

# Preface

## Why *Denied a Future?* was produced

The idea for the *Denied a Future?* report emerged at the 1999 session of the UN Commission on Human Rights. Save the Children presented information about the ways in which the right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller<sup>1</sup> children was being compromised or violated in a number of European countries. Various people were interested in finding out more and asked us to recommend publications that they could refer to. We discovered that there were very few of these. While there was a lot of information available, from research institutes, from governmental sources, from organisations working with Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities and from activists in those communities, this information was in libraries, archives and in people's heads, in many different locations and languages.

Large sums of money are being spent by governments, intergovernmental agencies and international NGOs on programmes that aim to reform education provision in Central and South-Eastern Europe and to improve the situation of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in Western Europe. The absence of an accessible text describing the starting point against which the impact of this expenditure could be measured meant that it was difficult to assess whether these programmes were actually bringing about positive changes for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. There appeared to be hundreds of small projects, many of which were highly innovative and successful. But it was hard to tell whether these

successful pilot initiatives were having any significant impact in the long term or on a wider scale. In other words, was expenditure on pilots and experimental initiatives leading to any systemic change?

Save the Children decided that there was a need for a basic text that described legislation, policy and practice with regard to education provision for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in a number of European countries. *Denied a Future?* therefore describes law, policy and practice in the period June 2000 to June 2001. We intend the report to serve as a benchmark against which the impact of current and future investments by the World Bank, the European Union, national and local governments and other agencies can be assessed.

The issues addressed in *Denied a Future?* are of growing significance and relevance in contemporary Europe. They feature in the debates leading up to the enlargement of the European Union and in the work of the Working Table on Democratisation and Human Rights of the Stability Pact for South-Eastern Europe. The failure to safeguard the right to education of large numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children was highlighted at the UNESCO Education for All 2000 regional meeting for Europe and North America. It was also highlighted at the European Conference against Racism, which was organised by the Council of Europe in preparation for the UN World Conference against Racism.

## How *Denied a Future?* was produced

Each *Denied a Future?* country report was co-ordinated by a single author or editor. However, the authors/editors drew upon a wide range of written and verbal contributions in the countries concerned. The drafts were widely circulated by the co-ordinating team, and comments were particularly sought from individuals in Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities who are clients and users of the education services under discussion. The views and experiences of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children, young people, parents and teachers are central to the conclusions and recommendations of *Denied a Future?*

## Who *Denied a Future?* is for

*Denied a Future?* comprises a Summary, an International Legislation Handbook and two volumes of country reports. The International Legislation Handbook describes the international and regional legal frameworks guaranteeing the right to education of children of minority groups. Volume One of the country reports covers South-Eastern Europe and Volume Two covers Central and Western Europe. There are summaries for each country report as well as volume summaries to allow for quick reference and ease of navigation. The Summary identifies the main findings of the 14 country reports, Save the Children's conclusions and recommendations for future action.

We expect different types of reader to use *Denied a Future?* in different ways. For international and locally based NGOs, we hope it will be useful as an advocacy tool. In the International Legislation Handbook, the relevant laws and articles are explained and analysed, and the "control mechanisms" related to them are described. Each country report contains a section outlining the international legal instruments that have been ratified in that country. As a practical advocacy tool, *Denied a Future?* contains most of the information needed by NGOs that are interested in using international law to lobby for change at national and community level.

We hope that *Denied a Future?* will be widely used as a planning and briefing resource by staff and volunteers of intergovernmental agencies and international NGOs. The individual country reports provide an overview of law and policy, and also a detailed description of the situation in schools and communities and the views of pupils, parents and teachers. They also provide information about the different Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities, their histories and the languages they speak. Within each country report there is a set of recommendations that Save the Children believes should be the focus for further attention and action.

We hope that policy-makers will find *Denied a Future?* a useful source of information about developments in other European countries. A great deal of good practice has been developed that can be scaled up and built upon. Although some of the country reports are critical of the records of governments to date, the intent in producing *Denied a Future?* is constructive.



We are aware that there are significant financial and other barriers impeding policy implementation and also that a number of positive initiatives are underway, but have been instituted so recently that it is too early to discern results. Our aim in producing *Denied a Future?* is to demonstrate where governments need to focus their efforts because their actions are such an important part of the solution. However, the country reports also indicate where action is needed by professionals, practitioners, NGOs, community leaders and activists.

### The limitations of *Denied a Future?*

We should acknowledge from the outset that *Denied a Future?* is not the final word in the issue of the right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. In some countries, it has proved difficult to get reliable information.

However, in cases where we believed there was a possibility of bias, or where we were given information that was contentious or possibly out of date, we commissioned additional research and sought alternative views. We have not succeeded in getting as much information as we would have liked about how a child's gender influences decisions about education. Also, the important issue of labour-market discrimination falls outside the parameters of this report.

*Denied a Future?* presents a "snapshot" in a dynamic period. Although every effort has been made by the project's co-ordinators to ensure that the information is up to date, it is possible that, even in the few months between conducting research and going to print, new policies or initiatives will have been introduced. This is to be welcomed. We hope that the existence of *Denied a Future?* will make it easier for people to identify where and how things are changing for the better.

## How we selected countries for *Denied a Future?*

A number of people have asked us how we selected the 14 countries that feature in the *Denied a Future?* report. Save the Children's UK and Europe Programme works in the United Kingdom and South-Eastern Europe. For our own purposes we were, of course, particularly interested in the situation in those countries. We wanted to include reports from other member states of the European Union in order to draw attention to issues which need to be addressed there too – the denial of the right to education of children who are labelled as “Gypsies” is often wrongly perceived as a problem limited to Central and South-Eastern Europe. Partner organisations in Italy, Finland and Greece were able to assist us in producing reports for these countries. Unfortunately, with the time and resources available to us, we were unable to extend the scope of the report to, for example, Spain, Germany, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia, the Baltic States or Russia. We have included reports on the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary because, in these countries, segregation of Roma/Gypsy children and the practice of educating them in special schools for the mentally disabled present particular challenges.

## Who are the children in the photographs?

Most of the photographs that appear in *Denied a Future?* were taken in Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Hungary, Italy, Serbia, Romania and Wales in the summer of 2001. The reports also feature images from the photographer's archive of work from other countries including the Czech Republic, England, Poland and Slovakia.

As a rule, the children and young people were closely involved in directing how they would be portrayed in the photographs. In many cases, they chose to be photographed alongside things and people that were important to them: brothers and sisters, friends, pets, toys, places where they play and work.

The photographer, Poppy Szaybo, has worked as a documentary photographer and organiser of cultural and educational projects with Roma/Gypsies and Travellers throughout Europe for over a decade. She extends her thanks to all of the communities she visited in summer 2001 for their kindness, hospitality and generosity. In particular, she would like to thank the young people that she worked with and photographed for sharing with her their humour, energy, vitality and warmth, making *Denied a Future?* an unforgettable and inspiring project with which to be involved.

# Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education in Europe: an overview of the issues

## Introduction

The people to whom the term “Roma/Gypsy and Traveller” has been attached represent a unique phenomenon in European history and culture. From their first appearance in the historical record over 600 years ago, the relationship between Roma/Gypsies and mainstream societies has been marked by many tensions and changes. Roma/Gypsies are now widely considered to be Europe’s largest ethnic minority. The continental population is estimated to be between 7 to 8.5 million and rising. There are Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities in practically every European country.<sup>2</sup>

This report examines educational policy and provision in relation to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people from a child rights perspective. Access to formal education is more important than ever in enabling individuals to maintain and develop living standards in Europe’s increasingly knowledge-based economy. Formal education also plays an important role in promoting awareness of the diversity within society, as well as the recognition of our common humanity, providing the basis for our concepts of democracy and human rights. This report reflects growing concern in recent years about the failures of educational provision to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people. In 1984 the European Commission instigated research into Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education, on the basis of which in 1989 the Council and Ministers of Education passed Resolution 89/C 153/02 “On School Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children”.

As its title suggests, the 1989 Resolution was drafted with reference to the circumstances and needs of the more mobile Roma/Gypsy and Traveller populations of the member states of the European Union (EU) at that time. The emphasis was on developing innovative practice to meet the needs of children and young people whose lifestyles presented practical and cultural challenges to service providers. The Resolution sought improvement rather than the achievement of any final aim and did not refer directly to rights. Over the following decade dramatic changes occurred both in terms of how Roma/Gypsies were perceived (to include the whole European diaspora), and in terms of how practice was developed, including the increasing importance of a human rights framework. This report aims to provide a basis for ongoing research into the relationship between rights and Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education. By gathering data on educational services and initiatives specifically targeted at Roma/Gypsies, and by compiling a summary of relevant national and international legal instruments, the report will provide a resource for all those involved in the field of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education, including authorities with statutory duties to make appropriate provision. The need for such work is underlined by the recognition that the report comes at a time of rapid social, economic, cultural and political change, not only for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people, but also for European society as a whole.

## East and West

Since 1989, policy approaches towards the overwhelming majority of Roma/Gypsies and their access to public services, including education, have undergone dramatic changes as a result of the collapse of communism and the process of European reintegration. Over three-quarters of the continent's Roma/Gypsies live in the former communist countries of Central and South-Eastern Europe. There are considerable differences between Roma/Gypsies in Central and Eastern Europe, Roma/Gypsies in South-Eastern Europe and Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in

Western Europe in terms of their demographic distribution, and their historical, social, economic and cultural circumstances. Yet such divisions in themselves are arbitrary; there are just as many differences within countries as there are between countries.

## Cultural and linguistic diversity

The inclusion of Roma/Gypsies from Central and South-Eastern Europe into European-wide policy initiatives emphasises all the more the need for policy-makers to consider the full range of



cultural and linguistic diversities that exist. Central and South-Eastern Europe contain the overwhelming majority of Romani speakers in the whole of Europe, yet Romani speakers account for only around 40 per cent of Roma/Gypsies in the region. Furthermore, native Romani speakers use a wide variety of dialects. Most Roma/Gypsies speak the language of the surrounding society as their main language, and different communities represent different stages of the transition from Romani to mainstream languages as mother tongue. Although the majority of Roma/Gypsies in Central and South-Eastern Europe live in the countryside, the region also has more and larger urban Roma/Gypsy populations than Western Europe. Finally, historically the relatively greater integration of Roma/Gypsies in the former communist states means that Roma/Gypsies in Central and South-Eastern Europe have been more exposed to majority cultural norms than their West European counterparts.

## A growing population

Roma/Gypsy populations in both parts of Europe differ in terms of their absolute and relative size. The often subjective nature of ethno-cultural identities, combined with the diversity and spread of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities, means that population figures should be treated as estimates. It is broadly accepted that approximately 4.2 million Roma/Gypsies live in eight Central and Eastern European states (which have a total population of 56 million). Only 1.5 million Roma/Gypsies live in the five

largest Western European states (which have populations of between 30 and 80 million each) – over half of these live in Spain.

## The context of transition

As well as considerable differences in wealth between the two halves of the continent, differences in economic development also have a major effect on the opportunities of Roma/Gypsy people and populations. Whereas Western European states generally allowed Roma/Gypsies and Travellers to develop traditional practices (for example, as private traders or seasonal farm labourers), in the communist states Roma/Gypsies were usually targeted for relatively low-skilled employment within the centrally planned economy, in both agriculture and industry.

