

White Paper

Learning from America's Mistakes:

A Proposal for Closing the Education Gap between Children of Roma Descent and Other Children in the European Union – STARTING WITH ROMANIA

July 2008



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Executive Summary
of Ovidiu Rom's Proposal
to Raise the Educational Attainment
of Romania's Poorest Children

From 2001 to 2008 the primary school drop-out rate almost tripled and for grades 5-8 the drop-out rate quadrupled in Romania. The purpose of this paper is to propose a national strategy to reverse this trend. The situation is largely a result of the disproportionate number of impoverished Roma children who start school late and drop out early. On average, children of Roma descent spend six and a half years in the formal education system, whereas the overall Romanian average is eleven years. In rural areas, all children are at risk for dropping out after eighth grade, but school abandonment in primary school is largely a problem among Roma children.

Our recommendations are based on the authors' direct experience working with impoverished children and families in Romania as well as a review of recent research on minority education reform in the US. We also review the Romanian laws affecting children and schooling – and find that Romania's current legal framework is comprehensive and largely adequate to the task of providing equal opportunity of education. The measures we advocate are enforcement of current legislation and country-wide expansion of proven strategies in order to reverse the current negative trend in educational attainment.

Unfortunately, there is a commonly held belief that the crux of this problem is that Roma are not interested in formal education. Our eight years' experience successfully recruiting and teaching impoverished Roma children disproves that assumption (which largely derives from equating outcomes with causes). When the obstacles are removed and incentives provided, Roma families **do** send their children to school.

Ovidiu Rom sets forth twelve specific measures, with estimated cost breakdowns, which we believe are necessary in order to start raising the educational attainment of Romania's poorest children. Our recommendations have been favourably received by the Ministry of Education, the National Agency for Child Protection, and prominent child welfare organizations including UNICEF and Save the Children.

Among the measures we advocate are:

- ✓ National summer school preparation programs for all low-income children age 5 and above;
- ✓ Free school materials, uniforms and hot lunches for children from low-income families;
- ✓ Incentives in the form of food coupons to low-income families for early enrollment, 80% attendance, parent attendance at monthly parent-teacher meetings, etc.

- ✓ Enforcement of education and children's rights legislation;
- ✓ Accountability of local administration for the enforcement of current legislation;
- ✓ Withholding of central government, or EU, funds for non-compliance.

The fact that in Romania almost one out of four children under age 18 is Roma should make clear why this is an issue that requires attention at the highest levels – and action on the ground throughout the country.

Note (April 2011): In a report to the Minister of Education, Daniel Funeriu in March 2011, the authors updated their recommendations based on evidence, from both personal experience in the field and the international literature, that the process of integrating margin and economically deprived children must begin in PRESCHOOL.

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I. Introduction

*A mind is a terrible thing to waste.
Slogan of the United Negro College Fund, 1972-2008*

Children of Roma descent have lower education levels than the dominant ethnic groups in all European Union countries for which data is available. A similar academic achievement gap exists between blacks and whites in the United States.

This paper proposes to take the lessons learned from fifty years' effort to close this achievement gap in the US and apply them to the situation of children of Roma descent in Romania. The US has accumulated a vast literature of research regarding what works and does not work in changing educational outcomes of children born into an environment of multi-generational poverty. In the US, the overwhelming majority of these children are black. In Romania, these children are overwhelmingly of Roma descent.

Romania has by far the largest number and arguably, the largest percentage of people of Roma descent in Europe. For the sake of brevity, we use the term "Roma" to mean "of Roma descent". In the official 2002 census 535,140 people self-identified as Roma.¹ However, knowledgeable estimates of the actual number of people of Roma descent in Romania vary between 1.5 and 2.5 million.² (Note: Being 1/16 black, i.e., having one great-great-grandparent who was black, qualifies a person for minority status in many US states.) The authors of this paper believe the number in 2008 is **at least 2.5 million**; the statistics generated herein will reflect that number, putting the Roma population at approximately 11% of the total population. (According to the 2002 Census, Blacks accounted for 12.4 percent of the US population.)

There are significant parallels between children of Roma descent and black children in the US. Both African-Americans and Roma have a history of institutionalized enslavement; records show that there were Roma slaves in Moldova as early as 1385³. The first African slaves arrived in Jamestown, Massachusetts in 1619. Roma were freed by Grigore Ghica, Prince of Moldova in 1855,⁴ seven years before the Emancipation Proclamation was issued in the United States. (Roma have lived in Romania since the 14th century, which is longer than Englishmen have lived in North America (16th century) and considerably longer than blacks have lived in North America (17th century) and yet, many ethnic Romanians categorize Roma as somehow having a less legitimate claim to their country of origin, as not being *români adevărați* ("truly Romanian").

Throughout the world it has been shown that a heritage of slavery leads to the phenomenon of a persistent "under class". It stands to reason that lessons learned from education reform efforts in the US to level the playing field between blacks and whites will have great relevance to the problems affecting Romania and the European Union with regard to people of Roma descent.

¹ The 2002 national census recorded a total population of 21,680,974. National Institute of Statistics, *Census of population and dwellings 2002*, INS.¹

² The 2007 UNICEF report, *Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma Children in Southeast Europe* estimated between 1.8 and 2.5 million. The Roma Education Fund's *Needs Assessment for Romania*, 2004 noted that Roma NGOs estimated the number to be between 1,010,000 and 2,500,000. Similar estimates are also found in: UNDP report, *Faces of Poverty*, 2005; C. Zamfir and M. Preda (eds.), *Romii in Romania*, Bucharest: Expert Publishing House, 2002; OSF-Romania; *Roma Inclusion Barometer*, Bucharest: OSF-Romania, 2007.

³ Sir Angus Fraser, *The Gypsies*, p 58, Blackwell, 1992

⁴ **"Grigore Ghica pressed for the removal of what he called 'this humiliating vestige of a barbarous society', proposing also that the owners should be recompensed for the loss on their investment. He had his way and the buying and selling of human beings was banned for good... Within a matter of weeks Wallachia took similar steps. Complete legal freedom came in 1864 when a new constitution was framed for the now united principalities...and Gypsies were, at least in principle, deemed to have the rights of Rumanian citizenship"**, Fraser, *The Gypsies*, p. 224-226.

In the United States, programs and strategies devised to improve educational outcomes for blacks are virtually never limited to African Americans or labeled as “Black Initiatives”. They are targeted to the ‘under-privileged’, ‘disadvantaged’, ‘at risk’, ‘lower class’, ‘minorities’, and the ‘underclass’. In keeping with this nomenclature and to avoid the resentments that can develop from differentially conferred social programs, this paper proposes an integrated set of solutions to the problems of Romania’s most “disadvantaged children”, with the implicit understanding that the primary target of these measures are Roma children – because it is Roma children, in large numbers, who tend to miss kindergarten, enter school late, attend sporadically, and drop out early.

The following measures derive from the authors’ seven years’ experience working with children from extremely impoverished families in the city of Bacau and the town of Buhusi in Moldavia, School 141 in Bucharest’s Sector 5, five villages in Dambovita County, and participating in summer programs in over 60 schools around the country. These activities were first developed under the auspices of the Fundatia de Sprijin Comunitar, Bacau, and since 2004 as programs of Asociatia Ovidiu Rom.

They are consistent with recommendations published by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP)⁵, the Roma Education Fund⁶, the *Decade of Roma Inclusion National Action Plan on Education*⁷, UNICEF⁸ and OECD’s *Ten Steps to Equity in Education*.⁹ They build on a number of projects implemented as pilots in 12 counties through the Phare program, “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, with a Special Focus on Roma”.

All of our recommended measures are designed to be distributed by family income, not by ethnicity.

In remote rural areas, all children are disadvantaged due to the inaccessibility of educational institutions that prepare students for the economic realities of the 21st century. However, Ovidiu Rom’s experience in rural communities, reinforced by the observations of Education Ministry representatives, is that late enrolment, sporadic attendance, and abandonment during or at the end of primary school are predominantly associated with Roma children – and increasingly, with children (regardless of their ethnicity) whose parents are working abroad.

Over the past seven years, with support from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), individual American donors, and Romanian corporations, the authors of this paper have drawn from the best American practices to create the *Gata, Dispus si Capabil* (“Ready, Willing & Able”) Mothers and Children’s programs (under the auspices of Fundatia de Sprijin Comunitar, Bacau) and the *Fiecare Copil in Scoala* initiative of Asociatia Ovidiu Rom (www.ovid.ro)

The success of these programs in getting and keeping disadvantaged children in school has led the public authorities to take over most of the operating costs of the program in Bacau. Increasingly, school directors and local authorities approach Ovidiu Rom to learn more about how they can implement similar programs in their own communities. We have been approached from various constituencies in Alba, Braila, Brasov, Dambovita, Ilfov, Mures, Neamt and Prahova. More and more of Ovidiu Rom’s resources are being directed to training teachers and community teams rather than on expanding our own direct services.

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ *Advancing Education of Roma in Romania: Country Assessment & REF Strategic Directions*, Roma Education Fund, Budapest, 2007

⁷ *Decade of Roma Inclusion National Action Plan on Education* (draft), National Agency for Roma, 2007.

⁸ *Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma children in Southeast Europe*, UNICEF, Serbia, 2007

⁹ *No More Failures: 10 Steps to Equity in Education*, OECD, 2007

Over the past decade, the field of education reform has been “seeded” by many innovative programs – notably Phare’s “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, with a Special Focus on Roma”, OSI’s *Centrul Educatia 2000+*, and the Ministry of Education’s Program for Rural Education (PIR). These programs, and others, have received support from UNICEF, Save the Children, the Regional Bureau of the Project for Ethnic Relations, and the Romanian Ministry of Education. More recently, as part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion¹⁰, the Roma Education Fund has entered the field.

Now it is time to both “scale up” these best practices on a national basis and to broaden the base of action and support beyond government and the purveyors of international aid.

The premise of this paper is that to radically improve the educational attainment of Romania’s most disadvantaged children will require social as well as educational intervention on a national scale.

