toward college or vocational school. While for the entire educational system, as of 1998, the ratio of the pupils who passed the capacity exam was 68 percent, for the schools in which Roma pupils prevail the ratio was only 44.6 percent. The data indicate that more than half of the Romani pupils in schools with prevailing number of Roma failed to pass the capacity exam.

The ratio of pupils who repeat one or more school years due to poor school results is calculated for the period 1995-1998 and it is computed for primary and secondary levels. An increasing ratio of Romani pupils in a school correlated with an increase of this indicator (ratio of pupils who repeat the school year). In schools with over 70 percent Romani pupils the ratio of pupils who repeated the school year was 11.3 percent, which is almost three times higher than the average for the educational system as a whole (3.9

¹⁸ Secondary school students in Romania pass a compulsory national examination (*capacitate*), necessary for entering upper secondary education, in mathematics, mother tongue, history or geography.

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percent). A student who has three successive failures is expelled from the school system because he/she would be over the legal age for primary school or gymnasium.

A survey of the Research Institute for Quality of life from 1998¹⁹ revealed that some of Romani students enrolled in compulsory education did not have basic reading and writing skills, although they in any case passed to a higher grade. Practically, these pupils can be regarded as functionally illiterate. High levels of functional illiteracy highlight once again the failure of educational system. Although the available data does not specify what is the percentage of functionally illiterate Romani students from schools with higher percentage of Romani students, it is very likely that due to the lower quality of education in the schools with a high percentage of Roma, many if not most of the functional illiterates, come from this type of school. As of 1998, the ratio of functional illiteracy was 17.6 percent for pupils enrolled in fourth grade. This ratio increases to 35.7 percent in the case of pupils who drop out in the fourth grade. Increased functional illiteracy can be in part an explanation for instances of school abandonment. It is surprising that Romani pupils pass classes without having minimal reading and writing skills. One third of the Romani pupils who dropped out school in the sixth grade could not read and write properly. This situation can be partially explained by low teachers' expectations of Romani pupils. Some teachers consider that for Romani pupils, literacy is rather a performance indicator than a minimal requirement.

As demonstrated in Table 3 below, the overcrowded classes indicator²⁰ reveals that schools with a high percentage of Romani pupils had a higher ratio of overcrowded classes than other schools where Roma do not constitute the majority of the students.

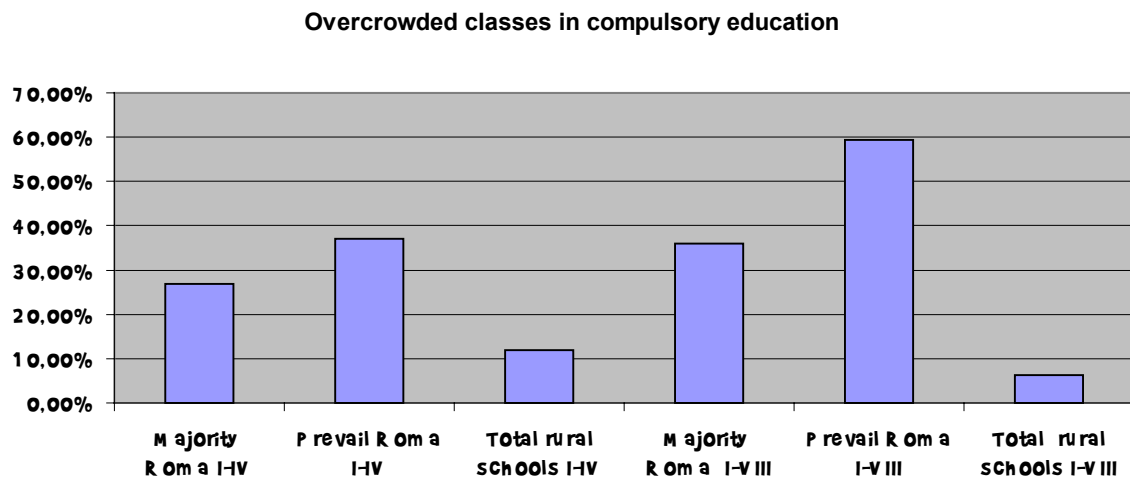


Table 3. Data source: Database MER, IES, RIQL, 1998

With the exception of kindergartens, where Romani participation was substantially lower (approximately four times lower than average), for primary and secondary education, in the case of schools with many Romani pupils, overcrowded classes represented a common situation. **The likelihood to have overcrowded classes increases proportionately to the percentage of Romani pupils in a school – i.e. the higher the**

¹⁹ Functional illiteracy was estimated on a national sample of 1,765 Romani households, representative for Romani population from rural and urban areas.