The transition in Central and South-Eastern Europe to a market economy has dramatically undermined the formerly state-owned extractive, manufacturing and agricultural concerns that provided the main employment opportunities for most Roma/Gypsies in this region. The result has been widespread long-term structural unemployment and a deepening dependence on dwindling state benefits and services. Economic difficulties for Roma/Gypsies are exacerbated by slow economic recovery in some countries, coupled with the emergence of widening gaps between the more- and less-developed areas both within countries and between Northern Europe and South, East and Central Europe.

Estimated size of Roma/Gypsy populations and GDP per head in selected EU and post-communist countries

Country	Total population	GDP per head (\$US)	Roma/Gypsy population (est.)	Roma/Gypsy % of total population
<b>EU members</b>				
France	59.3m	\$23,000	340,000	0.6%
Germany	82.8m	\$22,700	130,000	0.2%
Italy	57.6m	\$21,400	100,000	0.2%
Spain	40.0m	\$17,300	800,000	2.0%
UK	59.5m	\$21,800	120,000	0.2%
<b>Post-communist states</b>				
Bulgaria	7.8m	\$4,300	800,000	10.3%
Czech Republic	10.3m	\$11,700	300,000	2.9%
Hungary	10.1m	\$7,800	600,000	5.9%
Romania	22.4m	\$3,900	2,000,000	8.9%
Slovakia	5.4m	\$8,500	520,000	9.6%

Sources: Jean-Pierre Liégeois and Nicolae Gheorghe, *Roma/Gypsies: A European Minority*, Minority Rights Group International, London, 1995; *CIA Fact Book*, 2000

## The importance of children

Within this wider context, the situation of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children and young people is particularly important. Throughout Europe national populations are in greater or lesser decline and there is growing concern about the implications of an increasingly ageing population. However, the age profile of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities diverges considerably from the national average in many states. A combination of higher fertility and lower life expectancy means that young people constitute a majority in most Roma/Gypsy

communities and the percentage of Roma/Gypsies of school age is greater than that of the Roma/Gypsies as a whole within national populations. Addressing the educational disadvantages of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children is therefore a matter of particular urgency in order, firstly, to ensure that a growing number of individuals can enjoy their human rights and equality of opportunity, secondly, to contribute to the development of Roma/Gypsy communities and cultures, and finally, to ensure the economic development and social cohesion of Europe and its individual countries.

In Western Europe the main challenge has been to connect mobile or socially isolated Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children to the education system. By contrast, in Central and Eastern Europe the vast majority of Roma/Gypsies are settled, with most children enrolled in primary school (although this is not necessarily the case in South Eastern Europe). The question for many countries in Central and Eastern Europe is more one of the quality of education received rather than one of access. Currently about half of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in the EU never attend school, although the situation varies from country to country and between communities. In Central and Eastern Europe attendance rates (especially in primary school) are at least 50 per cent higher, although again with wide variations within the region.

## A European issue

In spite of such huge diversities among Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities across Europe, one feature is more or less ubiquitous: the persistence of prejudice and discrimination. This in turn reinforces their relative lack of success within mainstream institutions and processes and, in particular, in formal education. This focuses attention on the importance of tackling anti-Roma/Gypsy and Traveller prejudice. However, there are a variety of other factors that also affect the access of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people to education. This demands that policy-makers be aware of the diversity that exists within the pan-European Roma/Gypsy and Traveller diaspora. This has proved particularly difficult to achieve given the inherent tendency in

all policy-making to over-simplify issues in order to make the policy-making task both manageable and cost-effective.

During the Cold War division of Europe, policy towards Roma/Gypsies was, almost exclusively, framed within national boundaries. Since 1990 there has been a dramatic increase in the levels of attention and in the number of initiatives focusing on Roma/Gypsies drawn up by supra-national European institutions. Their number is so great (and rapidly increasing) that the timeline (see pages 14 and 15) indicates only the main developments explicitly relating to or directly affecting Roma/Gypsies.

European institutions with a pan-European membership (Council of Europe, OSCE) have shown particular interest in Roma/Gypsies. To date, their activities have largely centred on information gathering, including the establishment of offices to provide continual monitoring and information exchange on Roma/Gypsy-related developments within individual countries. EU activity has been divided between the provision of ongoing support for initiatives aimed at improving the educational opportunities of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children and voicing concerns about the human rights situation of Roma/Gypsies in candidate countries within negotiations on EU enlargement.

More broadly, the OSCE and the Council of Europe have been active in developing the concept of minority rights and proactive engagement to encourage the preservation and promotion of distinctive minority languages, cultures and identities. The EU has concentrated

**Timeline of main European initiatives aimed at Roma/Gypsies and Travellers**

<b>1969</b>	Council of Europe Recommendation 563 (1969) "On the Situation of Gypsies and other Travellers in Europe".
<b>1975</b>	Council of Europe Resolution (75)13 "Containing Recommendations on the Social Situation of Nomads in Europe".
<b>1983</b>	Council of Europe Recommendation R(83)1 "On Stateless Nomads and Nomads of Undetermined Nationality".
<b>1984</b>	Resolution C172/153 "On the Situation of Gypsies in the Community" was passed in the European Parliament. It recommended that national governments of member states co-ordinate their approach to the reception of Gypsies.
<b>1987</b>	EU Report "School provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children". The report was extended until 1989 to take account of new members states (Spain, Portugal, Greece). The full report was published as "School Provision for Ethnic Minorities: The Gypsy Paradigm" in 1998 (Interface Collection).
<b>1989</b>	EU Council Resolution No. 89/C 153/02 (No. C 153/3) "On School Provision for Gypsy and Traveller Children".
<b>1991</b>	Paris Charter for a New Europe (CSCE) – which made specific reference to the need to address the "particular problems" of Roma/Gypsies and also developed a framework of explicit minority rights.
<b>1992</b>	Office of High Commissioner on National Minorities established in the Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe (CSCE) (since renamed the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe – OSCE) with responsibility for monitoring and resolving potential ethnic conflicts. The High Commissioner has taken particular interest in the situation of Roma/Gypsies.
<b>1992</b>	Council of Europe European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – provisions of which may be applied in respect of "non-territorial languages" such as Romani.
<b>1993</b>	High Commissioner on National Minorities (CSCE) first report on "Roma (Gypsies) in the CSCE region".
<b>1993</b>	Council of Europe Recommendation 1203 (1993) "On the Situation of Roma in Europe".
<b>1993</b>	Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities in Europe, Resolution 249 (1993) "On Gypsies in Europe: the Role and Responsibilities of Local and Regional Authorities".

more on anti-discrimination and equal opportunities measures. Overall, in the 1990s, there has been a significant increase of interest in issues of racism and inequality and a number of fora have emerged through which interested parties, including Roma/Gypsies and their organisations, can contribute to debate and policy-making at the European level.

### Information and policy-making

The way that Roma/Gypsies are viewed by policy-makers shapes how policy towards them is formed and implemented. The current lack of success of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers within mainstream educational systems reflects a long history of governments failing to adopt appropriate and effective policies towards Roma/Gypsies in

**Timeline** *continued*

<b>1994</b>	Appointment of a Co-ordinator of Activities on Roma/Gypsies, Directorate of Social and Economic Affairs – Council of Europe.
<b>1995</b>	Council of Europe – Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities – requiring states to develop a proactive approach to enabling minority communities to develop and promote their culture and identity.
<b>1995</b>	Specialist Group on Roma/Gypsies established in the European Committee on Migration (CDMG) – Council of Europe.
<b>1996</b>	Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues established in the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights – OSCE. The Contact Point's role is to co-ordinate Roma/Gypsy-related initiatives within European institutions, to monitor relevant legislative and political developments in individual countries and to promote Roma/Gypsy self-organisation/representation.
<b>1997</b>	EU – Amsterdam Treaty, Article 13 of which provides the basis for the EU (and member states) to develop initiatives aimed at combating racial discrimination and promoting equal opportunities.
<b>1997</b>	Accession negotiation for membership of the EU opened with Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Bulgaria, Romania and Slovenia. The situation of Roma/Gypsies is dealt with under Political Criteria, and the EU's annual "Opinions on Progress towards Accession" includes specific reference to the situation of Roma/Gypsy minorities in individual countries.
<b>1998</b>	EU – European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia established to monitor development in race relations throughout Europe, publishing annual reports on each of the member states of the Council of Europe. Since its inception, it has taken a special interest in the situation of Roma/Gypsies.
<b>1999</b>	EU adopts "Guiding principles for improving the situation of Roma" in Candidate Countries that includes a large number of recommendations in the field of education.
<b>2000</b>	EU Race Directive 2000/43/EC, making provisions for equal treatment, regardless of ethnic origin, binding on member states.
<b>2000</b>	Second report by the High Commissioner on National Minorities (OSCE) "On the Situation of Roma and Sinti in the OSCE Area".

general. This failure is rooted in the inability and, in most cases, the reluctance of policy-makers and decision-takers to fully appreciate the history, circumstances, aspirations and capabilities of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people. There are few, if any, other population groups in Europe against which regular racist pronouncements and actions still pass largely unremarked. The tendency has been for Roma/Gypsies to be

seen as "the problem" rather than the key to the solution, and it is still unusual to come across acknowledgements that "the problem" could be the outcome of personal or institutional racism or well-meaning but ill-advised policies. The consequences of failed governmental initiatives have been deepening misunderstanding, fear and suspicion, contributing to the generation and reproduction of prejudice on both sides.



The end result is frequently to apportion blame to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people themselves for policies and practices that were derived without any consultation with, or involvement of, their end users.

### Problems of accountability

Being aware of the reasons for past policy mistakes may help to avoid their repetition. In recent years this process has been greatly facilitated by the unprecedented degree of self-organisation displayed by Roma/Gypsy and

Traveller people, and their desire to engage in decision-making processes that affect them. There are still significant obstacles to the development of reliable mechanisms of accountability between those who represent (especially at national and international levels) and those who are represented. Every activity in which Roma/Gypsies and Travellers come into contact with mainstream institutions (such as education) should have a basis of dialogue and consultation. It is increasingly recognised (at least in Central and Eastern Europe) that government policy cannot be implemented without the consent of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people.

Underpinning this is the need to develop a dialogue that does not reinforce a Roma/Gypsy elite, but that reflects their diversity. The question is not only to what extent decision-takers invite and understand the views of Roma/Gypsies, but also to what extent they take into account these representations when decisions are made. It is important that supra-national institutions, governments, NGOs and other organisations are able to evaluate the growing data on Roma/Gypsies and their circumstances in order to avoid joining the long list of those who have failed to find an answer to the “Gypsy Question”.

### A “common European home”

The movement towards the greater internationalisation of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller policy began in 1984 with the passage in the European Parliament of Resolution C172/153 “On the Situation of Gypsies in the Community”, which recommended that governments of member states co-ordinate their approach to the reception of Gypsies. The collapse of communism and the continuing process of EU enlargement have served to increase the diversity of legal instruments which can be deployed in relation to the education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children and young people. Indeed, the creation of a “common European home” could have particular significance for Roma/Gypsies. By making Roma/Gypsies and Travellers citizens of a multicultural Europe rather than minorities within nation states, they may finally be able to overcome some of the many problems they face. However, at the same time, the debate on EU enlargement has created scope for some national

governments to seek to evade their responsibilities towards their Roma/Gypsy populations by portraying Roma/Gypsies as a stateless “European problem” for whom no national government need take responsibility.