To improve the educational attainment of disadvantaged children will require a coordinated effort of the:

- ✓ Education, Health, and Child Protection systems
- ✓ Local and county government
- ✓ Civil society organizations
- ✓ Private business sector
- ✓ Major religious organizations
- ✓ Mass media

It will not be easy and it will cost a great deal of money, but **less per child than it costs to keep a man in prison¹¹ and many times less than it costs to support a family on welfare for a lifetime.**

Why should closing this education gap be Romania’s Number One priority? To put it bluntly, the future wellbeing of the Romanian economy, Romania society, and the perception of Romania abroad – depend on raising the education level of Romania’s poorest children. Although **Roma account for 11% of the population, Roma comprise almost 25% of people under the age of 18¹²** and every year that percentage increases because the Roma birth rate is significantly higher than the national average.¹³

Everyone in society benefits from increased education levels. The country benefits from the increased purchasing power, higher tax revenues, higher levels of worker productivity and lower crime rates.¹⁴

¹⁰ The “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015” is a multi-country initiative of Open Society Institute and the World Bank. For more information see <http://www.romadecade.org>

¹¹ The **annual** education cost per child was 486€ for 2005 (Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Starea Invatamantului din Romania, 2007, p. 14). According to an April 4, 2007 interview published in *Prahova News*, Magistrate Eduard Stasie, Warden of Ploiesti Penitentiary affirmed that the state “spends about €300 **monthly** per inmate” available at http://www.ziarulprahova.ro/articol~categorie-social~stire-20596~%e2%80%9epentru-intretinerea-unui-detinut-statul-cheltuieste-lunar-circa-300~cauta-eduard-stasie~perioada-toata_arhiva.html accessed Jan. 30, 2008.

¹² See box, page 6.

¹³ National Report regarding Social Protection and Social Inclusion, Bucharest, September 2006

¹⁴ In the US, research has shown that each high school dropout, over the course of his or her lifetime, costs the US \$260,000 (Rouse, 2005) *Issue Brief*, Alliance for Excellent Education, January 2007.

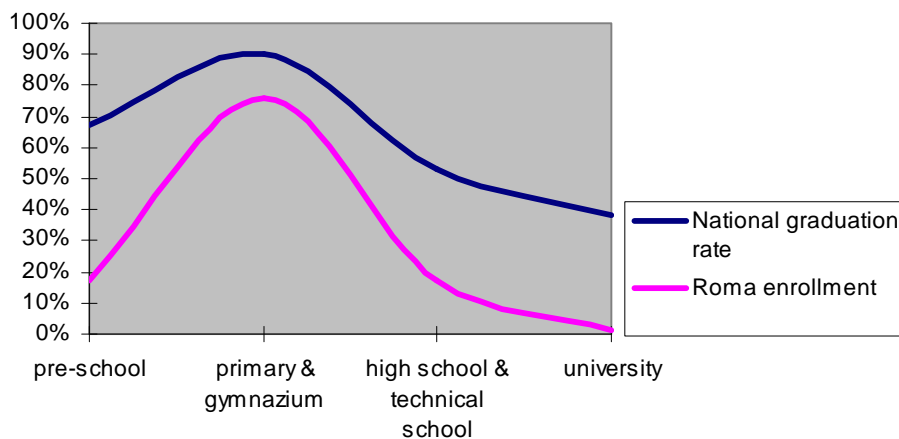
II. Defining the Problem

Dropouts are living critics of their environment, our society and our education system.
Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) African-American novelist

A. The facts

There has been a striking decline in the overall “absolute poverty” rate in Romania since the beginning of the decade – from 35.9% in 2000 to 13.8% in 2006¹⁵. The poverty rate for Roma declined from 76% in 2003 to 58% in 2006. **But the gap between Roma and the average Romanian increased. In 2003 the poverty rate for Roma was three times higher than the national average and in 2006 it was more than four times higher.**¹⁶

- The primary school drop-out rate almost tripled (from 0.6% in 2000/2001 to 1.7% in 2007/2008); the school abandonment rate for grades 1-8 more than tripled from 0.6% to 2% (a period of strong economic growth for the country as a whole)¹⁷.
- Unschooled Roma children represent about 80% of the total number of unschooled children in Romania¹⁸.
- Pre-school enrolment of Roma children (aged 3-6) is one quarter of the national average (17.2% compared to 67%)¹⁹.
- Three quarters of Roma children attend primary and gymnasium education; 17% attend high school and technical school and just 1% attends college²⁰. By comparison, the national average of graduating students is 90.3% for primary and gymnasium education, 52.8% for high school and technical school and 38% for university level²¹.



- On average, Roma spend 6.8 years in school, whereas the national average is 11.2 years²².
- In the 2002 Census over 100,000 Roma people age 11 and above were recorded as illiterate²³.
- The percentage of Roma age 18 and under (47.1%) is twice that of the general population (24.7%)²⁴.

¹⁵ World Bank, Ministry of Labor, Family & Equality of Chances, and NIS – *Romania: Raport de evaluare a saraciei. Programul de asistenta analitica si consiliere*. Raport faza intai, Anul fiscal 2007, Noiembrie 2007

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ministry of Education, Research and Youth, Raportul privind Starea Invatamantului din Romania, 2008

¹⁸ Ministry of Education and Research, Institute for Educational Sciences, Institute for Research on the Quality of Life – 2002, Roma Children School Participation. Problems, Solutions, Actors, Bucharest, p. 47

¹⁹ Advancing Education of Roma in Romania, REF, 2007, p. 38

²⁰ Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, Volume 1, 2007, EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) 2007, OSI, p. 349.

²¹ Ministry of Education. Research and Youth, Starea Invatamantului din Romania, 2007, p. 67, 87, 102.

²² EUMAP, p. 349.

²³ INS – Recensamantul populatiei si al locuintelor 2002, table 14.

²⁴ EUMAP, p. 345.

B. The “Culture” Myth

“It is time to correct our image of the largest minority in Europe, which is still shaped by Gypsy romance and Gypsy kitsch. This misconception has lured us into the false belief that the misery which the Roma people endure is actually an act of self-chosen freedom.”

Wim Wenders, German film director

The Roma elite, the average Romanian, and the international media all like to perpetuate a mythology of the Roma people as a culturally distinct, largely itinerant, and homogeneous group. This is very much like characterizing all people of Jewish descent as sharing the lifestyle and beliefs of Hasidic Jews.

Only about 25% of Roma in Romania self-identify as *Roma*. According to Romani CRISS, Romania’s most prominent Roma NGO, only about 30 percent of those speak Romanes. In other words, **approximately six percent of the total Roma population in Romania speaks Romanes as their first language.**

In Romania, the majority of Roma people:

- speak Romanian as their first language,
- have identity documents,
- have been sedentary for many generations²⁵,
- do not marry off their daughters at thirteen,
- share the same language, religious beliefs, core values and traditions as other Romanian citizens,
- consider themselves Romanians,
- live in urban areas (the ratio of Roma rural vs. urban dwellers is virtually identical to the ratio for Romanians as a whole: Roma: 45% rural²⁶/ Romanians 47% rural²⁷).

It is the practice of many Roma to enrol their children in school late (age 7-9) – not as a result of Romani “Culture”, but as a result of the culture of poverty—going to school brings with it a host of financial and social complications—and because that was when the parents started school.

The authors of this paper respect the efforts of Roma organizations to preserve and promote the distinctive elements of their language and traditions and to advance the contributions these have made to human culture. But transmitting cultural heritage, as important as it is, should not be confused with or take priority over efforts to educate children so they can live and work and reach their human potential in mainstream society. That responsibility falls squarely on the government and civil society, not only on Roma NGOs or the Roma Political Party.

²⁵ After all, people who are enslaved can hardly be itinerant.

²⁶ National Agency for Roma (ANR).

²⁷ Romanian National Institute of Statistics, pp. 14-16, <<http://www.insse.ro/cms/files/pdf/ro/cap2.pdf>>. Retrieved on 19 January 2008.

C. The result

It is impossible for anyone to be both unemployed and a good citizen.
Daniel Etounga-Manguelle, African economist

Precise statistics regarding the Roma population are not available, in part because most European governments do not keep statistics on ethnicity or race, and in part because only 25% of the estimated 2.5 million Roma in Romania self-identify as Roma. *However,*

IF you accept that 2.5 million of Romania's 21 million citizens are of Roma descent,

And IF you accept that 44% of Roma are children (0-18)²⁸,

(in areas where we work children often account for OVER half the inhabitants)

Then there are 1.1 million Roma children.

And IF you accept that there are 4.77 million children (0-18)²⁹ in Romania,

THEN, 23% of Romania's children are Roma.

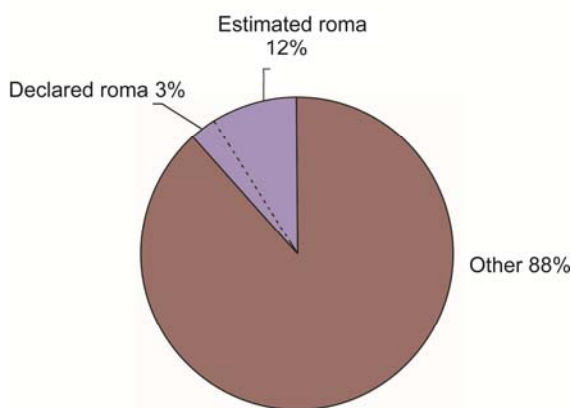
IF 82% of these 1.1 million children do not go beyond 8th grade³⁰

THEN:

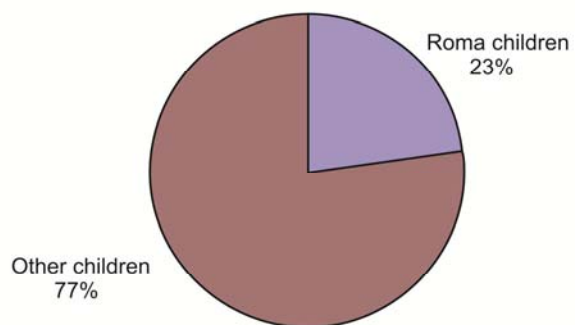
Romania is currently permitting 20% of its children to grow up without the skills and qualifications that would enable them to support themselves in the 21st century.