²⁰ The category “overcrowded classes” is defined in accordance with the Romanian school construction standards. These standards require 1.8 – 2.1 square metres per pupil within the classroom and 2.7 – 3 square metres per child in kindergarten”. MER, IES, *Invatamantul rural in Romania: conditii, probleme si strategii de dezvoltare*, Bucharest, 2000, p. 71.

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number of Romani pupils in a school, the higher the number of overcrowded classes. The likelihood of overcrowded classes in primary schools in which Romani pupils prevail was more than 3 times higher than for all rural schools. For secondary schools in which Romani pupils prevail this likelihood was more than 9 times higher than for the whole system. In the segregated schools for Roma, insufficient school space negatively affects the quality of education. In overcrowded classes it is more probable that teachers are more oriented toward discipline maintenance than on individual pupils' needs.

An important facility for the quality of the educational process is the school library. Moreover, for Romani pupils the school library is an essential resource because many Romani children come from poor families and do not have ready access to many books. **The higher the number of Romani pupils in a school, the more likely it would be that the school doesn't have a library.** The data indicates that, in schools with a majority of Romani pupils, library was missing in almost two-thirds of the cases. In schools in which Romani pupils prevail, this facility was missing in almost three-quarters of the cases.

Teacher qualification in educational units with a majority of Romani pupils

Teachers' qualifications and attitudes are a crucial factor influencing the quality of the educational process. While teachers' qualifications can be objectively evaluated by

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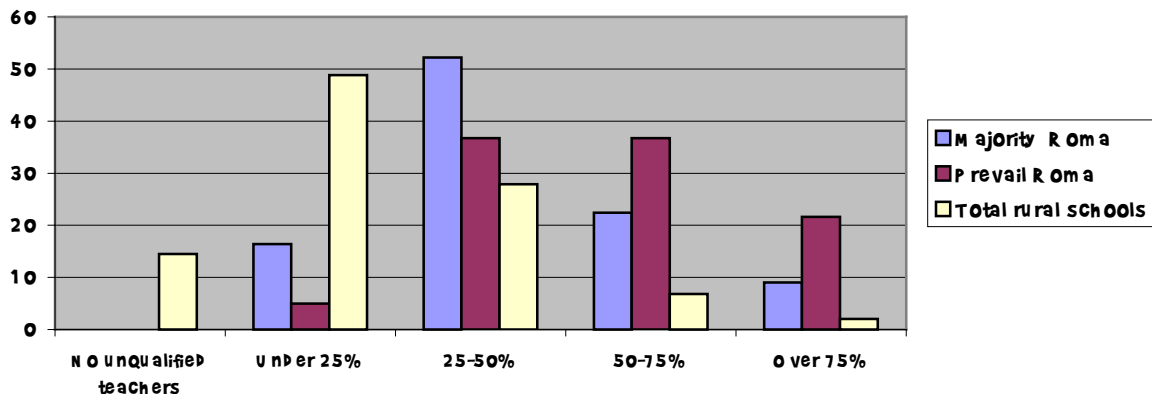
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quantitative indicators, teachers' attitudes have a subjective component contained in their perceptions and expectations about Romani pupils.

The ratio of schools with a shortage of qualified teachers is an indicator containing all school units with at least one unqualified teacher. Schools in which Romani pupils prevail indicated a shortage of qualified teachers almost two times higher (83.5%) than that of all rural schools (43.5%). Practically, all schools with over fifty percent Roma were confronted with the problem of a shortage of qualified teachers. The ratio of kindergartens with a majority of Romani children indicating a shortage of qualified educators was almost 10 percent higher than the whole system. In the case of kindergartens in which Romani children prevail, this percentage was over 25 percent.

The ratio of unqualified teachers in compulsory education (primary and secondary school) is an indicator reflecting the intensity of the lack of qualification phenomenon. It can be supposed that in schools with a high ratio of unqualified teachers the quality of education is low. The discrepancies between segregated schools for Roma and the educational system regarding the lack of teacher qualification can be seen in Table 6 below:

Percentage of unqualified teachers in compulsory education



Data source: Database MER, IES, RIQL, 1998

Practically, as of 1998, there were no schools with over 50 percent Roma (“majority Roma” schools) without unqualified teachers. There is an obvious correlation between the percentage of Romani pupils in a school and the ratio of unqualified teachers.