### The rights framework

In addition to the current context of changing policy approaches to Roma/Gypsies, this report is being compiled at a time when large-scale political changes in Europe are creating new fora and an enhanced role for the discourse on human rights. For much of the post-war period, international law and the domestic legislation of European states have dealt with the rights of ethno-cultural minorities by guaranteeing their right not to be discriminated against. Policy affecting Roma/Gypsies – including education policy – was developed and implemented within individual states and is therefore subject to domestic political and cultural considerations. Since they had little political influence at this level, Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people and their interests were rarely taken into account.

European enlargement has strengthened the position of international agreements with regard to domestic legislation through the process of legal harmonisation. In addition, new bodies have been established to monitor political developments within states and to check compliance with international agreements. In 1993 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe endorsed Recommendation 1203 “On the situation of Roma in Europe”, which explicitly requested that governments

implement international agreements relating to Roma/Gypsies. Offices have been established within the Council of Europe (Specialist Group) and the OSCE (Contact Point) to monitor and advise on policy towards Roma/Gypsies against a rights background. Furthermore, the OSCE's High Commissioner on National Minorities has conducted two detailed investigations into the circumstances of Roma/Gypsies (1993 and 2000). In respect of post-communist states (many of which have large Roma/Gypsy populations) their aspirations to join the EU are conditioned by the Copenhagen Criteria which demand the "stability of institutions guaranteeing democracy, the rule of law, human rights and respect for and protection of minorities".

## Minority rights

As a result of these developments there are now accessible institutions, charged with collating data and facilitating good policy and practice across Europe, working to a more rights-oriented agenda. The process of Europeanisation also means that more Roma/Gypsies are able to promote their interests at a wide range of international fora and may seek remedies at the European Court of Human Rights.

A key change in the rights discourse has been the development of special rights for ethno-cultural groups, known collectively as minority rights. The degree to which minority rights will evolve, and the extent of their application with regard to Roma/Gypsies, is a matter of conjecture and will be decided ultimately by how useful they are perceived to be in different local contexts and at

the regional (European) level. In 1991 minority rights achieved detailed expression in the Paris Charter (CSCE/OSCE). This was followed, in 1995, by the Council of Europe's Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, which implicitly recognises minorities as collective entities with legal entitlements. Given the wider debates about Roma/Gypsies, and most recently Travellers, as ethnic minorities, minority rights have an important bearing on Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education.

The primary justification of minority rights lies in the acknowledgement that the right to not be discriminated against has not ended discrimination. Their justification also lies in the recognition that minorities possess certain characteristics that are not dealt with by anti-discrimination and which often require additional institutional or legal support to maintain. Whereas anti-discrimination rights seek to make sure that members of minorities can access mainstream resources, services and individual remedies, minority rights focus on enabling the minority community to develop and reproduce itself as a distinct cultural community.

Extensive linguistic and cultural diversity and the wide variation in relationships with extra-communal institutions, societies and cultures that characterise Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities pose fundamental challenges to the development of a distinct cultural community. However, it is precisely because the Roma/Gypsy diaspora exhibits diverse circumstances and needs that minority rights may well prove to be the most useful instrument in addressing a particular issue or situation.



## Human rights

Human rights mechanisms have also dealt with rights for Roma/Gypsies and Travellers. The UN Commission on Human Rights, the UN Sub-Commission for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights and its Working Group on Minorities are examples of fora where the issue of Roma/Gypsy rights have been made explicit. For example, in 1999 the Sub-Commission entrusted one of its members to prepare a working paper on the human rights problems and protection of Roma/Gypsies. In addition the reports of the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance have frequently referred to discrimination encountered by Roma/Gypsies and Travellers.

## Child rights

Finally, the existence of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child and its almost universal ratification by governments across the globe has helped to reduce the invisibility of children and establish their value in their own right. The establishment of formal mechanisms to monitor child rights and in particular the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child have been instrumental in holding countries to account on a number of issues, some of them specific to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children.

## A voice for Roma/Gypsies and Travellers

The development of appropriate and effective policy and other initiatives targeting Roma/Gypsy and Traveller education has been facilitated by improved channels of communication between Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people and mainstream society resulting from the unprecedented growth in formal Roma/Gypsies self-organisation. Since 1970, five World Gypsy Congresses have been held, with a continually expanding number of affiliated organisations. Since 1979 the International Romany Union has enjoyed Consultative Status at the UN (enhanced in 1993). European institutions have proved less enthusiastic about supporting the establishment of a permanent representative body for Roma/Gypsies; however, the Specialist Group and the Contact Point (see page 15) encourage both national and international Roma/Gypsy and Traveller organisations to play a greater role in decision-making.

At the national level, the steady growth in the number of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller organisations in Western Europe since the 1960s has been enhanced by Roma/Gypsies in Central and South-Eastern Europe exploring new opportunities to adopt a public role with the development of civil society in this region and the end of one-party political systems. Roma/Gypsy and Traveller representation currently plays a mediator role, allowing Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people to transmit information up to Government as well as providing policy-makers with a means of disseminating information and

explaining policy to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities. The balance in these relations varies according to the political context, ie, the degree of political authority that Roma/Gypsy and Traveller representation can command in any situation, and the extent to which policy-makers are interested in taking on board what Roma/Gypsies might have to say.

Decisions taken at local government level often have direct significance for Roma/Gypsies and Travellers, especially in the field of education. Local authorities usually have the primary role in allocating resources and monitoring the quality of educational provision. As Roma/Gypsies and Travellers perceive the need to develop mechanisms for representing their view to local decision-makers, the response of authorities ranges from conflictual to co-opting. Roma self-organisation can also take cultural or religious forms and manifests itself within the activities of mainstream NGOs and other organisations. The development of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller media throughout Europe also provides means by which Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people and mainstream actors can establish a dialogue and aim for greater mutual understanding.

Finally, there are the Roma/Gypsy and Traveller individuals themselves, including children and young people. The arena of education is naturally favourable to identifying and establishing dialogue with those targeted by educational initiatives. In respect of education, it is particularly important to identify, understand and take account of the views of those most directly affected by education: children themselves.

Therefore, the *Denied a Future?* report includes many direct quotations from school pupils and other young people in which they explain their experiences and aspirations.

The diversity of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers, their long history and the continued pervasiveness of anti-Roma/Gypsy and Traveller prejudice means that governments and NGOs must be aware of the need to establish confidence in

themselves and their activities among Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities. Such confidence is best achieved through the representatives of mainstream bodies demonstrating their ability to understand the concerns of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people, including those of children, and to establish a consensus on how Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people can enjoy their educational and other rights.



# Summary of findings and conclusions

Save the Children believes that education must be of a high standard for all children, regardless of their ethnic or cultural background. This means education that is inclusive, responsive, relevant, developmentally appropriate and participatory.

The right of children to receive an education carries a heavily implied obligation on adults, and in particular upon state agencies, to deliver it and to ensure that it is relevant to the needs of individual children and of sound quality.

The state, by providing education services, can in part compensate for disadvantages and inequalities that can arise from, for example, poverty or difficult family circumstances. In reality, the educational playing field is not always a level one due to historical legacies of structural inequality and discrimination. The school, as the place where the community's younger citizens are introduced to the world outside their immediate family, is particularly influential in shaping children's world views, expectations and aspirations. Thus education systems are among governments' most important and influential means of promoting respect for citizens of different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. However, schools can also be sites of confrontation where different values and world views collide and where majority values can undermine all others.

Therefore, the *Denied a Future?* country reports, while acknowledging the importance of education gained within the family and community, focus on the record of governments in providing education services in line with obligations described under their own, and international, law and policy.

The reports principally describe access to and the quality of state-funded education. They investigate factors such as the availability of school places, the existence of financial barriers to school attendance and environmental factors such as concerns about children's personal safety when travelling to school. Our assessment of quality includes material comparisons, for example, whether Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children have the same access to equipment and facilities as children from other ethnic backgrounds do and whether the equipment and facilities are of the same quality. We also examine the quality and relevance of curricula and teaching practice and the extent to which these are designed or modified with the needs and aspirations of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in mind. Underpinning this is an exploration of teachers' expectations of Roma and Traveller pupils and of parents' and children's experiences and expectations of education. We examine what constitutes good practice and the extent to which this is being applied in public education provision throughout Europe.

## The right to education

“School is good for the future, we can achieve something.”

Roma girl, 12 years old, Croatia

Education is both a fundamental human right in itself and a means of realising other rights. It is a key that can open many doors. The denial of the right to education may affect the enjoyment of other rights, since the consequence of an incomplete education may be to render civil and

political rights – such as freedom of expression or the right to political participation – devoid of substance and meaning.

Being able to take up the right to education provides, in the absence of other limiting factors such as labour market discrimination, a route to access an adequate standard of living. It opens access to the type of knowledge required by individuals to develop all their faculties, to make choices, to develop political and social awareness and to take clear-sighted decisions in order to live a dignified life. Above all, education, in the broadest sense of the word<sup>3</sup> imparts ability to individuals themselves to access these wider benefits.

“Education has not cancelled out my Traveller identity. It gives you more of a chance to be independent in life ... It is possible to have an education and be a Traveller.”

Traveller, UK

However, even when education is defined in terms of rights, its inviolability is not guaranteed. Legislative changes have a negligible impact on the lives of individuals without the mechanisms and resources that are needed to enact them.

In practice, political, economic, ideological and cultural barriers exist that prevent particular groups of children from accessing their right to education. The availability of resources and the relative position of education in the hierarchy of cultural, social and economic priorities of state and family can either compromise children's educational rights or promote them.

“I cannot go to high school because I will have to work as soon as I finish primary school. I would have liked to learn more.”

Roma boy, 9 years old, Greece

“You leave school at the age of 11 or 12 ... then you are expected to act like a man ... You would be mocked by the others ... for wearing a school bag after the age of 14.”

Traveller boy, Northern Ireland

“I never attended school. Therefore I am trying to have my children regularly attend school.”

Roma parent, Bosnia and Herzegovina

“I do not want to be anything. I know how to make bread and things like that. I think this is enough.”

Roma girl, 9 years old, not enrolled in school, Croatia

“I have two kids and they are just finishing 8th grade, but only one can go to high school. It's too expensive.”

Roma mother, Hungary

Over-stretched and under-resourced teachers and school directors have experienced successive waves of reforms in recent years and are aware that extra demands placed upon them are rarely accompanied by the resources and support that they need if they are to implement change successfully.

“With such a small budget we can't achieve anything, equal opportunities are just empty words.”

Kindergarten teacher, Hungary

In many European countries, the claim of minority children upon available resources is not held to be as legitimate as that of children from the majority:

“We have such a horrible school. Others have lovely schools ... they have central heating and beautiful desks.”

Roma child, Romania

“I don’t think anyone in S sends their child to pre-school ... there is no pre-school here ... so how can a Roma child living in S be compared with his non-Roma brother or sister?”

Romani teacher, Macedonia

“They are being educated according to the shortened programme, similar to the one for those with learning difficulties, and then, later on, they have problems if they want to enrol in secondary school. Children are told this is best for them ... we feel powerless.”

Roma parent, Croatia

Efforts to claim educational rights on equal terms with the majority do not always have popular support. Children are often the messengers who convey the full force of their parents’ prejudices to their minority peers.

