

AI Index: PRE01/003/2010
13 January 2010

Eliminate second-rate education for Roma in the Czech Republic

The Czech authorities are continuing to place Romani children in schools for pupils with “mild mental disabilities”, leaving them with a sub-standard education, Amnesty International said in a report published today.

“Systematic discrimination against Romani children in education continues despite repeated international and national exposure. The Czech authorities must end the segregation of Romani children in schools and act to tackle the underlying causes of discrimination,” said Nicola Duckworth, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

Amnesty International’s report, [*Injustice renamed: Discrimination in education of Roma persists in the Czech Republic*](#), examines the systematic discrimination that still exists in the Czech education system, despite a 2007 judgment by the European Court of Human Rights.

The Court found that the Czech Republic had discriminated against Romani children by placing them in “special schools” for children with mental disabilities, where they received a sub-standard education.

With a new Schools Act in 2005, the Czech authorities merely renamed “special schools” as “practical elementary schools”, but the system which places children in these schools and teaches a limited curriculum, essentially remains the same.

“Recent measures to support Romani children in mainstream education announced last November by the Czech authorities do not go far enough as they are neither comprehensive nor legally binding,” said Nicola Duckworth.

Amnesty International visited several schools in Ostrava, where in 1999 18 Romani children initially filed the court case, which eventually led to the European Court judgement.

The organisation found Romani children are still over-represented in so-called practical schools and classes intended for pupils with “mild mental disabilities,” due to the failure of mainstream educational establishments to meet their needs.

In some places, Romani children make up more than 80 per cent of the students of practical elementary schools.

Romani children are also segregated in Roma-only schools which often offer a lower quality education, limiting their future education and employment opportunities.

The placement in practical schools and classes for pupils with “mild mental disabilities” is based on the results of assessments that fail to factor in cultural and linguistic differences of Romani children and may be compounded by the prejudice of staff conducting them.

“The duty to ensure the successful inclusion of Romani children into integrated mainstream schools lies with the Czech authorities who have a unique opportunity to reverse decades of discrimination and segregation,” Nicola Duckworth said.

“Education is the way out of a vicious circle of poverty and marginalization that affects a large part of the Roma population in the country. Unless the Czech authorities give them equal opportunities, they will be denying Romani children their chances for a better future and full participation in the life of the country.”

Amnesty International calls on the Czech authorities to:

- Freeze placements of all children into practical schools and classes for pupils with “mild mental disabilities” for the school year 2010/11, pending a review of the need for such a curriculum and schools;
- Enforce in law the desegregation of education and adopt a comprehensive plan with clear yearly targets to eliminate school segregation of Romani children;
- Ensure that additional support is immediately made available for children who need it in order to effectively participate in and develop to their fullest potential within the integrated mainstream elementary school.

Cases

František attended a mainstream elementary school primarily attended by non-Roma pupils but when he was in fourth grade his teacher complained that the boy was “too lively”. Based on a psychological assessment František was sent for four months to a practical school. When František returned to the mainstream elementary school, he failed his final exams as he was following a reduced curriculum in the practical school. František had to repeat the fourth grade and his new classmates would make fun of him because they knew that he had been sent to the “special school”. František now did not want to go to school. In March 2009, his mother decided to move him to a Roma-only mainstream elementary school, where he would not be discriminated against and bullied by teachers and peers.

Sabrina went to a mixed school, attended by both Roma and non-Roma children, in 1998, when she was six years old. Her mother said that the teacher neglected her and the girl used to sit in the corner while other children were busy with school work. Her mother was then told that Sabrina must change to a special school for children with “mild mental disabilities”. She was never properly tested for learning disabilities. After Sabrina graduated from the special school (at 15 years old), her only option for further education was a vocational training school. Sabrina is one of 18 children who took their case to the European Court but they are just 18 among the thousands of Romani children who were wrongfully placed into special schools in the Czech Republic over the years.

Twelve-year-old Mirek and his five siblings used to go to a mainstream school in their home town of Karvina. However, after his family was forcibly evicted from their flat there their mother, Helena, decided to place them in a practical school in neighbouring Ostrava. She was afraid they would be bullied and discriminated against in a non-Roma mainstream school and did not want them to go to the Roma only mainstream school as she had heard that it was very rough. When they were finally assessed in 2009 at the end of the diagnostic period Helena instructed her children to deliberately make mistakes during their psychological assessment so that they would be accepted a practical school. Mirek told Amnesty International that much of what he was studying in the practical school was a repetition of what he had already learnt in lower grades in the mainstream school he had attended and that he was given less homework.