***And this number does not include rural non-Roma children.*³¹**

2002: Roma percent of total population



2008: Estimated percentage of Roma children



If this trend continues, the economy will suffer greatly, and the image of the nation will continue to deteriorate in the eyes of its fellow EU members. More and more Romanian citizens will depend on social aid and/or crime in order to survive – or will immigrate to other European Union countries where their lack of marketable skills will make them unwelcome and will further augment the cycle of prejudice, discrimination, and multi-generational poverty. Romania will have lost a quarter of its potential workforce for the next quarter-century, and ensured that this segment of the population will continue to live on the margin of society, either here in Romania or as emigrants to Western Europe.

²⁸ EUMAP, p. 345.

²⁹ ANPDC – *Statistici ANPDC Decembrie 2006* at <http://www.copii.ro/content.aspx?id=55> accessed January 30, 2008

³⁰ EUMAP p. 349.

³¹ If this population were included in the calculation, the number of unprepared youth would probably jump to over 25%.

III. Romanian Laws Affecting Children

All that is necessary to be done is to make the government consistent with itself, and render the rights of the states consistent with the sacred rights of human nature.
Frederick Douglass (1817-1895) African American Abolitionist

Romania ratified the **United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child** in 1990. Romania guarantees the rights of all children in order that they may be able as adults to fully contribute to the economic and social development of their country and recognizes the right of every child, including those without formal civic documentation, to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental and social development.

In 1995 Romania passed **Education Law 84**³² which stipulated that all children must attend 10 grades of school starting from age six. In 2004 Romania passed **Education Law 272**³³ which requires that:

- ✓ The Ministry of Education, school inspectorates and schools to implement measures to prevent school abandonment caused by poverty.
- ✓ All suspected cases of abuse or neglect must be immediately reported by professional staff who interact directly with children (e.g., teachers and social workers).
- ✓ Schools, supported by local authorities are obligated to conduct an annual census of children 6-7 years of age in their assigned geographical areas.
- ✓ The National Child Protection Authority ("ANPDC") has responsibility for monitoring how children's rights are respected.
- ✓ Local public administrations guarantee and promote the enforcement of children's rights in their jurisdictions.
- ✓ Local public authorities must involve the local community in identifying the needs of the community and local solutions for the social problems affecting children.
- ✓ Public social assistance services are required to 1) monitor the situation of children in their jurisdiction and enforce children's rights, and 2) inform families of their rights and obligations regarding their children and the services to which they are entitled.

At present these laws tend to be passively interpreted. For example, the local Social Protection Service ("SPAS") is required to monitor and analyze the enforcement of children's rights, including the right to education, but SPAS does not, as a rule, get involved in the identification of school age children who are not in school. This is considered to be the exclusive domain of the schools, but in general the schools do not actually conduct censuses. The lack of clarity in the law combined with the lack of communication between local agencies allows many impoverished children to fall between the cracks of the system.

School Mediator Order 1539 (2007) provides the legal framework for schools to hire a person from the local community specially trained to serve as a liaison between the families and the school)³⁴ in communities with a large number of children who are not attending school. Most school mediators were trained through the EU Phare "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" program. A school mediator can be requested by any community group that identifies the need (parents, school, authorities, NGOs, etc). But in reality:

- the number of trained school mediators is inadequate for the need;
- many communities/schools that meet the criteria have not requested a mediator;
- many do not budget for the position;
- the position is susceptible to political patronage abuse;
- the pay scale is too low to attract and keep truly qualified mediators. See Section V(1.d.)

³² See Annex B for more information and references to the specific provisions

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ See Section 3.4 pp. 384-386 of the EUMAP report for a history of Roma school mediators.

IV. The Reality

How can you teach book learning to people who are hungry and without proper shelter and know nothing about good living?

Booker T. Washington (1856-1915) African American educator

A. The American Experience

Poverty stunts the development of Roma children in the same way it stunts the development of African American children. Like Roma in Europe blacks in the US have poorer health, a higher mortality rate, higher fertility rate, and a higher crime rate than whites³⁵.

In the 1950's the overall plight of African-Americans in the Deep South was probably worse, due to de-facto apartheid, than the situation of Roma in Romania at the same time.³⁶ "In 1950, only 24 percent of blacks aged 25-29 had completed high school, less than half the rate for whites. The average black person had spent 3.5 fewer years in school than the typical white; in the segregated South it was 3.8 years.³⁷ Given what we know about the [segregated schools], the racial gap in actual knowledge was undoubtedly much larger than the number of years in school suggests."³⁸

As a result of the forced integration of schools and services in the 1960's, blacks made tremendous educational gains until the late 1980s. But the sad truth is that there has been no narrowing of the achievement gap between black and white students **since 1988; in fact it is larger today than it was 20 years ago.**³⁹ Many American policy makers concluded in the 1990's that the persistent gaps "must be the result of wrongly designed school policies...and that this achievement gap is the fault of 'failing schools'"⁴⁰

In an effort to narrow the gap in the percentage of black and white students who are proficient in math, reading and science, President George W. Bush's No Child Left Behind ("NCLB") Act was enacted in 2001⁴¹.

"Under the law's most visible stipulation, states must test public school students in reading and math every year from third through eighth grade, plus once in high school, and reveal the results for each school or face a loss of federal funds.

"Just as critical, schools must break out test results for certain groups: blacks, Hispanics, English-language learners, learning-disabled students. This has embarrassed many a top suburban school where high-flying majorities have masked the low achievement of minorities and special-ed students.

"The law insists—with consequences for failure—that schools make annual progress toward closing the achievement gap between rich and poor, black and white, and bring all students to grade-level proficiency in math and reading by 2014."⁴²

³⁵ Rothstein, *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap* p.2

³⁶ "In 1940, when statistics on the educational attainment of the population by race first became available, whites reported high school completion rates of 24.2 and 28 % for males and females, respectively; the comparable numbers for blacks were 6.9 and 8.4 %. <http://www.economics.ucr.edu/papers/papers03/03-11.pdf>

³⁷ By comparison, the education gap between Roma and the national average is estimated to be 5.5 grade levels.

³⁸ Thernstrom, p. 18 *No Excuses: Closing the Racial Gap in Learning, 2004*

³⁹ Thernstrom, p. 1

⁴⁰ Rothstein, p. 2

⁴¹ "The federal NCLB law provides serious penalties for schools that fail to make sufficient annual gains on standardized achievement tests."

⁴² "How to Fix No Child Left Behind", *Time Magazine*, May 24, 2007

After six years, there is no consensus on the law's actual impact and it remains highly controversial.⁴³ Dr. Susan Neuman, the former Assistant Secretary of Elementary and Secondary Education, criticized NCLB for what she called its "troubling assumption" that all children's early childhood experiences prepare them for school success."⁴⁴ Congressman George Miller, one of the authors of NCLB, conceded "schools cannot close the gap on their own," but to the extent the federal government can now pressure schools to help poor minority children while in their care, "No Child Left Behind is a good law."⁴⁵ Indeed, NCLB has confirmed that the government "*should* set standards for schools and students, *should* monitor performance in relation to those standards, and *should* deploy incentives, rewards, and interventions to effect achievement gains"⁴⁶ among disadvantaged groups.

This law shows the seriousness with which the U.S. government takes its responsibility to ensure the educational achievement of all its children. But the law's lack of measurable results is an important signal that Romanian reformers should take to heart – that education reform without concomitant social measures will not succeed.

This is the thesis of Richard Rothstein's 2004 analysis *Class and Schools: Using Social, Economic, and Educational Reform to Close the Black-White Achievement Gap*. "A focus on school, to the exclusion of the rest of a child's life, will never significantly narrow the gap between disadvantaged and mainstream students...School reform alone can only slightly narrow the achievement gap."⁴⁷

A summary of Rothstein's major points was published by The National School Boards Association. This summary is included, almost in its entirety, as Annex C⁴⁸ because the observations have great relevance to the situation between Roma and the majority populations in Romania – and many other European countries.

Rothstein describes the concrete ways in which social class directly affects learning. For example:

- ✓ **The Reading Gap:** White children are more likely than black children to be read to in pre-school years. A child who enters school recognizing some words and has turned the pages of many stories will be easier to teach than one who has rarely or never held a book. The inability of schools to overcome the disadvantage of less literate homes is a universal reality. For poor children to have a chance for academic success they must be helped to enter school with a familiarity with books.
- ✓ **The Conversation Gap:** There are stark class differences in how parents converse with their children. A famous American study found that by age 3, children of professionals had vocabularies that were 50% greater than those of working class children and TWICE as large as those of welfare children.
- ✓ **The Role Model Gap:** Impoverished children have little contact with positive, employed adult role models.⁴⁹ Labour market discrimination continues to be a significant obstacle,

⁴³ National Public Radio (NPR), Dec. 1, 2005

⁴⁴ Rothstein, p. 141

⁴⁵ National Public Radio (NPR), January 8, 2006. Miller further explains, "We would love to have No Child Left in School wrapped in a national health care policy, an early childhood education policy of real substance... but this nation hasn't yet committed to that kind of education system."

⁴⁶ Finn, *Troublemaker: A personal history of school reform since Sputnik*, Princeton University Press, 2008.

⁴⁷ Richard Rothstein is a research associate of the Economic Policy Institute and a visiting professor at Teacher's College, Columbia University. He was previously the national education columnist for the *New York Times*.

⁴⁸ <http://www.nsba.org/site/doc.asp?TRACKID=&DID=34723&CID=1234> accessed January 24, 2008.

⁴⁹ **One key difference between Blacks and Roma is that the lighter skin color and more Caucasian features of Roma make it much easier for Roma to "assimilate" into the majority population with its Mediterranean roots. Thus, successful people of Roma descent have long denied or actually been ignorant of being descended from Roma. This makes it very difficult to find successful Roma role models in the context of the larger culture, whereas in the US, it is much harder for an African American to "assimilate" in the same way. Consequently the many people of African descent who have succeeded in all walks of life can be held up as role models.**

especially for black males. Studies have found that black workers with darker complexions have less success in the labour market than those with identical education, age, and criminal records, but lighter complexions. As long as racial discrimination persists, the average achievement of black students will be lower than the average achievement of whites, simply because many blacks who see that academic effort has less of a payoff will respond rationally by reducing their effort.