“I like going to school but the other children don’t want us here, they tease us. I want to become a teacher and teach all the children to read and write. If all of us Roma knew how to read and write, no one would tease us.”

Roma girl, 10 years old, Greece

“I tried once, two years ago. I lasted two weeks ... the Albanian kids attacked us ... I’ll start school again now and I’ll take it to the end, I want to be a doctor.”

Ashkali<sup>4</sup> boy, 12 years old, attending pre-school orientation classes in Kosovo

## What constitutes a “relevant education?”

“If I didn’t learn, I wouldn’t know anything.”

Roma child, Romania

There is an ongoing debate in Europe and beyond as to what constitutes a “relevant education”. Education systems have many stakeholders and so the question arises: “relevant to whom?” The educational rights, needs and preferences of children are often superseded by the immediate economic needs of their households, the cultural or religious preferences of their communities or the economic and ideological profiles of their governments.

The provision of education by states is influenced by cultural, political and ideological contexts. Widespread consensus on the desirability of “Education for All” is, after all, a relatively recent development. Only a few decades ago it was still widely held in many European countries that higher education for young women was not only unnecessary but also, to a large extent, undesirable. As well as imparting essential skills and values that are believed to be desirable in citizens, education is a means of promoting the political, social and economic agendas of governments to their youngest citizens. Examples

include the teaching of history, religious education, human rights and citizenship education and the imparting of views and values such as respect for people from other cultural backgrounds or its opposite: a sense of national superiority and, in extreme cases, xenophobia.

Change in education is continually needed because education systems must constantly adapt to the changing needs of individuals and society. The purpose of education is to prepare children and young people to be active citizens. To do this, it must develop the potential of children, encouraging them to think and reflect so that they can deal with situations that schools could not have envisaged.

The education process is most effective when it draws upon the views of all people who are clients and consumers of the education system, not just those of government officials, politicians and professionals. However, the bureaucracy that is necessary for the functioning of a public education system on a national scale often leads to rigidity and inflexibility.

A significant factor that has led to inappropriate and unsuccessful policies with regard to education provision for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children has been a failure to appreciate the diversity of these communities, their contexts and histories and, crucially, the corrosive effect of prejudice that has existed for decades if not centuries. The process of policy development inevitably moves from an appreciation of the circumstances of individuals, families and communities to the

derivation of a set of general principles and measures. However, in the case of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities, this process of deriving general principles seems to have been informed, in many cases, not by an understanding of the circumstances of families and communities, but by a set of fundamentally negative assumptions and expectations.

“In fact, the government does not know the situation of Romany children in the educational system ... if you ask the government for details ... you only get an answer that they don't know ... . [Only recently] has the government been collecting data on the needs of Romany children through questionnaires sent to schools.”

Education Expert, Slovakia

For many of the Roma/Gypsy and Traveller parents interviewed for the *Denied a Future?* reports, a relevant education was, first and foremost, one that would lead to the means to earn a living.

“... to get somewhere, they have to learn. If you look around, you can't even get a job as a cleaner with 8th grade now. It was different for my parents' generation.”

Roma father, Hungary

“I like going to school because it will help me find a job in the future.”

Roma boy, 8th grade, Italy

In this, their views coincide with those of the vast majority of Europeans concerned about their children's prospects in a rapidly changing economic environment. However, both parents and children were conscious of labour market discrimination that effectively closes off many employment options. Therefore, the expense and time involved in acquiring education might, ultimately, not bring any tangible benefits.

“Our grandfather always told him [my brother] not to go to school. He said the same thing to me too. He kept saying school was useless if you couldn't get a job afterwards.”  
Roma girl, 14 years old, Serbia

Some parents are not convinced that school is the best place for children to be educated, with the content being largely irrelevant.

“I probably learned 10 per cent of what I know at school. I learned from my parents and from reading.”  
Traveller, Scotland

And even when parents are convinced that attending school improves their children's life-chances, children who have grown up in an environment where there are few employment opportunities, even for the educated, may not share this view.

“Why do I need school? There are professors working at the marketplace ... just go and count them!”  
Roma boy, 16 years old, Bosnia and Herzegovina

However, other children who had grown up in areas with very high unemployment were firmly of the opinion that education would increase their options – if jobs were not available locally, qualifications would enable them to look further afield for employment opportunities.

“I would make education compulsory for all Roma and hold parents accountable for ensuring that their children attended school.”  
Roma university student, Romania

“I want to go to high school in Saudi Arabia and be a doctor there.”  
Ashkali boy, 13 years old, Kosovo

## The common European experience

Throughout Europe, regardless of their varying cultures, contexts and histories and of the qualities and abilities of the individual adults or children, Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities continue to encounter discrimination, lower-quality service provision and a lack of personal security, freedom of movement and choice. The absence of effective redress mechanisms leaves individuals disempowered and distrustful of official structures and institutions. In many communities, poverty exacerbates this powerlessness and increases the extent of social and economic isolation. Successive generations find themselves excluded from educational opportunity and trapped in insecure, marginal and low-paid employment.

### Discrimination and stereotyping

The discrimination encountered by Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in schools is often overt.

The Greece country report relates, for example, how Greek parents refused to send their children to the same school as Roma children. The UK report describes how Traveller pupils were placed in a separate room at a school's Christmas party. However, more subtle forms of institutionalised discrimination on the part of teachers and other educational professionals are equally damaging and manifest themselves in the widespread low expectations of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children and negative assumptions about their abilities and eagerness to learn. In a number of Central and Eastern European countries, teachers have responded to attempts to end segregated education by demanding extra pay to teach Roma children.

"I had a number of Gypsy friends at school. I saw how they were treated differently. They had to work harder to get anywhere and they would often be humiliated."

Young Hungarian

Throughout Europe, stereotypes are widely held about "The Gypsies". These are sometimes positive, often negative, but almost always based on prejudice. In a recent interview, the President of Slovakia stated, for example, that Roma children, given their poor living conditions, should be sent to boarding school, to be educated for "Well, music perhaps. They're very good at music you know."<sup>5</sup>

"... my teacher always wants me to sing for her, saying all Roma know how to sing."

Roma boy, 8 years old, Macedonia

"Many [parents] are today keeping their children at home because of fears for their safety as police gear up to evict the Travellers within days."

London *Evening Standard*, 5 June 2001

"Teachers have told the children that they may even have weapons. It's really worrying."

"I'm not happy about my girls going to school. You always hear rumours about Travellers making trouble and I don't want my kids going near them."

Parents quoted in the same article

News reporting tends to focus on criminality and violent behaviour or, when the emphasis is supposed to be on the positive, on musical or artistic ability. Within mainstream media, popular drama or fiction, it is highly unusual to come across portrayals of Roma/Gypsy or Traveller people as individuals who share many of the same concerns and aspirations as other community members. In fact, it is unusual to come across any portrayal of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people at all.

Children soon become aware that people outside their community regard them as different and in some way inferior.

"I'd like to be a pilot when I grow up. I hope people won't mind having a Roma driving the plane."

Roma boy, 10 years old, Montenegro



Why should we mind? And how is it that a child of 10 is already aware that we might?

There are a small number of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers represented among the professions, including lawyers, educationalists, politicians and activists who assisted Save the Children in producing this report. There is also an emerging generation of eloquent and committed young activists and journalists who are beginning to overturn many of the stereotypes that prevail in their own countries and Europe-wide. However, Roma/Gypsies and Travellers still remain largely invisible in the realm of formal politics and policy-making.

“The Gypsies are not interested in education” is a claim that is often deployed to avoid posing important questions about *why* parents are sometimes reluctant to put their children in the hands of “educators”. This argument also suggests

that Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities and cultures are somehow frozen in time and unchanging – a view that is as untrue of these communities as it is of any other community or culture in contemporary Europe.

“Lots of people who are Travellers say it’s wrong to send the kids to school. They are afraid they will lose their culture. But I knew the Travelling way of life was changing and kids would need an education for the future.”

Traveller parent, England

This widely held stereotype is not only untrue of very large numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller parents and children, it also conveniently dispenses with the need to examine the reasons behind some parents’ and children’s mistrust and cynicism. In the course of putting together the *Denied a Future?* report, parents and children in different countries and communities expressed a

wide range of views, as would be expected in any diverse group. Parents' views on formal schooling often reflected their own past experiences of education and whether these had been useful to them as adults.

Many children told us how much they enjoyed learning and were determined to continue in the face of various obstacles.

"It's nice to go to school, but there is no one in the family to wake me up in the morning. My mum goes to the market to work at 4 o'clock in the morning and I often oversleep. When I wake up it is already late and I feel ashamed ... so I will ask my mum to buy me an alarm clock."

Roma boy, 10 years old, Bosnia and Herzegovina

"I pick cherries, my mother washes them and in the evening, after school, I go and sell them [in order to] buy notebooks, shoes, clothes."

Roma girl, Romania

"When we came here three years ago, I thought I'd be going to a regular school. But I didn't have any report cards from my old school so I couldn't enrol. I work in the city mortuary chapel. My kid brother and me went around begging this summer."

Roma boy, 14 years old, attends adult education centre, Montenegro

"I was one of the best in my class ... I worked one week for money and the teachers told me I couldn't come back. But the school director said I do have the right to come back. I was loading cement. My family needed the money."

Egyptian boy, 14 years old, Kosovo

Sometimes, parents and children have opposing views on the place of education in their personal and family priorities.

"I have one girl who wants to go on to high school, but her parents won't let her. They want her to stay at home and claim benefits. These kids are victims of their parents."

Teacher, Slovakia

Although much is often made of intergenerational tensions, they occur only in some families. Many parents are supportive of their children's education – often in circumstances when the education system is not.

"I would like to be a teacher. My mum wants me to change schools because she says that is the only way for me to become a teacher."

Roma girl, 11 years old, Special School for the Mentally Handicapped, Czech Republic

"... of course it's worth studying. The more one knows the better."

Roma father, Hungary



The impact of discrimination on access to education

The prevailing stereotypes affect school policies towards Roma children, the content of “Roma curricula” and teachers’ expectations and behaviour.

“In school, Roma kids are treated differently from the others ... They do not try to teach our kids.”

Roma parent, Albania

Prejudice, reflected in stereotypes, often results in the physical segregation of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. At its worst, this is evidenced by the very large numbers of Roma children who are attending special schools for the mentally disabled in many Central and Eastern European countries, having been diagnosed as disabled on the basis of linguistically-biased IQ tests. Sometimes the IQ test is dispensed with and a recommendation from a teacher or school director suffices. Poverty forces parents unwittingly to collude with a practice that channels able young people into facilities that deprive them of the option to apply for high school, university or a managerial job. The Bulgaria country report describes the practice of special school staff “recruiting” in Roma neighbourhoods, explaining to parents how children who attend the special school will benefit from free food and school books that parents would otherwise have to pay for themselves.

In several countries, non-Roma parents have protested when there have been plans to merge a Roma and non-Roma school and insisted that the Roma children be taught in separate classes.

Even in integrated classrooms, the practice of seating Roma children at the back of the class is common.

“I do not know why they sit in a circle [in another school I visited]... their tables are in a circle. But in my classroom, I sit behind everybody else and sometimes I cannot see properly what the teacher is writing on the blackboard.”