In the category “50-75 percent unqualified teachers”:

- the percentage of schools with a majority of Romani pupils was approximately three times higher than that for the educational system;
- the percentage of schools in which Roma prevail was approximately five times higher than for the educational system;

In the category “over 75 percent unqualified teachers”:

- the percentage of schools with a majority of Romani pupils was approximately four times higher than for the educational system;
- the percentage of schools in which Roma prevail was ten times higher than for the educational system.

In schools with a prevailing number of Romani pupils, the ratio of unqualified teachers was almost three times higher than for the educational system and the ratio of unqualified schoolmasters was almost 2.5 times higher. In kindergartens in which Romani children prevail, the ratio of unqualified instructors was with almost 25 percent higher than in the educational system.

As illustrated by the above data, the schools with a high percentage of Romani pupils are “second hand” schools which offer bad facilities and high levels of under-qualified teachers. This fact, has a detrimental impact on quality of education which Romani children receive as well as on the Romani child’s motivation to attend school. High drop out rates among Roma are in part the result of the negative experience Romani children have at school. Most of the “beneficiaries” of this type of education, Romani parents and children alike, have clear awareness that they do not receive equal education in the schools with high percentage of Romani children.

Quality of education evaluation by beneficiaries’ expectations

Many Romani parents express dissatisfaction with the level of knowledge achieved and the skills mastered by their children in schools with a prevailing number of Romani children. Parents frequently complain about a lack of motivation among teachers in work with Romani pupils. Due to the fact that some teachers from the schools with a high percentage of Romani pupils have low expectations of Romani pupils, these teachers tend

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to set lower standards of educational achievement for Romani pupils than for the other pupils. According to one teacher, “There are differences between the Romanian children and the Rudari [Roma] children. They [the Romani children] are asked only to stay at their desks in the last row and they are left alone, and told only to be quiet.”²¹

Some teachers believe that Romani pupils have no chance to follow higher levels of education and these teachers behave accordingly. These teachers have a low commitment, they underestimate Roma pupils’ potential and don’t treat Romani pupils individually. **For many educators the main objective regarding the education of Romani children is the mere achievement of basic literacy skills.** Moreover, some teachers consider reading and writing a performance indicator and not a basic ability to be accomplished in the first two years of school. Fixing literacy as a final objective of primary school (sometimes even of secondary school), teachers’ requests and expectations are often very low. A proof in this respect is the fact that some Romani pupils, who pass classes for years, attend sometimes even the gymnasium without properly knowing to read and write.

The following excerpts refer to Romani parents’ dissatisfaction concerning the school achievements of their children:²²

“Teachers are not motivated, they say that the Gypsies have no possibilities to follow higher levels of education. Teachers are not motivated, that is it.”

²¹ Author’s interview with a Romanian teacher, Rudarie, Gorj county, 1998.

²² All interviews were made by the author during field researches in Romania in 1998 and 2000.

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“I have a child in the third grade, too. But he doesn’t know even to write his name. And he goes daily to school. Our children don’t have even homework to do.”

“My child is in fifth grade and he doesn’t know to write his name too. Children are not really learning because are only gypsies here and teachers are not preoccupied to work with them...In order to leave school earlier teachers let children go home at 10 or 11 o’clock.”

“My child is in the sixth grade and he doesn’t know anything from school ...during six school years he doesn’t know in this moment even to compute, he knows only what I teach him. I am satisfied because he knows what I teach him: to write and to read. Otherwise, he goes to school without learning anything”

The majority of Roma parents are aware about the quality of education discrepancies between schools with a high percentage of Roma pupils and schools with another ethnic majority. For this reason some wealthy Romani parents prefer to enrol or to transfer their children in schools with another ethnic majority. In the same way act Romanian parents when they have to choose between a closer school with a high percentage of Romani children and a far away school without Roma (or with a low percentage of Romani pupils).

Most of Romani parents consider that it would be desirable for their children to learn in ethnically mixed schools and not in schools with a majority of Romani children. Schools with a non-Roma majority pupils are perceived as better schools having better school

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facilities, human and financial resources. Parents who are in favor of mixed schools bring the following arguments:

- Mixed schools tend to have higher quality of education because teachers tend to have better qualifications and there are generally better facilities;
- Romani pupils are taught to achieve better results in mixed schools;
- Socializing Romani and non-Romani children together could have positive effects for both Romani children and non-Romani children (facilitating communication, cultural exchanges, avoiding social exclusion, and interethnic tolerance);
- Schooling in a mixed school is perceived to bring rewards such as higher educational and, ultimately employment opportunities.