- ✓ **The Health Gap:** Overall, lower-income children are in poorer health. They have poorer vision (partly because of prenatal conditions, partly because of how their eyes are trained as infants), poorer oral hygiene, more asthma, poorer nutrition, and less-adequate paediatric care than middle class children. A good part of the over-identification of learning disabilities for lower-class children may well be attributable to undiagnosed vision problems that could be easily treated by optometrists and for which special education placement then should be unnecessary.
- ✓ **The Housing Gap:** The unaffordability of adequate housing for low-income families also affects achievement. Children whose families have difficulty finding stable housing are more likely to be mobile, and student mobility is an important cause of student failing. It is hard to imagine how teachers, no matter how well trained, can be as effective for children who move in and out of their classrooms as they can be for those who attend regularly.

Rothstein concludes that “if we properly identify the actual social class characteristics that produce difference in average achievement, we should be able to design policies that narrow the achievement gap. Certainly, improvement of instructional practices is among these, but a focus on school reform alone is bound to be frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful.”⁵⁰

- ✓ To succeed, school improvement must combine with policies that narrow the social and economic differences between children.
- ✓ **After-school and summer experiences for lower-class children**, similar to programs middle-class children take for granted, would also be needed to narrow the gap.
- ✓ The most important new investment should be in **early childhood programs**, because the gap is already huge by age 3.
- ✓ **Provision of health-care services to lower-class children** and their families is also required to narrow the achievement gap.⁵¹

B. The Romanian Experience

A number of well-designed educational and social projects have been tried in Romania and have resulted in positive outcomes. Especially noteworthy are the “Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, with a Special Focus on Roma” projects developed and managed with support from EU’s Phare program. Since 2003 Phare, in association with the Ministry of Education, has piloted a variety of approaches aimed at improving Roma access to education and developing county level strategies. In 2004, the Government also drafted an Action Plan as part of the Decade of Roma Inclusion,⁵² but as of January 2008 it had not been officially adopted.

⁵⁰ <http://www.nsba.org/site/doc.asp?TRACKID=&DID=34723&CID=1234> accessed January 24, 2008

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² EUMAP, p. 363

In 2007, the Minister of Education, Cristian Adomnitei, launched a proposal for making changes to the Education Law, including wider availability of early childhood programs; making preschool generally available from 3 years of age; and five years of primary school starting with the last year of pre-school. In the summer of 2008 Parliament is expected to consider it.

In March of 2008 the leaders of the major political parties signed the National Pact for Education, expressing a “common vision of the major political players on the objectives that should govern Romania's education system in the years to come.”⁵³ It was based on the diagnosis and recommendations set forth in the 2007 study from the President’s Commission on Education.

The document acknowledges that the Romanian education system is in need of a major overhaul in order to be competitive with other countries. Among its eight objectives are:

- ✓ Minimum annual education budget of 6% of GDP.
- ✓ General availability of early education and guaranteed unrestricted free access for all to education through high school graduation.
- ✓ Guaranteed access to a quality education and involvement of parents as partners in the education process.
- ✓ Closing the educational attainment gap between rural/urban and between different social groups [i.e., Roma and non-Roma].

A non-partisan review of educational goals is a good exercise. However, most of the core provisions of the pact already exist in law. The crux of education reform in Romania is not legal; it is logistical – large-scale implementation on the ground – from the heart of Bucharest’s Sector 5 to the small cities of Moldova to the villages of Baia Mare.

V. The Way Forward

Education is that whole system of human training within and without the school house walls, which molds and develops men and women.

WEB Du Bois, African American civil rights activist 1868-1963

The time has come to integrate best practices for raising the educational attainment of Romania’s most disadvantaged children into a coherent national initiative. The interconnected education and social obstacles that keep Romania’s poorest citizens from obtaining even a minimally acceptable education must be overcome. This must not be construed as charity – but as an absolutely essential course for the country’s future.

Adoption of these measures will require collaboration with national, county and local governments. In addition to Romanian government funding, it will require EU support and significant private sector contributions. We have divided the thirteen measures into four sections. A full discussion of these measures is available in Romanian under the title, *Fiecare Copil în Școală în Patru Pași*, available on our website www.ovid.ro.

- 1. Legislation enforcement**
- 2. Education initiatives**
- 3. Family Support**
- 4. Public awareness**

⁵³ President Traian Basescu as quoted in <http://crib.mae.ro/index.php?lang=en&id=31&s=65370&arhiva=true>

1. ENFORCEMENT OF EDUCATION AND CHILDREN'S RIGHTS LEGISLATION

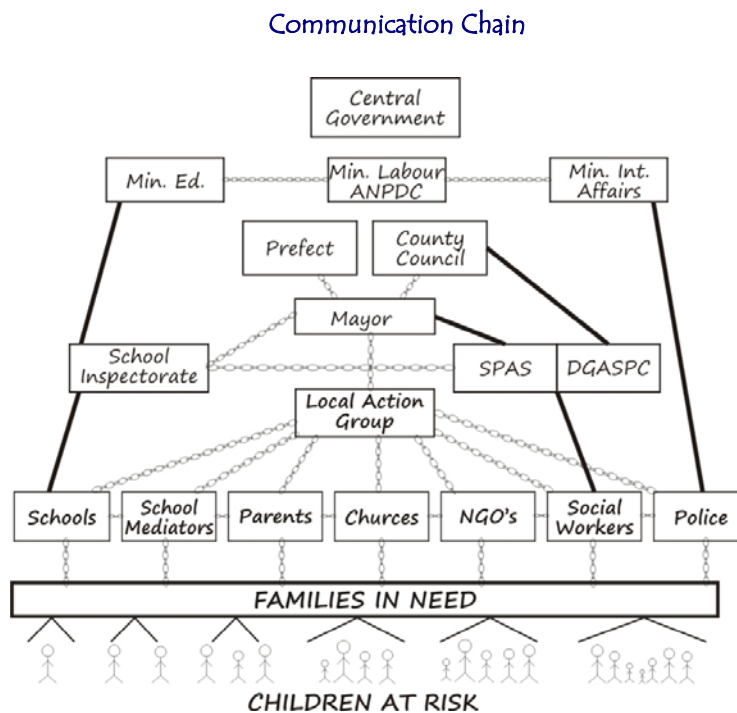
The legal framework for ensuring children attend school is in place and new legislation designed to increase children's access to education continues to be proposed. However, there is often a void between the provisions of a law and its actual enforcement. Some of the reasons these laws are frequently ignored:

- Stakeholders at the grassroots level (parents, teachers, social workers and other parties directly involved in children's education) are not aware of them;
- The laws often leave a lot of room for interpretation;
- Communication channels between the factions responsible for upholding the laws are weak;
- The decentralization process has resulted in an unclear chain of command for certain functions;
- The education of disadvantaged children is simply not a priority at the national, county, or local level.

All too often, the legal system does not provide genuinely viable solutions and therefore law enforcement "by the book" may cause more harm than good. For example, parents are to be fined if they do not send their children to school. However:

- A fine imposed on a parent living in extreme poverty, or homeless, will only exacerbate the problem: the fine will remain unpaid and thereby prevent the family from obtaining social aid;
- Reporting a case to the local social services office is often futile. In many *comune* the social services department consists of one person, sometimes not even a formally qualified social worker;
- Removing children from their family because the parents do not make them go to school is not a workable, or even desirable solution.

1.a Issuance of Ministerial Directives regarding the enforcement of current laws and establishment of enrolment, attendance, and student retention as major priorities for local administrations.



Recommendations

- Ministerial order on the enforcement of Education Laws
- Ministerial order on the enforcement of Law 18/1990
- Establishment of county commissions through *Hotarare de Guvern* (Government Order) initiated by the Ministry of Education and coordinated by the Prefect.

Cost per child: 200€ (social workers)

1b. Formation and/or utilization of Local Action Groups (*Structuri comunitare consultative* Legea 272, art. 103)

Comprised of representatives from the School Inspectorate, local authorities, school and community mediators, police, local NGOs, and other community representatives (such as religious leaders and parent representatives) local action groups are important check and balance mechanisms for the local administration. The empowerment of these groups is particularly important in light of the current governmental decentralization process. The central government “should ensure that there are accessible and competent bodies...and that local authorities are given clear mandates...”⁵⁴

Responsibilities of the Local Action Group:

- obtain from the local council an initial list of children over 5 years of age
- make requests for school mediators and assisting in local recruitment and selection
- make sure authorities, teachers, and parents are aware of education laws
- reward teachers who make extraordinary efforts to prevent school abandonment
- host town meetings about important education issues
- hear citizen complaints regarding child welfare and education
- clarify stakeholders’ specific intervention roles to ensure that children do not fall through the cracks and that interventions are not duplicated
- coordinating public awareness campaigns regarding the importance of universal education
- help schools access funds through the Ministry of Education’s “Improvement of School-Community Collaboration Program in Rural Areas”⁵⁵ and other sources.

*Cost per child: negligible*⁵⁶

1c. Accountability of local administration for conducting annual school registration drives and 100% registration of kindergarten and primary school children

Many disadvantaged children in Romania skip kindergarten entirely, enrol late in first grade (at age 8 or 9), do not attend school regularly, and drop out of school after four to eight grades. A small, but significant percentage, never enrol at all. (On average, Roma spend 6.8 years in school whereas the national average is 11.2 years.⁵⁷)

⁵⁴ Ibid, p. 332

⁵⁵ The Partnership for School and Community Program, School Grants component (within the Rural Education Program launched by the Ministry of Education in) gives school grants of \$ 4000 to 7000. <http://rural.edu.ro/index.php/articles/4> accessed February 2008

⁵⁶ Members serve on voluntary basis.