Roma child, 7 years old, Macedonia

Bullying and harassment of Roma children by their non-Roma classmates, often encouraged by their parents, is reported with distressing frequency. It is evident that in many countries, teachers, however well intentioned, are neither trained nor adequately resourced to address incidents of persistent racist bullying. Appropriate support for teachers appears to be widely lacking in this regard.

“I was doing alright ... but when they found out who I was they started calling me names ... wouldn't want to sit beside me ... Whenever that happens you lose all your concentration on your work, on everything, because you lose confidence. You know something bad is going to happen day after day. I used to like to go to school when that wasn't happening, but when it was I didn't want to go back.”

Traveller, England

While the practice of overt negative portrayal in school books of the “Gypsy stole the Chicken” type has more or less ended, Roma and Traveller people are rarely visible in textbooks and resources

used in classrooms even when these contain portrayals of other minority groups. Although suitable texts exist, these are not widely distributed. There are still almost no references in mainstream curricula to the history of Roma peoples in Europe and their participation in key historical processes, despite a presence that dates back at least some 600 years.

Attempts to introduce curricula more suited to the needs of Roma children have been criticised by some Roma parents as misguided. In the Czech Republic, parents were bemused by the introduction of Roma song and dance classes for Roma children. They argued that rather than making children feel respected in the school environment, this would promote the perception that their children were somehow incapable of following a basic curriculum. The parents had actually been hoping for extra maths classes for their children. An occasional “cultural celebration” does not transform an excluding curriculum into an inclusive one.

#### Lower-quality service provision

“You can’t learn anything in this school, there aren’t enough rooms, we study in three shifts ... the teachers don’t care. Whoever manages to go to a Bulgarian school [ie, not one of the segregated “Gypsy schools”] almost always finishes it, while here only a few students finish the 8th grade every year ... they may ask you for money to send your child to a Bulgarian school.”

Roma student, 15 years old,  
Roma school, Bulgaria

The *Denied a Future?* country reports include both poorer and richer European countries. Regardless of the general state of the economy, state-funded education, housing, health and welfare services offered to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people or situated in neighbourhoods with a high Roma/Gypsy or Traveller population are of a lower standard than those offered to the majority population. This appears to be as true in most rich countries as it is in poor ones.

Examples cited in country reports include: the closure of schools and kindergartens in Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods while those in other neighbourhoods remain open; failure to include Roma/Gypsy settlements and stopping places in plans to extend transport and other infrastructure; and school buildings of visibly lower quality in Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods.

An additional quality concern is that many services are designed exclusively to meet the needs of the majority population. So, for example, even in areas with a high Roma population, there will be no Roma-speaking staff in the housing department, health centre, school or kindergarten. The reasons for this include labour market discrimination, educational requirements for applicants to public sector posts and institutional cultures that exclude community involvement. In addition, public service institutions often develop a culture that places the onus on service users themselves, however vulnerable or disadvantaged, to somehow avail themselves of the knowledge, language and other skills needed to engage with service provider bureaucracies. This can lead to a form of “rationing” that is discriminatory in outcome.

“... there are no books, no teachers who know the Romani language and few Roma who know how to write in their language, so it is not possible to find teachers ...”

NGO staff, Albania

Service provision that reflects bilingual and multilingual needs is also lacking. This is not exclusive to Roma/Gypsies. Equipping schools and teachers to work with children of different linguistic backgrounds will ultimately benefit very large numbers of children.

It is now quite widely accepted that children who learn to read and write in their mother tongue are able to apply these abilities to other languages with more ease than children whose first attempts at literacy are in a language that they do not understand or speak well.<sup>6</sup>

“I can understand Croatian well and I know what they say to me, but I do not know how to answer back so that they understand me, my words are not clear enough. This is very difficult for me because they think I know



nothing. That is not true. It is easier for me to do drawing then. But I would like to be a police woman and to be that I have to go to school.”

Roma girl, 9 years old, Croatia

Some factors that prevent access to educational facilities

Poor transport infrastructure between Roma settlements and major service and population centres limit children's education options in several ways. Parents have concerns about their children's physical safety when travelling long distances on poorly lit roads. Often there is no public transport link for several kilometres. The problem is exacerbated in bad weather when children from poorer families have no warm clothes or shoes and unsurfaced roads can be deep in mud. A survey of Roma children cited in the Croatia country report revealed that most of them take about an hour to walk to school.

The absence or closure of pre-school provision in Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods or near Traveller sites can lead to older girls being withdrawn from school to help with childcare when parents are working. It also leaves young mothers with no option other than to give up their education.

“I had a younger brother and both my parents were working, so there was no one to take care of him. I didn't go to school regularly so I stopped altogether. I regret that I can't go to a regular school now. I wish we could have an opportunity to go to high school and then get good jobs.”

“I had the same problem. I had to look after my younger sister. I completed six grades back then and I left six years ago. I hope this project carries on.”

Interview with two Egyptian women, 21 years old, attending “catch-up” classes, Kosovo

Most school systems in Europe expect children to do large amounts of additional schoolwork at home. Children living in poor quality and overcrowded housing, in the worst cases without water or electricity, find it difficult, if not impossible, to do homework. Their disadvantage increases as they get older and need time and a place to study and prepare for exams.

Itinerancy is an important feature of the working lives of many Roma/Gypsy and Traveller families across Europe. Some families travel only in the summer, for seasonal work; others do so all year round. This aspect of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller life presents particular challenges to education systems designed for settled populations. Both the UK and Romanian country reports provide examples of how public education providers are seeking to address these challenges.

The absence of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller staff in education services contributes to the sense of marginalisation as well as causing practical difficulties due, for example, to staff's inability to communicate with parents and pupils and ignorance of cultural preferences.

Lack of personal security, freedom of movement and choice

“to ensure separation between the [Traveller] community and our pupils, we have created a ‘buffer zone’ across which children may not stray.”

Poster in English school, quoted in the London *Evening Standard*, 5 June 2001.

While lack of personal security is at its most extreme in the case of Roma, Egyptian and Ashkali in Kosovo, violent attacks continue to be directed at individuals and neighbourhoods by neo-nazi groups throughout Central and Eastern Europe. Harassment and verbal abuse are part of the daily experience of many Roma and Gypsies/Travellers in Western Europe too. For Travellers in the UK and nomadic communities elsewhere in Europe, forced eviction, the lack of secure sites and stopping places, and hostility on the part of the settled population interfere with children’s school attendance.

“... with their dogs they [neighbours] made it uncomfortable for us to go to school.”

Egyptian girl, Kosovo

“I was woken up by the police ... smashing my house with all my family’s things inside even my clothes and my school bag. How can I go to school now?”

Roma youth describing forced eviction, Italy

The impact of lack of security on education

“In school, our kids have been beaten up and now they are afraid to go to school. Some of the children here go to school, but most of them have stopped.”

Roma parent, Albania

If parents fear for their children’s safety, they will keep their children at home. They will avoid sending their child to school if there are no secure transport arrangements. They will opt for the nearest school or a school where there are a large number of Roma pupils rather than a school that will offer their child the most appropriate education. In some cases parents will opt to send their child to a special school for children with learning disabilities because there are other Roma pupils there, even if their child does not have a disability. Fear that the child will be harassed is also a factor in the low take-up of daycare and kindergarten facilities and in the early withdrawal of female children from formal education. A logical and common outcome of these two factors combined is the withdrawal of older girls from school to care for younger siblings.

“I don’t go to town. I’ve never been to the Promenade. My folks don’t like me to go out. Maybe they are scared. Boys hassle me when I go down the street.”

Young Roma woman, Montenegro

Lack of contact between different communities from such an early age allows stereotypes to thrive and can foster the escalation of mutual distrust. The sense of insecurity thus deepens, and measures undertaken to improve conditions



in schools and kindergartens are ineffective because the children who would benefit most are already absent.

“I think it is important they [children] stay with their own community ... we are happy with each other and feel more safe like that.”

Young Traveller, Northern Ireland

In addition, the prospect of violence or verbal abuse influences children’s expectations, self-esteem and sense of their own potential.

The boundaries of the “safe” world are confirmed by all the evidence as being narrower for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children than for majority children and children of other minorities.

“I said she can’t go ... I want her to stay in the local school. If there is any problem I can go to the school and see the head teacher. In P she would be too far away.”

Father of a Roma girl who has been offered a grammar school place in another town

“They said I was a ‘mafioso’. One of them punched me in the face. I turned around and ran all the way home. My parents were scared and said I wasn’t to go near that school again. I went again a few months later and it happened again. They chased me but I got away.”

Roma boy, 10 years old, Montenegro

Classrooms are themselves “communities”, with their own norms and cultures. This can cause particular difficulties for pupils from itinerant families whose arrival is not always welcomed or even accommodated. A positive and welcoming environment, small adjustments to the class routine and a friendly teacher who is “culturally aware” can make a positive difference.

“We all have problems when we want to get a job ... here at the school we are treated equally and fairly.”

Roma youth, Romania, attending vocational school

#### Lack of redress

“... they don’t tell you that they don’t want the child because you are a Gypsy, they tell you there are no vacancies ... how can you check if this is true or not? Who can you complain to?”

Roma student, Roma school Bulgaria

In almost every country surveyed there is at least an adequate legal and policy framework guaranteeing basic rights including equal opportunities, access to services and access to justice. However, in the face of sometimes overt policies of substandard service provision and

institutional discrimination, Roma/Gypsies and Travellers still have few channels in which they can feel confident when seeking redress. Examples are numerous and include incidents of police brutality, discrimination in the labour market, inadequate investigation of incidents of racist violence, substandard housing provision and the closure of community and health facilities in Roma neighbourhoods while those in other neighbourhoods remain open.

The establishment of Ombudsmen, citizens’ advice services and NGOs offering legal representation are all encouraging developments, and a small number of successful landmark legal cases are beginning to change perceptions. However, many Roma/Gypsies and Travellers have few possibilities of seeking redress if they have been refused a job on the basis of their perceived “race” or if their child is about to be labelled as “mentally disabled” as a result of a culturally biased intelligence test.

A case study from the Slovakia country report describes the experience of a 20-year-old Roma woman. She had recently returned to the Basic School from a Special Remedial School for the Mentally Handicapped, explaining that she would like to take the final exam, which she could not do at the special school she attended. After completing Special Remedial School, she had continued her education at the Secondary Training School for cooks and waitresses (a Special Secondary School). However, this kind of school does not give her the opportunity to take the final exam that would give her a possibility of a higher wage, a managerial position and the option of going on to higher education.

The deputy director at the Basic School had approved her request and told Save the Children: “hers was a typical case ... I followed the case of the girl because my husband taught her at the Special School ... he was reporting to me that this girl ... had above average IQ, her only problem was that her parents were completely uneducated.”

#### Impact of absence of redress

Absence of redress erodes confidence in public authorities and service providers and is immensely disempowering. In Central and Eastern Europe, among the most serious consequences for children result from an absence of redress for parents whose children are labelled “retarded”, usually because they are not native speakers of the majority language. Currently a group of Czech parents, whose case was rejected by the Czech courts, is bringing a case in the European Court of Human Rights. In the event of this case being successful, thousands of parents will be empowered to challenge the branding of their children as “retarded”. To date, no such challenge has been successfully brought in any of the countries where it is known that disproportionate numbers of intellectually able Roma children continue to be sent to special schools and are receiving an education that effectively disbars them from most professions.

