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## **Five years on: Czech government still failing to address discrimination against Romani children in schools**

Romani children in the Czech Republic are still being denied the educational opportunities offered to other students five years after the European Court of Human Rights found the authorities guilty of discrimination, Amnesty International and the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC) said in a report published today.

“The Czech Republic’s education system is failing Romani children, with devastating consequences for their future. Thousands of Romani pupils are trapped in segregated schools which leaves them with few chances for further education and extremely limited options of finding work,” said Dezideriu Gergely the Executive Director of the European Roma Rights Centre.

“Unfortunately, many Romani pupils in Czech Republic today are reliving the experience of the applicants who lodged the complaint with the European Court more than a decade ago,” Gergely added.

*[Five more years of injustice: Segregated education for Roma in the Czech Republic](#)* provides evidence that Romani children continue to be over-represented in schools and classes designed for children with mild disabilities and Roma-only schools. The report exposes the shortcomings in the Czech educational system that excludes Romani children from integrated mainstream education.

“For five years now the government failed to address the problem. This inaction amounts to a serious ongoing breach of the government’s obligations. The right to education free from discrimination has been recognized in international human rights law since at least 1948. Despite this, and, despite the 2007 ruling from the European Court, Romani children continue to be denied the right to education,” said John Dalhuisen, Europe and Central Asia Programme Director.

In November 2007, the Czech Republic was condemned by the European Court for violating the right of Romani children to education free from discrimination by placing them in “special schools” for children with mental disabilities, which offered lower quality education.

“While the Czech government acknowledged the existence of segregation of Romani pupils in schools, so far it has not been able carry out its own plans and commitments to eradicate it,” said Dalhuisen.

“The Czech education system still allows pupils to be placed in “practical” education too easily; which disproportionately affects Romani children who continue being overrepresented in this stream of education,” said Dezideriu Gergely from the ERRC.

The report by Amnesty International and the ERRC focuses on four schools in Ostrava which are known for being “Roma-only”. The report is based on interviews with Romani parents and their children currently enrolled in the same schools as some of the applicants in the original case, D.H. v the Czech Republic.

Kristián is the brother of one of the applicants of the European Court case. When he was in the fourth grade of a mainstream (mostly non-Roma) elementary school he had problems coping with the curriculum. He was tested and diagnosed with a mild mental disability.

The psychologist told his mother that she should transfer Kristián to a practical school with reduced curriculum because “he was slow”. The psychologist, and the mainstream school did not offer measures to help such as individual support or after-school tutoring. His brother (a former applicant in the D.H. case, Julek) believes that Kristián is re-living his own experience, and is concerned about the impact this will have on Kristián’s future.

Maria’s children were also applicants in the D.H. case. All four of her children attended a special school. She was not happy with the quality of education they received. “Children never brought their homework or books from the school. [...] None of them finished secondary school and now they are all unemployed and dependent on social allowances.” When Maria’s granddaughter Laura reached school age, Maria wanted her to go to a mixed mainstream school: “I wanted Laura to go to school with white children so that she does not end up like my other four.”

“Without access to quality education Roma will not be able to escape poverty and marginalization. Unless desegregation and the elimination of separate and unequal education is placed at the centre of the Czech educational policy the vicious circle of discrimination will continue,” said Dezideriu Gergely.

“The authorities must show political will to end school segregation immediately. For a start, they must implement the already existing National Action Plan on Inclusive Education and Strategy for Combating Social Exclusion and transform the current system of ‘practical schools’. They must also ensure that all their measures are in compliance with international and regional standards on education and non-discrimination,” said Dalhuisen.

### **Notes to Editors**

The case of D.H. and Others v the Czech Republic was brought by 18 Roma students from the Ostrava region in the Czech Republic, who were represented by the European Roma Rights Centre. During 1996 and 1999 all applicants had been assigned to special schools for children with learning difficulties, where they received inferior education based on a diluted curriculum. In 2000 the applicants complained to the European Court of Human Rights arguing that their treatment amounted discrimination in violation of Article 14 in conjunction with Article 2 of Protocol 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights as their right to education had been denied.

In a decision in February 2006, the chamber of the Court stated that although the applicants had raised serious arguments, they did not amount to a violation of the Convention. Pursuant to an appeal filed by the applicants, on the Grand Chamber in a landmark decision ruled in favour of the applicants and found that the applicants had suffered discrimination when denied their right to education.