⁵⁷ EUMAP, p. 349

This is virtually always a result of extreme poverty, parents with very low education levels themselves, and various, often subtle, forms of discrimination from public authorities, teachers and other children. The most common deterrents to education are (a) lack of money for shoes, appropriate clothing, school materials, nourishment, and transportation, and (b) systemic indifference to the special needs of poor uneducated families when it comes to school enrolment and attendance.

The local *inspectorate* (school district) is responsible for bringing children age six and above to school when they don't register or when they stop attending⁵⁸. For instance, in many rural areas teachers do recruit first graders, but it tends to be more linked to the teacher's need to fill the classroom than to ensuring that no child is left out. In populated urban areas, teachers and school staff generally do not consider it their duty to bring children to school.

The mere fact that some children are not registered is evidence of a severe deficiency in the system. The structures and policies must be modified to ensure the inclusion of all children, even if parents do not have the knowledge or capacity to follow through the registration process on their own.⁵⁹

Government has the ultimate responsibility to ensure children attend school during the years for which it is compulsory. Parents should not be expected to cover education costs that they cannot bear. Government must ensure that these children get the subsidies and the support they require to have a chance to succeed⁶⁰.

Evidence of the value of door-to-door school registration drives in poor neighbourhoods:

Since 2002, Ovidiu Rom has conducted annual school registration drives and in every case, it has resulted in the identification of significant numbers of school age children who are not registered or not attending school. Children are frequently identified:

- with minor physical disabilities whose parents erroneously assume it prohibits their attending regular school;
- who are not in school because they are babysitting younger siblings;
- who are languishing at home because they have "aged out" (due to failing a grade three times or missing school because they were living abroad, etc.) and are unaware of programs like Second Chance⁶¹.

We also find children who lack identity documents, but in our experience this actually accounts for a relatively small percentage of children who are not attending school.

Methodology:

Ovidiu Rom uses staff and volunteers as well as city social workers to canvass a geographically defined area. Signs are posted around the community that:

- announce we will be conducting the door-to-door surveys between certain dates
- urge people to register their 5 and 6 year old children for school by April 15
- invite parents to send their 5 and 6 year olds to our Summer School Preparation program
- encourage families to visit our centre, located in the local primary school and staffed by a full-time social worker, if they want information or assistance

⁵⁸ **Regulamentul de Organizare și Funcționare a Unităților de Învățământ Preuniversitar** Art. 10 (5) Schools, in cooperation with the local administration and the Department of Population Monitoring, are required to carry out an annual census of children, age 6-7, living in their jurisdiction.

⁵⁹ *Breaking the Poverty Cycle*, UNICEF

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ The "Second Chance" for primary education, launched in 2005, allows youth and adults to catch up with grades I-IV. It is open to anyone who has not completed primary school and who is at least 4 years of age beyond grade level. (see Annex 1 to MEDC order 5260/6.10.2005).

Recommendation

- County commission, through its control function, should hold the local authorities responsible for making sure all children living in their jurisdiction are in school.

Cost per child: 3€ (posters, data collection systems, training)

1.d. Adequate funding & mandatory implementation of School Mediator Order 1539, with increased mediator responsibilities and remuneration

We have found that good school mediators make a tremendous difference in children's attendance and in relations between poor families and school authorities. Roma School Mediators were introduced to Romania in 1996 by Romani CRISS and the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara. As of January 2008, there are 150 trained mediators and 242 in training through the Phare project, "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, with a Special Focus on Roma." By January 2009, over 400 school mediators are expected to have been trained.

However, there are some flaws in the current system:

1. Of the 150 trained mediators, only about 70 are currently employed as mediators.
"County councils were expected to allocate resources and to hire mediators, but there are still no supporting rules for hiring or maintaining these positions... Unless there is a clear conditioned transfer of responsibilities and budgets... the local authorities may simply decide there are other priorities and abandon the use of school mediators." EUMAP ⁶²
2. The mediator selection process relies heavily on recommendations from the Roma School Inspectors and local Roma leaders.⁶³ What this often means is that they are selected through *Partida Romilor* (the Roma Party). This brings politics into the education environment, often restricts the selection process to Party members and their relatives, and this can potentially undermine the mediator's objectivity.
3. A critical obstacle to the development of effective mediators is that the salary scale is barely above minimum wage. Ovidiu Rom has only been able to keep good school mediators in communities where we work by either augmenting their compensation with other incentives or hiring them from our own budget. As an NGO we have some flexibility, but most school mediators are paid by the local council, with very little margin for granting performance raises. To date there has been a high rate of attrition, given the low salary and low status.

Recommendations

- Recruitment campaigns to attract local residents to apply (led by the School Inspectorate, local action group, or NGO)
- Selection process that includes the local council and school director
- Pay increments based on student attendance
- Ministerial directive that every school with a high ratio of impoverished children has a trained mediator

⁶² EUMAP, p. 384-386

⁶³ Ibid, p. 384

- Mediators trained to initiate **Early Childhood Education programs** based on the HIPPY (Home Instruction for Parents of Preschool Youngsters) model⁶⁴
- Training for principals and teachers on school mediation issues and cultural sensitivity

Cost per child: 168€

1.e. Withholding of government funds for non-compliance

US desegregation laws only became widely enforced when states were threatened with the loss of Federal funds. Although the Supreme Court had declared the racially separate schools unconstitutional in 1954, the law was not widely enforced in the Deep South until the passage of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This directed extra resources to high poverty schools and distributed their money on the basis of need. The Act “spurred racial integration because states engaged in discrimination were prohibited from receiving federal funds.”⁶⁵

It is a fact of nature that human beings are more likely to achieve a goal if there are serious penalties for not doing so. By linking funding to school registration and student attendance, the government sends the message that this is indeed a national priority.

Recommendation:

- Make the distribution of the funds for school infrastructure distributed by the County Council to the communes and mayors conditional on the school registration and attendance of all children.

Cost per child: 0€

2. EDUCATION MEASURES

2.a Teacher Training

Most primary school teachers are not well-equipped to deal with a large influx of children who have not been prepared for school through kindergarten or by educational enrichment at home. Teachers lack strategies and resources—and they usually lack a mandate from their superiors.

Although in theory Romanian teachers believe that all children deserve an equal education, they are often daunted by the day-to-day difficulties of teaching children who, as a result of their living conditions, bring with them behavioural and health problems. And of course teachers share the same prejudices and stereotypes as society in general. The EUMAP Monitoring Report found that “low expectations and negative perceptions of Roma in the classroom are pervasive.”⁶⁶

⁶⁴ HIPPY teaches parents to prepare their 3-5 year olds for school. Facilitated by para-professionals from the community and supported by simple activity packets, home visits, and group meetings, HIPPY parents learn how to prepare their children for success in school and beyond. HIPPY started as an experiment in Israel in 1969 and has grown to 16 countries and 26 US states.

⁶⁵ Thernstrom, p. 214-215

⁶⁶ *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma*, EU Monitoring and advocacy Program (EUMAP) Open Society Institute, 2007 p. 333

Most Romanian teachers are familiar with the concept of child-centred classrooms, but daily teaching practices are often teacher-centred and dominated by memorization and drill. Training in tolerance, diversity and multiculturalism are part of pre-service teacher training, but ongoing pragmatically oriented training for inclusive education is vital for making disadvantaged children and their families feel comfortable in the school environment, as well as for enhancing the quality of classroom life for all of the children.

Pre-school and primary school teachers are the front line in the war on school abandonment. With direction, training, and opportunity, they often prove to be life-changing advocates for their students. Providing teachers with more incentives linked to attendance and performance of their disadvantaged students, like those given to Olympiad coaches, would send the message that the education system is serious about educating its poorest students.

Ovidiu Rom provides interactive professional development for integrating disadvantaged children into mainstream classrooms including:

- concrete application of child-centred methods,
- opportunities for innovation, critique, reflection, and collaboration,
- feedback from skilled practitioners.

Ovidiu Rom also offers strategies for:

- dealing with health and hygiene problems,
- increasing understanding of behavioural problems that may accompany disadvantaged children,
- communicating with the parents of disadvantaged children,
- integrating Roma culture and contributions into the regular curriculum (not just for the minority children).

Recommendations

- Series of four training sessions for all in-service teachers (grades 0-4)
- Practical applications in the classroom following each session to ensure that the knowledge is transformed into practice.
- Cultural sensitivity training and information on Roma culture and history, and curriculum materials⁶⁷
- Significant salary incentives for teachers working in poor communities (following the example of giving salary increases to teachers working in rural areas)

Cost per child: 21€

2.b. National summer school preparation programs for all low-income children

Six years of running summer school-preparation programs in impoverished areas have shown them to be extremely effective in attracting and acclimating children to school. The first year that Ovidiu Rom held summer schools in two impoverished neighbourhoods of Bacau, the kindergarten enrolment doubled at both schools.

Summer school prep programs create awareness and raise the comfort level of parents, familiarize children with the school environment (thus reducing the gap between them and those who have attended pre-school) and attract children to school through pleasurable activities that stimulate creativity, curiosity, and a desire to learn.

⁶⁷ “Although positive efforts have been made towards increasing the available curricular material relating to Roma, the current approach tends to take too narrow a view and overlooks the fact that the majority population must also be educated and have exposure to diversity, even more so than the minority groups.” EUMAP report, p. 389

They serve to ready disadvantaged children for first grade, and when older previously unschooled children are identified, summer programs can prepare them to integrate more successfully into first grade.

A number of schools have organized summer programs through the Phare program, but summer programs are still not common practice in most poor communities:

- there are no specific budgets for summer programs
- teacher incentives are weak⁶⁸
- too few teachers have experience/training in conducting such programs (for disadvantaged children lacking any previous formal education)

Ovidiu Rom's **Sotron Summer School Preparation Program** is a child-centred model based on Project Head Start, a US based education initiative⁶⁹. In 2007, Ovidiu Rom's "Sotron" methodology (with specially designed student workbooks and teachers' kits) was implemented in 60 schools and kindergartens in eight counties. Overall, 70 teachers received preliminary training in using our Sotron kits, and 1700 children participated in the summer school programs. Attendance was consistently high, invariably *increasing* over the course of the program as word of mouth spread among the parents. We did not have the capacity to track individual school attendance throughout the school year, but reports from teachers indicate that attrition over the school year was lower than usual.