#### Poverty and social exclusion

“I would like to continue, but my parents don't have enough money for the books and everything else I need.”

Roma boy, 16 years old, Bosnia and Herzegovina

Many Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities in different countries experience high levels of unemployment and job insecurity, and are concentrated in low paid and low status jobs or, at best, in insecure working arrangements in the informal economy. This has varied from country to country and over time. For example, in Central and Eastern Europe, many Roma families feel that their situation has significantly worsened in the last decade. Continuing discrimination inhibits social mobility and contributes to intergenerational poverty and deprivation. Although the contexts and the extent differ, this is the case across Western, Central and South-Eastern Europe.

Industrialisation and falling demand for the traditional crafts and trades that brought income into many Roma/Gypsy households in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe has been followed, in the last decade, by the loss of many of the unskilled and agricultural labouring jobs that subsequently became the basis of Roma/Gypsy employment. For Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in Western Europe, this transition has happened more gradually. The prohibition of private enterprise in many Central and Eastern European countries before 1990 meant that in this region, unlike in Western Europe, there was no basis for Roma/Gypsies to bypass labour market discrimination by working as sole traders or establishing family businesses that serve their own communities.

In some of the fastest-growing economies in Europe, unemployment among Roma/Gypsies remains in the region of 70–90 per cent. The benefits of economic growth are not reaching



Roma/Gypsy communities, indicating that economic growth alone will not guarantee an end to poverty and social exclusion. Additional efforts and investment will be required to counter the legacy of discrimination, and measures are needed in particular to address discrimination in labour markets. Throughout Europe, increasing numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller young people are failing to complete even basic education and will therefore face limitations on their employment choices and prospects. Unless this trend is reversed, an increase in entrenched inter-generational poverty will be unavoidable in coming decades.

#### The impact of poverty on education

“Many children do not come to school because they do not have proper clothes to wear and are embarrassed.”

Roma boy, 10 years old, Greece

In Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe, structural adjustment has resulted in the withdrawal of subsidies and the introduction of fees and charges of various kinds. This has been most detrimental for pre-school services, but has also affected textbooks and school materials. Transport costs are an additional burden on impoverished families often living in settlements that are cut off from population centres. In the case of families living in extreme poverty, this additional financial pressure has forced some parents to withdraw their children from school. The withdrawal of free pre-school provision in many countries has had particularly harmful

implications for bilingual children, leaving them at a linguistic disadvantage on entering primary school, where most teachers are not trained to work with children who are not native speakers of the majority language.

Increased poverty and unemployment in Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities all over Europe has also led to ever-larger numbers of children leaving school in order to work or, in the case of girls, to help in the household while parents work. While children acquire skills when working, these do not transfer easily back into the school setting. Thus, having left school and become used to the responsibility of earning an income or managing the household, it becomes increasingly unlikely that working children return to school. If they do, they are now older than other children in their grade, their former classmates have moved on, they are behind with some parts of the curriculum and their “adult” skills are not valued in the school setting. Disaffection can soon follow: while working brings immediate and practical benefits, the benefits of the abstract activities of the classroom are less immediate, less evident and they don’t pay. Children face a genuine trade-off between the need to earn an income now and their future earning power.

“I’d like to continue school but I know it’s impossible because I’m too old. I stopped because we couldn’t afford the books. That was the only reason. I made the decision – it was five years ago. I’d like to continue in secondary school but I don’t know how.”

Egyptian girl, 15 years old, Kosovo

# Recommendations

“ ... if we had a better education system, there would be fewer Roma in Special Schools.”

Psychologist, Serbian Special School  
where 80 per cent of the children are Roma

To make a reality of the aspiration of a “level playing field” for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children, governments have the most significant role in changing policy and practice at national, systemic level. Among the more discouraging findings of the *Denied a Future?* reports is how little has changed in terms of national trends in some countries over the past decade. This is despite hundreds of successful projects that have been developed in individual schools and kindergartens that demonstrate what kind of change is needed. The case has been made repeatedly that teachers, when properly trained and given the educational resources they need, can work with children from a range of backgrounds. Likewise, there are few policy-makers who still believe that segregated schools benefit any children – whether from a majority or minority background. Only governments can set in train the systemic changes that will eventually secure the right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. In some countries, the beginnings of such change can already be discerned. However, most of these initiatives have been set in train too recently for any assessment to be made of their impact upon more than a small group of children.

School directors, teachers, community leaders and non-governmental organisations also have a significant role to play. Governments are not omnipotent and many of the changes that need to occur rely on individuals in schools and

communities taking action to make law and policy a reality.

Intergovernmental organisations have the important task of supporting governments to monitor and evaluate these changes. In particular, the agencies that plan and manage European Union funding must ensure that programmes which support the change process are strategic and sustainable.

Finally, the media will be vital in getting the message across that guaranteeing rights to children from minorities who have hitherto been denied them is not a “zero sum equation” that results in other children being deprived of their rights. All children benefit from growing up in a society that respects the rights of all its citizens.

Therefore, while many of the recommendations that follow are ultimately the responsibility of national governments, the task of implementation involves us all.

## The task facing governments

“If you were Minister of Education for a day what changes [to the education system] would you make to promote education for Roma?”

“ ... I would prefer to be Minister of Finance and allocate money to implement it effectively.”

Roma university student, Romania

A long-term commitment is needed on the part of governments not only adequately to resource

reforms aimed at ending discrimination, but also to ensure that proper systems are in place to effectively monitor and evaluate outcomes. In addition to measures aimed at ending discriminatory practices in education, action is urgently needed to address discrimination on the basis of ethnicity in labour markets. The challenge facing policy-makers is to ensure that political opportunists do not manipulate these efforts to generate resentment on the part of majority populations, creating a perception that majorities and minorities are engaged in a “bidding war” for scarce resources.

In a small number of countries, governments have still to adopt effective anti-discrimination legislation. Recommendations in individual country reports stress this particular aspect of legislative reform in the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and, at the time of writing, Romania (where the process appeared to be well advanced). Greece has yet to sign the European Charter for Minority Languages and the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education and to ratify the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. Macedonia, Romania and the United Kingdom have yet to ratify the European Charter for Minority Languages.

In almost all countries, accurate and comprehensive data on the access of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children to school and on their attainment are lacking. Given the purposes to which data on ethnicity have been put in the past, governments are understandably concerned that their aims in collecting such data could be

misinterpreted. However, the absence of meaningful data makes the task of monitoring progress difficult and heavily dependent on anecdotal evidence.

### The task facing civil society

“Parents of non-Roma children are against their children sharing the class with Roma children. They say they would rather kill their children than let them sit with Roma children.”

Roma parent, Croatia

The case for equal opportunities is sound and unassailable. Governments of the countries featured in *Denied a Future?* have acknowledged this by signing and ratifying legally binding international conventions and charters.

However, in some European countries the political climate is such that measures that appear to favour minority groups are subject to manipulation by opportunistic politicians who attempt to gain electoral support by playing on fears of parents from the majority population that integration will somehow damage their children.

The media and non-governmental organisations therefore have an important role to play in raising public awareness of the social and economic costs of sustaining inequalities, supporting governments to sustain their efforts to end discrimination and secure equal educational opportunities for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children.



## The task at intergovernmental level

“It’s a harsh term – to segregate – but some of my colleagues think it would be better so that they can learn in the way they like, not endangered by the hostility of the majority. But official policy is against this and aims to integrate them into society.”

Representative of the Ministry  
of Education, Hungary

It needs to be acknowledged that many of the positive changes initiated by governments in recent years might not have taken place and would almost certainly not have been viewed as a priority without pressure being brought to bear by international and European institutions. Intergovernmental institutions will continue to play

an important role in reminding governments of their obligations with regard to internationally agreed standards and in supporting them to meet these.

For the foreseeable future, the European Union and the Council of Europe will need to continue to monitor developments in policy and provision for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller people across Europe. In the immediate future, significant funding will continue to be required to support the establishment of new systems and practices and to disseminate best practice at both European and domestic levels.

- **International organisations, including the UN Commission on Human Rights, the Special Rapporteur on Contemporary**

**Forms of Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance should continue to monitor closely the international obligations undertaken by governments in respect of the right to education, with particular attention to the right to education of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children.**

In many European countries, education systems are geared to the needs of the few rather than the many

“This Prussian, authoritarian method is not just bad for Gypsy children, but for all children.”

Educationalist, Hungary

- **In order to rebuild confidence in education systems, formal education must be inclusive and relevant to all children. A relevant education is more likely to lead to employment opportunities. Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities are more likely to have confidence in and make use of schools when these demonstrably respect their histories, cultures, achievements and aspirations.**

Higher visibility and role models within schools will build confidence

“Where I live, in 50 years no Roma child had gone to grammar school. After I began going, my sister joined me. Other people saw this was a realistic choice and in the last three years six kids have gone on to grammar school.”

Roma grammar school student, Hungary

A key aspect of demonstrating inclusiveness and relevance is to ensure that Roma/Gypsy and Traveller adults are physically present and visible as role models and representatives of their communities in schools – as parents, mentors, classroom assistants and teachers.

- **There is an urgent need for the deployment of more teachers, teaching assistants and classroom assistants, especially drawn from Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities, to promote links and dialogue between schools and the communities that they seek to serve.**
- **“Access” courses with flexible timetables for students whose education has been interrupted will enable mature entrants and those with family responsibilities to train as teaching assistants and teachers. In some cases, further measures such as scholarships and subsidised childcare will also be needed to make training or re-training a realistic aspiration.**

Open up schools to the communities they serve

“... not to be crammed into such a small room anymore ... a place for the children should be built.”

Roma parent, Romania

- **In many countries, school and kindergarten buildings now have excess capacity due to falling birth rates. Under-utilised space should, wherever possible, be deployed in creative ways to establish facilities that will be used and valued by the wider community, for example community health clinics, citizens’**

**advice services, childcare facilities or centres for adult learning and skills training.**

- **School buildings should be used more effectively to offer after-school and weekend activities for children and young people and also to create opportunities to bring other family members onto school premises. Particular attention should be paid to the needs of children living in overcrowded and poor quality accommodation who find it difficult to study at home.**

Take the concerns of parents and children seriously

“... they all give up in the end ... one girl finished grammar school, but she couldn't find work and came back to the village.”

Roma mother, Hungary

In many Roma/Gypsy and Traveller communities, it is clear that some parents are not convinced that formal education offers significant economic opportunities. Even for families that are in a position to do so, is it worth sacrificing the economic gains from working now for the longer-term gains that are supposed to arise from staying in formal education? How realistic are aspirations and how useful are qualifications when institutional racism persists in so many workplaces?

“I can't supply the books or the clothes for them. The older ones must take care of the younger ones while my wife and I work. Also, as you can see, there is no space for them to study.”

Roma parent, Bosnia and Herzegovina

“I believe they consider that there is a 'price' to be paid [assimilation] and so opt out.”

Jane G Lee quoted in the UK *Denied a Future?* report

“... they give you a C whether you know something or not in order to get rid of you, there are some students that can't even read in the 5th grade ... the teacher sends you to do her shopping for her and you don't have to come back.”