In my interviews with Romani parents, it became evident that cases of abusive treatment of Romani pupils who attend mixed schools make some Romani parents reluctant about the possibility of sending their children to school together with non-Romani children. Such cases include sitting Romani children in the last desks, failure of the teachers to stimulate Romani pupils to be active in class, exclusion of Roma from extracurricular activities, tensions between Romani and non-Romani pupils and sometimes between Roma and their teachers. Some Romani parents are afraid that mixing Romani and non-Romani pupils could strengthen segregation tendencies. Romani children might find themselves isolated in the mixed schools because of majority prejudices and stereotypes and due to status differences. Economic and social status differences between Romani and non-Romani children are visible in lack of school supplies, lack of adequate clothes and shoes, lack of meal, lack of money for extracurricular activities.

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Romani children are more afraid than their parents to learn in the same class or school together with non-Romani children. During my research many Romani children told me that they were frightened of being isolated, badly treated or even beaten. These fears are more salient in the case of pupils learning actually in all-Romani schools.

Policy Options: Desegregating the Educational System vs. Improving Quality of Education in the Segregated Schools

This paper argues that the quality of education in the segregated schools for Roma is lower than in the mainstream schools. Unqualified teaching staff, lack of basic facilities, and racist treatment of Romani children are crucial factors contributing to the inferior level of education in the schools where Romani children prevail. Romani children who attend segregated schools in practice have a very low chance to pass beyond the stage of compulsory education. Moreover, most of them drop out before finishing secondary or even primary school. The incidence of functional illiteracy among Romani children is very high, even for those pupils who have graduated the fourth or eighth grades.

In Romania segregated schools appeared as a consequence of residential segregation, which affects more than one-quarter of Roma. However, the social distance between Roma and majority and the negative prejudices held by the majority are the main factors for preserving the *status quo*. While by law there should be no obstacles to the

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enrollment of Romani children in integrated, higher quality schools, in practice, obstruction on racist grounds has to date blocked integrated schooling.

There are mainly two ways to address the existing discrepancies as regards educational quality in the segregated and in the mainstream schools. The first one is to *improve the quality of education* in the segregated schools. After 1989 almost all relevant actors, including the Romanian Ministry of Education and non-governmental organisations have acted within the frame of this policy option. Almost all projects and programs developed by NGOs aim, in one way or another, to improve quality of education in the segregated schools. Measures such as teacher training, school development, improvement of school facilities and teaching materials, involvement of parents and communities, participation of Roma in extra-curriculum activities fall in the frame of improving quality of education. The assumed philosophy of this intervention is that if the quality of education is improved, Romani pupils will attend higher level of education and consequently will be more competitive at the labour market. Continuing this argumentation, a better integration on the labour market will lead, in time, to a better social and economic status for the Romani population. While addressing the quality of education, this strategy leaves unaddressed the problem of segregation itself. The assumption that the social distance between the Romani minority and majority population cannot be overcome is implicitly accepted.

The second policy option consists in *desegregation of the educational system*. While improving the quality of education option does not address educational segregation, the

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desegregation policy option makes a step further, challenging both the quality of education and the state of physical separation of the Romani children based on ethnicity. While the currently applied strategy for improving the quality of education means preserving segregated schools, the desegregation option proposes elimination of this kind of school from the educational system. Separating schools means in fact making a judgement about Romani culture as one of a lower rank than the majority culture. Educational segregation of Romani pupils is unacceptable regardless of the fact that it is not a result of a governmental policy. Even if segregated Romani schools would become equal in quality with other schools from the educational system, segregation is inappropriate for both the Romani minority and for the Romanian society as a whole. Beyond its function of transmitting knowledge and developing abilities, school is also a means for disseminating values. Tolerance, ethnic dialogue, democratic exercise cannot be applied if a minority is isolated, excluded from the mainstream society.