Recommendation

- Provide funds and incentives for schools to implement Summer School Preparation Programs for disadvantaged children (whose families qualify for social aid).

Cost per child: 21€

2.c Compulsory UNIVERSAL kindergarten from 5 years of age

"An investment in early education is the most profitable investment in education, as it has the highest individual and social benefits and the lowest opportunity costs."

European Expert Network on Economics of Education ⁷⁰

Early education reduces the drop-out rate and delinquency; it leads to increased chances for a better socio-economic future, and raises the health level of the population⁷¹. Children who attend kindergarten have an educational advantage over those who do not, as they are already familiar with the school environment and requirements and are versed in basic concepts such as names of colours, numbers to 10, and the letters of their name.

⁶⁸ According to the annex to O.M.Ed.C. 5669/15.11.2006, teachers can receive "equality in education" points (e.g., for teaching summer kindergarten, remedial classes, children with special needs, and parent education). However, out of 100 points, these points can qualify for 0.5-4 points, a very low number compared to the point system for superior academic performance.

⁶⁹ Created in 1965, Head Start promotes school readiness by enhancing the social and cognitive development of children through educational, health, nutritional, social and other services to children living below the poverty line. Programs are administered locally by NGOs and local school systems.

⁷⁰ www.education-economics.org, quoted by "Romania educatiei, Romania cercetarii" Presidential Report, page 13

⁷¹ NPSE Report (Nevoi si Prioritati de Schimbare Educationala in Romania – fundament al dezvoltarii si modernizarii invatamantului preuniversitar, order by Med for Oct 2006-May 2007) quoted by "Romania educatiei, Romania cercetarii" Presidential Report, page 13

Early education also helps children learn to interact with persons outside their own family. Pre-school is particularly important for children from families and communities that have traditionally been excluded from education, and for those who only speak a minority language or whose home circumstances make it hard for them to benefit from early stimulation⁷².

The EU considers investment in early education a priority measure to increase the efficacy and equity of the education system⁷³. EUMAP⁷⁴ and the Roma Decade Action Plan also support mandating kindergarten for all children.⁷⁵ The 2007 Presidential Report on Education recommended that the last year of kindergarten be mandatory “to prepare the child for the requirements of the school environment and to contribute to equity and equality in education.”⁷⁶

Current Romanian law stipulates that the pre-school year is “generally available”⁷⁷ – which means all children are entitled to pre-school and schools should ensure that this right be respected, but does not make pre-school attendance mandatory; parents are not obligated by law to send their children to pre-school. In fact, today there are not enough places to accommodate all kindergarten age children.

Recommendation

Incorporate into the law clear lines of responsibility and sanctions for officials that do not uphold the law. Services at the community level should be shared between local authorities and nongovernmental organizations to deal with problems of geographic isolation, lack of financial resources, parental indifference or opposition, etc.

Cost per child: 96€

3. SUPPORT FOR CHILDREN AND FAMILIES

3.a. Incentives to low-income families for 1) early enrolment, 2) 80% attendance of primary school children, and 3) parents' attendance at monthly meetings with teachers, mediators, and social workers

Ovidiu Rom has found material incentives to be highly effective in getting parents to attend meetings and participate in parent trainings. In partnership with Unilever, Ovidiu Rom regularly offers a small package of household and personal cleaning products to parents who attend Parent-Teacher Team meetings.

We propose that food coupons (valued at 200 lei/57€) similar to those Romanian employers may provide to their employees, be distributed by schools to parents who qualify for family aid. These coupons should be given to families below the poverty line for the following actions:

- registering their children aged 3, 4, or 5 for kindergarten by May 1

⁷² Breaking the Poverty Cycle, UNICEF

⁷³ Efficiency and equity in European education and training systems, Commission of the European Communities, Com (2006) 481, final

⁷⁴ EUMAP suggests the Ministry of Education should “ensure that all children have access to full-day two-year pre-school, by extending the compulsory preparatory class (grupa pregatitoare) to two years for all disadvantaged children” EUMAP, p. 335.

⁷⁵ Decade of Roma Inclusion National Action Plan on Education, National Agency for Roma, 2007.

⁷⁶ Romania educatiei, Romania cercetarii Presidential Report

⁷⁷ Law 268/2003 (updating Education Law 84/1995), Art. 7

- registering their age 6 children for 1st grade by May 1
- 80% attendance in school for the fall term
- 80% attendance in school for the spring term
- 100% attendance in the Summer School program

Thus, a family with two small children who registers them both for kindergarten or first grade would get 400 lei in food coupons. If their children meet the attendance criteria they would qualify for 400 lei in food coupons in January, 400 in June, and 400 in August, for a total annual income supplement worth 1600 lei.

This would have several positive effects:

1. Reward poor families for early school registration
2. Motivate poor parents to make sure their children attend school regularly
3. Add to the local neighbourhood's micro-economy
4. Provide a means for improving poor children's nutrition

Recommendations

- Use local NGOs to track student attendance and parent participation.
- Create coupon distribution mechanism.
- Include mechanism to prevent misuse: fraud, use for non-food items, shops charging commissions.

Cost per child: 228€

3.b. Free school materials, uniforms and hot lunches for children from low-income families

Even though primary education is officially free of charge, schooling entails costs that can be prohibitive for families living on the margin, particularly those with more than one school age child. Cost is the most frequent explanation given by poor parents for not sending their children to kindergarten and postponing enrolling their children in primary school. School costs include clothing, supplies, and transportation. Gifts and informal payments to teachers, which are common in Romania, pose a special burden to families who live at the subsistence level.

School materials: Once a year the Ministry of Education provides primary students who qualify (family income under 250 lei per family member) with a basic package of school supplies, such as school bag, writing kit (pencils, fountain pen), notebooks, and watercolours. School starts on September 15, but the supplies are commonly distributed late (e.g., for the 2007-08 school year in Dambovita county the supplies arrived in January 2008) and they generally last children only one semester. Although technically students receive all compulsory textbooks free of charge, teachers have the prerogative to require students to purchase one or more extra workbooks.

The problem is not simply that a parent hasn't the cash to pay, it is that parents are embarrassed to admit to the child or the teacher that they can't afford things their child needs. It's easier to put off sending them to school, or not make them go.

Cost per child: 50€

Clothing: Children have been known to come to our summer school programs barefoot, without underwear, in pyjamas, and even in their communion dresses because they lacked the appropriate clothing. On occasion we have been told by school principals that "uniforms aren't necessary" only to discover that all of the

‘Romanian children’ are wearing uniforms. In one highly traditional Roma community where the mothers dressed in colourful pleated skirts, both parents and children broke into delighted smiles when we offered them the standard Romanian blue and white checked uniform (indeed, not “required”, but highly desirable).

If we are serious about getting them to go to school, kindergarten and primary school children living below the poverty line should be provided with appropriate clothing.

Cost per child: 100€ (2 uniforms, one coat, two pairs of sturdy shoes)

Nutrition: Romania’s *Corn si Lapte* program which made snacks of bread and milk available to all kindergarten and primary school students as of 2002 is certainly a step in the right direction, but it does not go far enough in making up for the nutritional deficits of impoverished children – and it goes too far by not differentiating between children living below the poverty line and those whose families can afford to cover their children’s dietary needs.

Most developed countries have free breakfast and lunch programs for children living below the poverty line. In the US, any child may purchase a meal through the National School Lunch Program (NSLP) but children from families with incomes at or below 130 percent of the poverty level are eligible for free meals. Those with incomes between 130 percent and 185 percent of the poverty level are eligible for reduced-price meals. NSLP is a federally assisted meal program operating in public and private schools. It provides nutritionally balanced, low-cost or free lunches to children each school day. School districts get cash subsidies and donated commodities from the US Department of Agriculture for each meal they serve. They are required to serve lunches that meet Federal requirements and they must offer free lunches to eligible children ⁷⁸ In January of 2008, 130 percent of the poverty level is \$26,845 for a family of four.) Most of the support USDA provides comes in the form of a cash reimbursement for each meal served.

Cost per child per year: 350€

Recommendations

- Provision of uniform, coat and shoes free of charge to children under the poverty line,
- Provision of teacher-requested workbooks and supplies free of charge to children under the poverty line,
- Nationally subsidized, but *decentralized* food and vitamin distribution program that is available to all, but free only to those who are living under the poverty line,
- Prohibition on teacher gifts,
- Enforcement of prohibition on teachers accepting fees for after-school tutoring of students in their own classes.

3.c. School-based vision, dental, and medical care as well as speech therapy in schools with high concentrations of disadvantaged children

Policymakers have now joined health, education and nutrition specialists in acknowledging the importance of *integrated* interventions...⁷⁹
Mary Eming Young ⁷⁹

⁷⁸ <http://www.fns.usda.gov/cnd/lunch/AboutLunch/NSLPFactSheet.pdf>

⁷⁹ *Early Child Development: Investing in the Future*, Mary Eming Young, The World Bank, 1996

Each of the well-documented social class differences between children living in extreme poverty and middle class children (poorer nutrition, vision, and oral hygiene; increased susceptibility to asthma, and inadequate medical care of children in poverty) “is likely to have a palpable effect on academic achievement, and combined, the influence of all these differences is probably huge.”⁸⁰

Ovidiu Rom staff have observed that many disadvantaged children have hearing and speaking difficulties due to the lack of attention uneducated parents give to correcting their children’s pronunciation and guiding their speech development. The confusion children make between various sounds make it difficult for these children to learn to read and write correctly without speech therapy. In Ovidiu Rom’s 2007 summer program in Dambovita County, most of the 184 children had speech problems of varying degrees.

Cost per child: 31€

3.d Engagement of established local NGOs in the implementation and monitoring of the measures listed above

There are many competent NGOs throughout Romania, thanks to foreign development capital and technical assistance from Phare, USAID, UNICEF, Save the Children, and other international aid organizations. Due to funds having shrunk dramatically or been withdrawn as a result of EU accession, many of these NGOs are having difficulty surviving. These organizations have a great deal to offer and should be utilized in efforts to bring disadvantaged children to school. They can provide manpower, oversight, and expertise, can help schools attract valuable resources from the local community, and can offer after school programs.