Roma school student, 13 years old, Bulgaria

- **More research is needed to develop a clearer understanding of the respective roles of economic, social and cultural factors in the withdrawal and self-withdrawal of children from formal education.**
- **More research is needed on the impact of discrimination and poor teaching practice on the motivation and attainment of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller pupils.**
- **Consultation and involvement of parents and children is the most effective way to identify barriers to attendance and achievement and to develop strategies to address them.**
- **Particular attention should be paid to the views and needs of families where parents, siblings or peers have not attended school, have left or are leaving school early or who have concerns about the school assimilating the child into the majority culture against their wishes.**
- **The active consultation and involvement of community members will be essential in developing services or adapting practices to meet the needs of communities with specific lifestyles or cultural preferences,**



such as traditional communities or communities who travel for all or part of the year.

Children need a safe environment

“The secondary school I went to was a nightmare ... we did not have time to read and write because we were being spat upon, bullied and generally abused by the pupils and the majority of the teachers.”

Traveller, Scotland

“My children do not attend the school. I do not feel secure for them to attend the school in J and they are too small to walk all the way to O. Let them open our school here in the village, organise some transport for the older ones, then I will let them attend. Now I will not let them attend, I feel insecure.”

Roma mother of three school-age children,  
Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Concerns about children’s safety were raised in every *Denied a Future?* country report. Further and more visible efforts are needed to establish schools as places where all children are safe from physical and verbal abuse.
- The whole school community must be involved in developing strategies to address racist bullying, physical and verbal abuse.
- Fears for the safety of children on their journey to school were an area of concern in almost all *Denied a Future?* country reports. Schools and municipal authorities need to establish a dialogue with children and parents to develop local strategies to address these concerns.

## Empower parents

“[My daughter] says to me ‘I’m not going back to that school anymore’ ... How do you expect me to keep them at school – you’re not going to let your child get rowed [being verbally abused] every day of the week.”

Traveller mother, Scotland

Empowering parents will build their confidence in making educational choices for their children. For example,

- **Parents should be able to request from the school whether teachers in that school have received equalities training. If teachers at the school have not received training, parents should have the right to request an alternative school place where teachers have the appropriate skills and training.**

## Teachers need better training and resources

“... we really need in-service intercultural education for teachers. The teachers don’t know what to do. They are either inexperienced or authoritarian with the Gypsy pupils.”

Educationalist, Hungary

In addition to the overt human rights violations described in many countries, the *Denied a Future?* reports indicate that discriminatory outcomes result from ill thought out school curricula and from teachers who are well intentioned, but inadequately trained and poorly resourced. In many countries, inability on the part of teaching staff to work with children from

different backgrounds results in teachers having low expectations of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. These views are often communicated to the children and their classmates. The absence of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller references in most texts and teaching materials compounds the problem.

Further action is needed on the part of education ministries and teacher training institutions to ensure that teachers enter their profession with the skills they need to work with all children.

- **Children’s rights, human rights and equal opportunities training should be included as mandatory elements of pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula in order to enable teachers to identify and address racist incidents.**
- **Pre-service and in-service teacher training curricula must ensure that teachers are familiar with the skills and approaches needed to work with children from different ethnic, linguistic, religious and cultural backgrounds.**
- **Roma/Gypsy and Traveller history, culture and languages should be available as study options for all trainee teachers alongside other foreign and indigenous language and culture modules.**
- **Good practice guidelines for equal opportunities in education that are already in existence, including self-assessment tools and guidelines for school inspectors, should be made more widely available and consideration should be given to their adaptation and adoption in countries**

where such tools and guidelines are not yet in use.

- All derogatory references to Roma, Gypsies and Travellers should be removed from school texts.
- School texts and especially history teaching materials should include references to ethnic and other minority groups in a positive and balanced manner, reflecting the ethnic, religious, national and linguistic make up of the wider national and European context.

Design education around the reality of children's lives

“I go to school when I do not have any house chores or when I am not taking care of my younger brothers and sisters.”

Roma girl, 9 years old, Greece

The reality of many children's lives is often ignored in the design of education provision and curricula. Being a young parent, needing to work or having other family responsibilities should not automatically disqualify a young person from taking up his or her right to education.

“I'm sorry I never went to school. I couldn't because I was the oldest child in my family.”

Roma activist, 22 years old, escorts Roma children to school from their settlements, Montenegro

- Flexible curricula need to be developed to better meet the needs of young parents and older children who work or have family responsibilities.

- Further research needs to be undertaken to assess whether early specialisation has the effect of consigning academically able children to “non-academic” streams with a disproportionate impact on poorer (often working) and minority ethnic children.

Vocational education must lead to real jobs

“I want to become a merchant and sell chairs. I do not want to go to high school because I want to work and make money.”

Roma boy, 11 years old, Greece

- Vocation-oriented education that is offered to older pupils must lead to real employment prospects and should offer options to retain some academic content. While students may opt for vocational subjects as a result of current financial pressure, this should not close off all options to develop and pursue academic interests later in their lives.

Acknowledge and respect Romani/Gypsy and Traveller languages and cultures

“The problem is not the kids ... it is a problem of language.”

Teacher, Slovakia

“... I think there should be some Roma language in the school ... the teacher treats me differently and this is why I have to try harder.”

Roma boy, 10 years old, Croatia

- Wherever possible (with reference to the needs and preferences of the specific



**community and the extent to which one or more of the Roma languages or dialects is used in that community), the Romani language should be offered in schools alongside other languages.**

Develop awareness of human rights and diversity from an early age

Given the importance of education in conveying values that children carry with them for the rest of their lives, schools have an important role to play in raising levels of awareness of, and engendering respect for, peoples of different religious, linguistic and cultural backgrounds. The *Denied a Future?* country reports focus on the effects upon Roma/Gypsy and Traveller pupils of education systems that have been designed with no reference to their life experiences, languages and cultures. The experience of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller pupils in schools can be viewed as, to paraphrase Vaclav Havel, a “litmus test” of whether an education system is effective in contributing to the creation of a civil society. In contemporary Europe, which is multiracial, multicultural, and multifaith, certain elements are essential in school curricula for children to learn to value and respect the multiplicity of European identities.

- **National curricula should include human rights and citizenship education at both primary and secondary levels.**
- **Curricula across all subject areas should contain elements of education for democratic citizenship and respect for diversity.**
- **Pupils should have opportunities to learn about world religions, languages and cultures**

**and be made aware of the undertakings of their governments to respect and protect the rights of all citizens equally regardless of faith, language, ethnicity and culture.**

- **Pupils should be aware of the obligation upon all citizens to value and respect the human rights of others that follows from the action of states in signing and ratifying international conventions and covenants.**

Pre-school provision is important

The *Denied a Future?* country reports emphasise the important contribution of pre-school provision in preventing children from falling behind or dropping out of primary school in the earliest grades. A great deal of good policy and practice has been developed in recent years and many examples are cited in the country reports. These good practice examples share certain characteristics, implying that there are basic principles that can be adapted to most cultural or community settings. Unfortunately, most of the newly developed good practice remains outside the state system and adoption by state pre-school structures of, for example, practices that value cultural diversity or improve community involvement has been slow.

The arguments for withdrawing free or subsidised pre-school provision are usually economic ones. However, the variation observed in the starting and leaving ages for compulsory schooling across Europe indicates that the starting point from which governments believe they have an obligation to provide education free of charge is as much a political as an economic decision.

“Until 1991, there were two kindergartens here in M, one was in the Roma neighbourhood. In 1991 ... they simply closed the kindergarten ... The other kindergarten was threatened with the same fate, but the authorities found a solution to save it. The problem now is that this one remaining kindergarten is too far away from the Roma settlement. Also, there are just too many children here for just one kindergarten.”

Roma primary school teacher, Albania

In some European countries, compulsory attendance at school or reception class can begin at age four, in others not until age eight.

The countries surveyed in *Denied a Future?* are developed economies. Therefore, the decision to provide free education services to some or all children under the age of seven reflects the ideological standpoint of governments as to whether parents or society as a whole should bear the cost, rather than the economic feasibility of doing so.

Save the Children recommends that all governments acknowledge the value of pre-school provision, including its particular usefulness to bilingual children. They should adopt strategies that will achieve the following goals in the long-term.



- **Pre-school facilities should be accessible and available, free of charge for all families that need them.**
- **Fees for meals and other extras that currently prevent some children from attending school or kindergarten should be waived.**
- **In situations where it is currently not viable to waive fees for all families, governments should adopt procedures to decide eligibility for fee waivers that are accessible for families with low literacy levels and that preserve the dignity of children in receipt of these benefits.**
- **In all pre-school service provision, curricula should be based on principles of inclusivity and respect for diversity, of which there are many successful examples throughout Eastern and Western Europe.**
- **Governments should offer bilingual and mother-tongue pre-school provision in communities that require it.**

Classroom assistants make a difference

“I speak with the Aunt (Romani assistant) ... and she explains. She can understand me better, but also the teachers show us how to do some things.”

Roma boy, 6 years old, attending preparatory class, Czech Republic

The *Denied a Future?* country reports demonstrate that classroom assistants play an important and useful role supporting children who are potentially at a disadvantage compared with their peers, for example those who are not native speakers of the teaching language and children who have never attended pre-school. Roma/Gypsy classroom assistants, or mediators, appear to be

highly effective in promoting links between the school, parents and the wider community. However, as the Bulgaria country report points out, classroom assistants should not be exclusively employed in supporting Roma/Gypsy children, as this can indirectly promote segregation, stigmatisation or at least differential treatment. If they are to be employed as a resource in schools, they should be for all pupils and their professional status needs to be formally recognised.

Currently, in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe there are few classroom assistants, especially Roma/Gypsy assistants, and most are trained, employed and paid for by NGOs. Their continued presence in schools, therefore, tends to rely on short-term external funding.

- **The important role that classroom assistants play in the establishment and successful functioning of integrated and multicultural schools should be more widely acknowledged by policy-makers.**
- **In addition to the deployment of classroom assistants working in a voluntary or trainee capacity, consideration should be given to the creation of professionally recognised and salaried teaching assistant posts within schools and kindergartens.**
- **To secure the professional status of teaching assistants, guidelines should be drawn up for the content of training curricula leading to a recognised Teaching Assistant qualification.**
- **Consideration should be given to creating a “fast-track” whereby Roma/Gypsy and Traveller classroom assistants and teaching assistants can be supported to train and qualify as teachers and pre-school care-givers.**



#### A case for affirmative action

“When I started managing the school I was shocked ... because the school did not have windows, many of the classroom doors were broken ... and many of the tables and chairs ... there was not enough school equipment ... the sanitary conditions in the school are very alarming ....I did not know where to start.”

Director of a primary school built for 800 but with 2,000 pupils, only two of whom are non-Roma, Macedonia

The *Denied a Future?* country reports record the reluctance of non-Roma/Gypsy and non-Traveller parents to send their children to a facility where there are large numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children. As well as the factor of prejudice on the basis of ethnicity, such facilities are associated, in parents' minds, with poor-quality provision and substandard facilities.

There are cases where affirmative action in the form of high investment in quality integrated provision has successfully overcome prejudice and negative associations on the part of parents.<sup>7</sup> For example, by investing in a mainly Roma/

Gypsy kindergarten to the extent that it has become one of the best pre-school facilities in the area, a Slovak NGO has succeeded, over a 10-year period, in attracting high numbers of non-Roma children. As a result, barriers between Roma/Gypsy and the majority Slovak communities have been successfully eroded and segregation in the local primary school is gradually diminishing as Roma/Gypsy and Slovak children make a successful transition together from kindergarten to primary school. No Roma/Gypsy child who has attended this kindergarten has been referred to a special school in the last two years. Regrettably, there are few signs at the time of writing that the policy and practice developed at this model facility is being adopted by the other three (state-run) kindergartens in the area.