Educational segregation is not only a cause of inferior education but also of social exclusion of Roma from Romanian society. Eliminating segregation, by including Romani pupils in mainstream education will increase school achievement of Roma pupils but will also open a movement for an equal status of Roma in all social fields. The success of the desegregation programme initiated in Bulgaria²³ shows that school desegregation can be considered a viable policy option in the case of Romani education. Existing programs and projects targetting so-called Romani schools, have to make a further step from improving education quality to school desegregation. In schools with

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over 50 percent Romani pupils desegregation plans must be made taking into account local contexts. There are some already validated modalities of desegregating schools: children transportation to schools with other ethnic majority, creating *magnet schools* which can attract non-Romani pupils in majority Romani schools, informing and helping Romani parents to send their children to better schools, removing bureaucratic barriers by redrawing school boundaries. Information is needed in order to adapt to local context and to choose the appropriate desegregation technique in each case. Anti-bias training for teachers is needed in order to create a friendly environment for Romani pupils in their new host schools. Also, Romani families have to be supported in order to provide for their children clothes, shoes, writing materials, a free meal, etc. However, in order to choose an option, a broad public debate must be initiated. In my view, a good solution should take into account all relevant stakeholders. It is important that Romani parents' voices be heard before planning an educational policy targeting their children.

Conclusions and recommendations

I conceptualise type of costs and benefits for mentioned policy options drawing the conclusions that desegregation will produce greater benefits on comparable costs or even cheaper compared with the second option. Desegregation option is feasible policy because institutional and legal structures for implementing this option are already in place being not necessary to have extra costs for creating these structures. I mention here: Roma inspectors at the county level, schools mediators comprised by the governmental strategy, the Council for Combating Discrimination and the law concerning with anti-discrimination measures. Moreover, more than halves of segregated Roma schools are on a walking distance (less than 3 Km) from the schools of the same level but with an other ethnic composition.

²³ See “*The Desegregation of ‘Romani Schools’ - A Condition for an Equal Start for Roma*”, Sofia, Bulgaria, April 27, 2001, report published by the *European Roma Rights Center* and the *Open Society Institute’s Roma Participation Program*.

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Although I do not operationalize costs and benefits on money, the cost –benefit analysis is made on the assumption that second option have similar costs with third option but desegregation will produce, on the long-term, greater social benefits. The first option can be counted practically only on costs, because no benefits can be deducted for the Roma or for society at large. In looking at costs I mention that the opportunity cost of choosing desegregation option, in the context of UE enlargement, will be lower than choosing other options. Concretely, it is probable that evaluations of Romania in order to integrate in European Union structures to be more favorable if a desegregation policy will be chosen. Social benefits of choosing desegregation will consist mainly in a reduced social welfare support for Roma from the part of state budget and a greater social cohesion. More educated Roma in better schools will easily find jobs, will earn more, access a house and medical services and will pay more taxes to the state budget. In evaluating second policy option I highlight the risks that schools will lower standards of education after project financing will close and probably will return to former low standards of education. Moreover, children from improved Roma schools will have probable difficulties to adapt further in schools where they will not find the same protective environment but rather a competitive environment. Also in the costs category for the second option I included money loss as a consequence that teacher trained in programs for improving Roma schools leave those schools soon after the training is finished. Due to cost and benefits, pro and cons arguments presented before I recommend the desegregation option for the compulsory education. (K1-8). Desegregation plans have to be contextual and to take in account local realities. I recommend that desegregation plans involve the free will of Roma parents in order to choose the desired school for their children. In order to have an informed choice Roma parents need to know the entire school supply in a locality/region, level of quality in schools (number of graduates on lyceum and higher education for example), and the fact that no barriers will be in place in order to chose other schools than present ones.

There are 3 main types of action needed to be taken in order to desegregate the educational system:

- Stopping segregation in education by enrolling Roma pupils, which follow to enter educational system in schools with other ethnic majorities.

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- Transferring Roma children from segregated schools to mixed schools and their placement in ethnic mixed classes.
- Realizing ethnic mixed classes in mixed schools where Roma children are placed in separate classes.

For a coherent desegregation policy the following institutions need to be involved:

- County Inspectorate for Education- Roma inspectors ;
- School mediators for Roma communities
- Local and County councils- Roma counselors
- Roma and non Roma Ngo's active in the field of education;
- National Council for Combating Discrimination
- Local and central mass media.

Where is the case, the already present structure of transportation of the Ministry of Education, need to be optimized in order to allow Roma pupils from segregated communities access to schools from the neighboring localities.

Desegregation process has to be carefully monitorised in order to prevent discrimination of Roma in their host schools and to keep evidence on school achievement. Roma Ngo's and Roma inspectors have to assure that transferring or enrolling Roma children to schools with other ethnic composition will not artificially create barriers to studying Roma language and culture for Roma pupils.