Recommendation

- Include in local “school recruitment budget” one full-time professional dedicated to project from an established NGO selected by the Local Action Group.
- Get UNICEF to establish a communication network among local NGOs participating in this program.
- Involve independent organizations working nationally (US Peace Corps, YMCA’s, Save The Children, FONCP, etc.)

Cost per child: 288€

Total annual cost per child: 1556€

Total national cost per year to keep at risk children in school: €311,280,000

⁸⁰ Rothstein, Class & Schools, p. 3

4. PUBLIC AWARENESS

Ovidiu Rom is in the process of applying for a Phare grant with the Ministry of Education, ANPDC, and Asociația Telefonul Copilului to create an awareness campaign stressing the importance of education for all children. This campaign will utilize Telefonul Copilului as a communication and data gathering device. Companies will be invited to include our message on their products and at their service sites and media companies (Pro TV has already agreed to participate) will be recruited to help widely disseminate the messages to:

4.a. Motivate parents to send their children to pre-school.

4.b. Inform parents of enrolment procedures and deadlines and of their legal rights and obligations to ensure that their children have access to a quality education.

4.c. Create awareness among the general public of their legal rights and social obligations to demand the government enforce education and children's rights legislation.

4.d. Motivate teachers to dedicate their energies to the success of their neediest pupils as well as their Olympiad contenders.

VI. Coalition of Stakeholders

*Today we begin in earnest the work of making sure that the world we leave our children is better than the one we inhabit today.
Barack Obama (1961-) African-American presidential candidate*

Until now, most of the effort to improve Roma school outcomes has been initiated by international development organizations and implemented by the government. Open Society Institute opened its EUMAP report for Romania with the following observation:

“The government has energetically adopted policies and programmes aimed at improving the situation of Roma generally, and has made Roma education a priority for use of EU funds. However, implementation of these policies has been far weaker than the ambitious targets suggest, and a wide range of obstacles to quality education remains for Roma children.”⁸¹

The fact that the primary school drop-out rate more than doubled (from 0.6% in 2001 to 1.5% in 2006) and the school abandonment rate for grades 1-8 tripled from 0.6% to 1.8%) suggests that the efforts implemented so far, although laudable, have not reached the critical mass required to impact the education gap between Roma children and the national average.

To raise the academic attainment and achievement levels of disadvantaged children will require nothing less than a MAJOR national initiative – one that engages a far wider spectrum of stakeholders than have previously been associated with this issue. In addition to cooperation and collaboration of central, county and local governments, it will require the active involvement of private citizens, the business sector, the independent sector, the church, and mass media. We advocate starting at the top AND at the bottom – at the “top” by engaging industrial and business leaders, church leaders, and major media outlets and at the “bottom” through the work of local action groups and the involvement of local business, NGOs, churches and media.

⁸¹ Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma, EU Monitoring and advocacy Program (EUMAP), Open Society Institute, 2007, p. 331

Ovidiu Rom is committed to promoting this initiative in the media and to the business sector. We have set a target of 90% government financing (50% EU structural funds/40% Romanian government) with a 10% private sector contribution. Although philosophically we believe education is the responsibility of the state, pragmatically we know that the investment and active involvement of the business sector will provide a stimulus and a system of checks and balances.

In addition we believe it is critical that the religious leadership embrace this initiative and we rely on our partners to gain the support of the Orthodox Church, the Catholic Church and other religious groups that influence public opinion and behaviour.

Recommendations

- Companies “adopt a school”⁸², covering 8-10% of Fiecare Copil in Scoala program costs (see budget) and providing oversight, in-kind donations, and consultation
- Employees direct 2% to their company’s Adopted School
- Employees volunteer as mentors to at-risk students at Adopted Schools
- TV and radio stations run Public Service Announcements generated by sponsoring corporations.
- TV, radio stations, and print outlets promote Fiecare Copil in Scoala
- Churches encourage members to volunteer and take up donations specifically earmarked for local FCS participating schools
- Partial funding obtained through EU structural funds

VII. Cost of Doing Nothing

Children whose minds, in their earliest years, are not adequately stimulated pay for these early deficits throughout their lives – and so does society. Such children are far more likely than their more fortunate peers to do poorly in school, to drop out early, to be functionally illiterate, and to be only marginally employable. Collectively, these children who have been deprived in early life affect labour productivity and national economic prosperity.

Armean Choksi, The World Bank

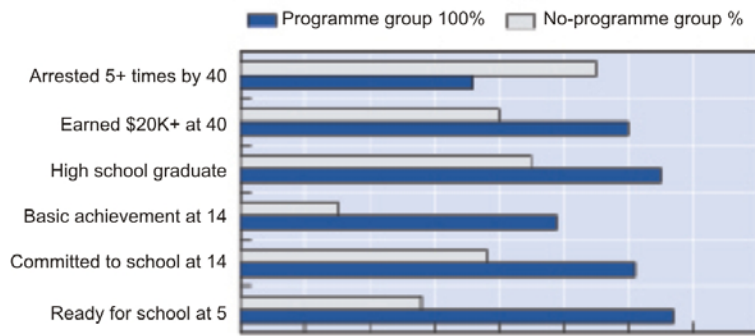
In 1962, 58 children living in public housing in a rundown neighborhood in Ypsilanti, Michigan, were randomly assigned to an experimental pre-school program, while 58 children, identical in virtually all respects, did not attend preschool. The life stories of these children have been tracked ever since. As they progressed through school, the preschool children were less likely to be assigned to a special education class for the mentally retarded. Their attitude toward school was better, and their parents were more enthusiastic about their youngsters' schooling. Their high-school grade point average was higher, and by age 19, two-thirds had graduated from high school, compared with 45 percent of those who didn't attend preschool.

The impact of those preschool years still persists, 40 years later. By almost any measure we might care about -- education, income, crime, family stability -- the contrast with those children who did not attend the preschool program is striking. When they were 27, the preschool group scored higher on tests of literacy. **Nearly twice as many have earned college degrees. More of them have jobs. They are more likely to own their home, own a car and have a savings account. They are less likely to have been on welfare and their income pushes them well above the poverty line. Compared with the control group, fewer have been arrested for serious crimes.**⁸³ David Kirp, *The New York Times*

⁸² Loosely based on the “adopt a highway” model whereby companies and associations commit to keeping a section of highway litter-free.

⁸³ “Leveling the Playing Field: Life Way After Head Start”, David L. Kirp, *New York Times*, November 21, 2004

Returns from early childhood education



Source: OECD (2006), *Starting Strong II: Early Education and Care*, OECD, Paris, Figure 5.1.

According to Richard Rothstein, “these results are consistent with non-experimental evidence. Head Start children have less need for special education and less grade retention than children who were not in the program. Adolescents and young adults who attended Head Start centres as children have better health, higher earnings, lower rates of delinquency, and higher high school graduation and college attendance rates than comparable youths who were not in Head Start... the non-cognitive benefits of Head Start programs, like avoidance of criminal activity, apparently last for years.”⁸⁴

Today in Romania, the annual cost of school per child is €486⁸⁵; keeping a man in prison costs approximately €3600⁸⁶. And this number does not take into consideration the lost wages, and social benefits that would have accrued had these men had a high school diploma and gotten a job in the mainstream economy.

Almost every week a new story appears in the international media about alleged transgressions committed by poor emigrants from Romania. It matters not whether the perpetrators of these crimes are of Roma or Dacian or Slavic descent. They were born in Romania, they speak Romanian and they travel on Romanian passports. They are bona fide Romanian citizens whose education qualifies them to “make a living” at nothing but manual labour or unlawful activities such as begging, theft, and prostitution. It doesn’t matter whose fault it is. This country has no alternative but to address this issue. If it doesn’t close the gaping education gap between children of Roma descent and the rest of the population, then there cannot possibly be any outcome except an escalating rate of poverty and crime and a deteriorating image abroad.

We must end this ancient cycle of poverty. Romania is blessed with abundant resources, a burgeoning ‘millionaire class’, and an influx of foreign investors and European Union funds. Romania – *the size of Oregon, with the population of the greater New York metropolitan area*⁸⁷ – has the means to educate all its citizens.

Do we have the will to lead Europe in eradicating a Union-wide problem for which there is a clear solution: a massive investment in the welfare and education of disadvantaged children at the pre-school and primary level?

⁸⁴ Rothstein, p. 123-125

⁸⁵ Ministry of Education, *Starea Invatamantului din Romania*, 2007, p. 14.

⁸⁶ http://www.ziarulprahova.ro/articol~categorie-social~stire-20596~%e2%80%9epentru-intretinerea-unui-detinut-statul-cheltuieste-lunar-circa-300~cauta-eduard-stasie~perioada-toata_arhiva.html accessed on January 30, 2008.