- **Governments should give consideration to affirmative action measures in the form of policies which favour significantly higher investment in integrated rather than segregated provision.**
- **Where good policy and practice has been developed by non-governmental agencies, national and local government agencies responsible for early years and primary education provision should make further efforts to promote the adoption of these in state-run facilities.**
- **The returns to such investment should be monitored with reference to how all parents perceive facilities with high numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller pupils and to the numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children referred to special schools for the learning disabled.**

Transition economies: are the changes sustainable?

In Central and South-Eastern Europe, it is only in recent years that there have been discernible efforts to improve educational access and achievement of Roma/Gypsy children.

In most countries, such initiatives continue to be labelled “pilots” or “experimental projects”. The focus has tended to be on initiatives outside the formal school system rather than on changing practices within the system itself.

At the time of writing (June 2001), most educational initiatives for Roma/Gypsy children are funded by external sources (European Union funds, aid budgets of other governments, foreign charities and churches) rather than by the governments of the countries in which they reside. An unkind interpretation could be to suggest that “the Roma” continue to be viewed as a case for charitable donations from overseas as opposed to citizens deserving of equal treatment and opportunities by their governments.

Even if this is not the case, with some 90 per cent of the good practice that was reported to us reliant on short-term funding from external donor agencies, concerns about sustainability and the capacity to replicate successful initiatives are unavoidable. For example, in the process of compiling the country reports, we came across teaching materials that had been developed but not disseminated, and Roma teaching assistants who had been trained but not employed. To date, there appears to be a failure to apply learning from individual projects to create the basis for wider reform.

After decades of under-investment in education for Roma/Gypsy children and investment in provision which excludes them from the education services enjoyed by the majority, the initial cost of reforming existing systems will be high.

By funding pilots and projects that focus only on Roma/Gypsy children, some donor agencies and international NGOs may inadvertently be supporting the maintenance of segregated education. The requirement for NGOs to be accountable and to demonstrate results to donors within relatively short time frames has resulted in a very large number of projects that show results quickly for a relatively small number of children. However, very little seems to have changed for Roma/Gypsy children within state structures and provision.

If policies aimed at achieving far-reaching reform are not backed up with budgets to implement them in the long term, progress in the future will not differ significantly from the patchy, unstrategic and unco-ordinated efforts observed to date.

External funding provided by foreign donors has undoubtedly played a vital role in stimulating policy reform and allowing pilots and experimental schemes to be tested. However, reliance on these sources of funding in the long term to fund educational provision for Roma/Gypsy children is unsustainable and inequitable. International donors may inadvertently be encouraging governments to assume that citizens of the Roma/Gypsy minority are not their responsibility.

What will happen once external support dwindles and the financial responsibility for education provision for children of the Roma/Gypsy minority falls once more on governments?

- **Given the current reliance on external funding, there is an urgent need for a realistic appraisal of what reformed provision will demand from public budgets in the long term.**

While there is an evident need to assess realistically what financial inputs are required to achieve lasting changes in educational provision for Roma/Gypsy children, there is an equally pressing need to monitor outputs. A statement such as “the government of X will spend \$Y on Roma education initiatives in the next three years” can be misleading. For example, the *Denied a Future?* reports record cases where “\$Y” has been given to schools which Roma/Gypsy children attend as an extra per capita payment. However, children in those schools appear not to benefit from these extra funds. Numbers of drop-outs do not decrease. Children do not emerge with useful skills or qualifications.

- **While there is a need for transparency regarding inputs, it is outputs, ie, results for children, that matter. Government agencies, education providers and Roma/Gypsy communities must find ways to work together to define the results that they hope to achieve, their grounds for supposing that a particular investment or activity will bring about those results and ways to monitor and evaluate whether or not the projected improvements have come about.**

A post-communist legacy: Roma/Gypsy children in special schools

“... they don’t understand the test questions and have no work ethic ... for example, I ask a child what he should do when he sees smoke coming out of a house. The right answer is that he would call the fire brigade or tell an adult ... Roma children as a rule reply that the stove should be cleaned or the stovepipe fixed to stop the smoke coming out. Then I have to fail the child.”

Psychologist, Special School, Serbia, in which 70 per cent of the 250 children are Roma

“The teachers [from the special school] come here every fall and go around the neighbourhood telling the people to send their children there because it is like a boarding school and they won’t have to worry about clothing or feeding them ... and the poorer people agree, they can’t help it.”

Roma student in mainstream school,  
14 years old, Bulgaria

Readers who are familiar with Central and South-Eastern Europe will, no doubt, be surprised that this section appears so late in this document. The practice of sending thousands of Roma/Gypsy children to be educated in “special schools” for the mentally disabled when they have no disability is perhaps the most extreme and startling demonstration of the racism that many Roma/Gypsy children have faced for decades in some parts of Europe. However, it represents just one of many symptoms of the underlying problems that beset education systems throughout Europe.

Our concern was that, by focusing primarily on a practice that affects only some countries, we would detract from a more deep-rooted problem that is Europe-wide. Wherever they are in Europe, children who are perceived to be “Gypsies” are likely to have negative experiences in education and to be subjected to some kind of discriminatory treatment by other members of the school community. In countries that do not have “special schools”, other, more subtle but equally damaging, violations of children’s rights occur.

- **In countries where segregation of Roma/Gypsy children continues to be practised through the perpetuation of the special school system, governments must take urgent measures to end this practice. They should accord priority to the establishment of integrated and accessible education for all, in accord with the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international and regional conventions and covenants that have been ratified by the states in question.**
- **The practice of using culturally biased IQ tests to assess children’s abilities should end immediately.**
- **The funding arrangements, management practices and underlying philosophy that has brought about a situation in which staff from special schools believe that it is acceptable actively to recruit children from Roma/Gypsy neighbourhoods should be addressed as a matter of urgency.**
- **Measures should be put in place immediately for parents and, where necessary, children themselves, to challenge “special needs”**

**diagnoses that have resulted from the application of IQ tests.**

- **Children who have been wrongly diagnosed with a mental disability and are in the process of reintegrating into mainstream schools must receive the support they need, for example extra tuition and help from classroom assistants, at no extra cost to their families.**
- **Schools, and particularly teachers, who are involved in the process of reintegrating children from special schools should have access to extra professional support to enable them to manage the children's transition smoothly.**

## Conclusion and next steps

Education services provided free of charge by the state can in part compensate for disadvantages and inequalities that can arise from poverty or difficult family circumstances. They are also an important means of promoting respect, from an early age, for citizens from different cultural, linguistic, religious and ethnic backgrounds.

Throughout Europe, discrepancies exist between the legal entitlements of children as expressed in international and national law and policy and the experiences of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in schools. The *Denied a Future?* country reports indicate that this is due to political, economic and cultural barriers. In particular, the position of education in the social, cultural and economic priorities of families and in the political and economic priorities of the state can either compromise Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children's educational rights or promote them.

Save the Children welcomes the efforts that are already discernible on the part of some governments to better understand and address the barriers that prevent Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children from fully accessing and benefiting from educational provision in the countries in which they are citizens. Sustained interest, improved co-operation and a cohesive approach on the part of inter-governmental agencies are important in supporting governments in these efforts.

- **Save the Children recommends that further research, both quantitative and qualitative, be carried out with regard to obtaining a better understanding of:**
  - **how gender affects educational aspirations, particularly of female children but also with regard to male children equating school-leaving with “adult” status**
  - **families' perceptions, including children's perceptions, of the “opportunity cost” of education compared to the benefits of contributing to the family's livelihood by working or providing childcare**
  - **the particular needs of young people who work**
  - **the particular needs of young people who are parents**
  - **the particular challenges associated with meeting the needs of children who are native speakers of the Romani language or one of its dialects**
  - **the incidence of labour market discrimination and the effects of this on educational and career expectations and aspirations of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children**



- the specific aspects of school-based provision that Roma/Gypsy and Traveller parents regard as “assimilationist” and therefore undesirable for their children
  - the specific aspects of school-based provision that undermine Roma/Gypsy and Traveller parents’ confidence in schools and their belief in the relevance and usefulness of school-based educational provision.
- In line with the above recommendations, Save the Children proposes that the following aspects of provision be monitored over the next 5–10 year period in order to evaluate the effectiveness of measures being proposed and undertaken by intergovernmental institutions and governments:
    - content of teacher training with regard to teachers acquiring the necessary skills to work with children from different backgrounds including Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children
    - availability, dissemination and content of curricula, textbooks and teaching resources with regard to inclusion of references to Roma/Gypsies and Travellers
    - availability of resources (texts and teaching materials) in the Romani language for use by teachers and students
    - quality and material condition of school facilities available to Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children in neighbourhoods with a high Roma/Gypsy and Traveller population in comparison to facilities offered to majority children
    - visibility of Roma/Gypsies and Travellers in the teaching profession and other professions associated with education
    - the role, numbers and perceived professional status of classroom assistants in classes where there are Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children
    - parents’ and children’s perceptions of the safety of the school environment, including the journey to and from school, with regard to the risk of the child being subjected to physical or verbal abuse
    - the actual cost to a family of having a child attending “free” educational provision
    - availability and cost of pre-school and kindergarten provision
    - numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children attending “special schools” and other segregated provision and the criteria and processes by which children are routed into such provision
    - numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children successfully reintegrating from segregated into mainstream provision
    - numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children completing basic education and their employment options when they have done so compared to other groups
    - numbers of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller young people entering and completing further and higher education, numbers opting for vocational and academic streams and their employment options on completing their studies compared to other groups

- **availability and effectiveness of out-of-school and supplementary provision including provision for children of seasonal workers, supplementary language classes, homework clubs, access courses for children and young people re-entering education, adult education and evening classes**
- **sources of finance for educational provision for Roma/Gypsy and Traveller children with regard to the respective shares of government and external sources in financing education services**
- **the degree to which provision for children of Roma/Gypsy and Traveller minorities is “mainstreamed” over time in overall national education policies and budgets.**

# Notes on the text

**1** Given the vast number of names applied to the people who are the subject of this report, the term 'Roma/Gypsies' is employed in accordance with Liégeois and Gheorghé's *Roma/Gypsies: a European Minority* (Minority Rights Group, 1995). In some Western European countries, the term 'Traveller' is preferred. Therefore, in this report we employ the term 'Roma/Gypsies and Travellers' or 'Roma/Gypsy and Traveller' when we are referring also to countries with populations whose preferred term is 'Traveller'.

**2** It is important to note that Roma/Gypsies are not unique to Europe, but can be found in continents throughout the globe, including the Americas and Australia for example.

**3** Through formal means such as schooling and training and informal means via family, peers and community

**4** The Roma/Gypsy communities in Kosovo are made up of Ashkali, Egyptian and Roma groups.

**5** *The Economist*, 12–18 May 2001.

**6** See for example, *A Chance in Life: Principles and Practice in Basic Primary Education for Children*, Save the Children, 1998.

**7** See, for example, Slovakia *Denied a Future?* country report.