⁸⁷ *Combined Statistical Area (CSA)* with an estimated population of 21,903,623 (as of 2005). Wikipedia

VII. Cost Projection

*Education is our passport to the future,
for tomorrow belongs to the people who prepare for it today.
Malcolm X (1925-1965) African American activist*

Annual costs for one school with 50 eligible students		unit	unit cost	nr of units	annual cost	Government	other sources	per student
1. Local Action Group	meetings	mtg	0	12	0			€ 0
2. Annual school registration drive	coordinator (social worker, mediator or NGO staff)	person	0		0			€ 3
	posters	poster	1	50	50		50	
	data collector materials	worker	5	10	50	50		
	trainings	worker	5	10	50	50		
3. Teacher training	2 trainers for 5 days (assuming class of 20)	teacher	500	2	1000	1000		€ 21
	transportation	teacher	10	2	20		20	
	materials	teacher	5	2	10		10	
	other	teacher	5	2	10		10	
	food	teacher	10	2	20		20	
4 Summer School	teacher's assistant (4 weeks)	worker	150	2	300	300		€ 21
	snacks (10 days)	child	10	50	500	500		
	materials (10 days)	child	5	50	250		250	
5 Incentives	school registration	child	57	50	2850	2850		€ 228
	80% attendance fall	child	57	50	2850	2850		
	80% attendance spring	child	57	50	2850	2850		
	100% attendance summer	child	57	50	2850	2850		
6. Entitlements	school materials	child	50	50	2500	2500		€ 500
	school clothes	child	100	50	5000		5000	
	hot lunch: 200 days x 1.75€	child	350	50	17500	17500		
7. Vision, dental, speech	Eye doctor part-time	doctor	1000	0.2	200	200		€ 31
	Dentist part-time	dentist	1000	0.2	200	200		
	vision & dental corrections	interventions	100	10	1000	1000		
	Speech therapist part time	therapist	800	0.2	160	160		
8. School mediator	salary full-time	mediator	700	12	8400	8400		€ 168
9. Enforcement of legislation	social worker, part-time	worker	800	6	4800	4800		€ 96
10. Universal kindergarten	incremental costs per additional child based on 2007 costs	child	200	50	10000	10000		€ 200
11. Local Admin accountability					0	0		€ 0
12. Withholding of funds for non-compliance					0	0		€ 0
13. Local NGO participation	one full-time professional dedicated to project	worker	1000	12	12000	12000		€ 288
	expenses		100	12	1200		1200	
	materials		100	12	1200		1200	
TOTAL					€ 77,820	€ 70,060	€ 7,760	€ 1,556
TOTAL for 200,000 children						90%	10%	
						280,152,000 €	31,128,000 €	€ 311,280,000

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Annex A. Romanian Laws Affecting Children

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child was ratified by Romania by **Law 18/1990**. Through this law, Romania guarantees the rights of all children in order that they may be able as adults to fully contribute to the economic and social development of their country.

Article 27 recognizes the right of every child to a standard of living adequate for the child's physical, mental and social development. The state is obligated to assist parents in exercising this right and when necessary, providing material assistance and support. The state is obligated to protect and guarantee the rights of all children in their territory including those without formal civic documentation.⁸⁸

Education Law 84/1995 updated by Law 268/2003 stipulates mandatory education of 10 grades, starting from age 6. According to this law, the responsibility for ensuring school attendance in the mandatory school system belongs to the parents. If they fail to comply, the parents may be fined between 50 and 200 lei. In case the parents cannot or do not fulfil their legal obligation regarding their children's education, the local authorities and schools are legally responsible to intervene.⁸⁹

Education Law 272/2004 for protection of children's rights, Art. 47 states that all children have the right to receive an education that allows the development of their aptitudes and personality and that prepares them to be contributing members of society.

Law 272, Art. 48 requires the Ministry of Education, school inspectorates and schools to implement measures to prevent school abandonment caused by poverty. They are required to take action to ensure adequate social services in the school environment, including: food, school supplies, transportation and other services deemed necessary for the child's attendance at school.⁹⁰

Law 272, Art.91 stipulates that all suspected cases of abuse or neglect must be immediately reported by professional staff who interact directly with children (e.g., teachers). They must notify the local Social Protection Services (SPAS) or the General Division of Social Work and Child Protection (DGASPC)⁹¹. The Ministry's School Directives states that teachers have the responsibility to monitor children's school attendance, keep regular contact with the parents, and notify social assistance/education institution cases in which children are at risk for school abandonment.⁹²

Schools, supported by local authorities and population monitoring services of the Police Department, are obligated to conduct an annual census of children 6-7 years of age in their assigned geographical areas.⁹³

Not all the measures above are routinely enforced. Indeed, many teachers are unaware of the provisions and sanctions of Law 272.⁹⁴ And while the legislation is clear with regard to children who have abandoned school or are at risk of doing so, the law is silent regarding children who have never been registered for school, and consequently do not show up in school records.

⁸⁸ Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma Children in Southeast Europe, UNICEF, Serbia, 2007, p. 9

⁸⁹ Law 272/2004, art. 45, (2) In cases where parents cannot satisfy their children's minimum needs of housing, food, clothing and education, the state, through the local administration, is required to provide parents with financial and in-kind support, as well as services provided according to the law.

⁹⁰ Law 272, Art. 48, paragraph F

⁹¹ Failure to comply represents severe disciplinary breach and is punished according to the law (Art. 134).

⁹² Regulamentul de Organizare și Funcționare a Unităților de Învățământ Preuniversitar Art.84. (4): The personnel involved in education is obliged to notify, if needed, the public social assistance/education institutions, the Child Protection Department, with regards to aspects that affect the dignity, and physical and psychological integrity of the child/student.

⁹³ Regulamentul de Organizare și Funcționare a Unităților de Învățământ Preuniversitar Art. 10 (5) School units, with support from local authorities and the population ID service (Serviciului de Evidență a Populației), are obliged to do an annual census of children age 6/7 from their allocated areas.

⁹⁴ In a recent workshop with teachers and school directors from Dambovită, Braila and Brașov counties, the general opinion was that teachers know they *can* notify the authorities if they think a student is at risk of dropping out – but are not aware that they are legally obligated to do so. Furthermore, the teachers asserted that such a written notice would be useless because the social assistance departments are not likely to act. One teacher said her school director does not encourage teachers to report these cases because he didn't want fuss created around his school.

Law 272, Art. 100 gives the **National Child Protection Authority (ANPDC)** responsibility for monitoring how children's rights are respected, as well as coordinating and controlling the protection and promotion of children's rights.

Law 272, Art. 102 requires local public administration to guarantee and promote the enforcement of children's rights.

Law 272, Art. 103 stipulates that local public authorities must involve the local community in identifying both the needs of the community and local solutions for the social problems affecting children. In order to accomplish that, 'consultative community structures' (i.e., local action groups) can be established. These groups may include clergy, teachers, local business people, medical staff, social service professionals, police officers and others. Their main role is to resolve cases that have been identified and to answer to education-related needs of the community. They may also be consulted when special protection measures need to be taken. Service on these committees is voluntary; members are selected by the Mayor and Local Council.

Law 272, Art. 106 requires public social assistance services to (1) monitor and analyze the situation of children living in their jurisdiction, and enforce children's rights, ensuring that relevant data be collected and analyzed and (2) counsel and inform families about their rights and obligations regarding their children and the services that are available locally.

At present these laws tend to be passively interpreted. For example, SPAS is required to monitor and analyze the enforcement of children's rights in their jurisdiction, including the right to education, but they do not, as a rule, get involved in the identification of school age children who are not in school. This responsibility is considered to be the exclusive domain of the schools⁹⁵. The lack of clarity in the law combined with the lack of communication between local agencies allows many impoverished children to fall between the cracks of the system. Ideally Community Consultative Structures should create a link and a 'quality control' mechanism to oversee the upholding of children's rights, but at present in most communities they do not serve that function.

School Mediator Order 1539/2007 provides the legal framework for schools to obtain a school mediator (i.e., a person from the local community specially trained to serve as a liaison between the families and the school)⁹⁶ if they:

- are situated in communities with large numbers of children who are not attending; kindergarten or school;
- have multi-ethnic or predominantly Roma students;
- have high abandonment rates, low attendance and poor academic results;
- have a high percentage of students from disadvantaged families;
- have many minority students, but no teachers from the respective minorities.

A school mediator can be requested by any community group that identifies the need (parents, school, authorities, NGOs, etc). But in reality (1) the number of trained school mediators is inadequate for the need, (2) many communities/schools that meet the criteria have not requested a mediator, (3) many communities that need mediators do not budget for the position, (4) the pay scale is too low to attract and keep truly qualified mediators. Most school mediators currently employed were trained through the EU Phare "Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups" program. See Section V(8) for further discussion.

⁹⁵ **Regulamentul de Organizare și Funcționare a Unităților de Învățământ Preuniversitar** Art. 10 (5) Schools, in cooperation with the local administration and the Department of Population Monitoring, are required to carry out an annual census of children, age 6-7, living in their jurisdiction.

⁹⁶ See Section 3.4 pp. 384-386 of the EUMAP report for a history of Roma school mediators.

Annex B. Summary of *Class and Schools* by Richard Rothstein

The achievement gap between poor and middle-class black and white children is widely recognized as [the United States'] most important educational challenge... Demography is not destiny but students' family characteristics are a powerful influence on their relative average achievement...

Describing the concrete ways that social class actually affects learning may help to make it obvious why the achievement gap can be substantially narrowed only when school improvement is combined with social and economic reform.

The reading gap

Young children of educated parents are read to more consistently and are encouraged to read more to themselves when they are older. Most children whose parents have college degrees are read to daily before they begin kindergarten, but few children whose parents have only a high school diploma or less benefit from daily reading. And, white children are more likely than black children to be read to in their pre-kindergarten years.

A 5-year-old who enters school recognizing some words and who has turned the pages of many stories will be easier to teach than one who has rarely held a book. The second child can be taught, but with equally high expectations and effective teaching, the first will be more likely to pass an age-appropriate reading test than the second. So the achievement gap begins.

If a society with such differences wants all children, irrespective of social class, to have the same chance to achieve academic goals, it should find ways to help lower-class children enter school having the same familiarity with books as middle-class children have.

Class backgrounds influence *relative* achievement everywhere. The inability of schools to overcome the disadvantage of less-literate homes is not a peculiar American failure but a universal reality. The number of books in students' homes, for example, consistently predicts their test scores in almost every country. Turkish immigrant students suffer from an achievement gap in Germany, as Bangladeshi pupils in Great Britain, and as do low-caste Buraku in Japan.

An international reading survey of 15-year-olds, conducted in 2000, found a strong relationship in almost every nation between parental occupation and student literacy. After reviewing these results, a U.S. Department of Education summary concluded that "most participating countries do not differ significantly from the United States in terms of the strength of the relationship between socioeconomic status and literacy in any subject."

Urging less-educated parents to read to children can't fully compensate for differences in school readiness. Children who see parents read to solve their own problems or for entertainment are more likely to want to read themselves.

Parents who bring reading material home from work demonstrate by example to children that reading is not a segmented burden but a seamless activity that bridges work and leisure. Parents who read to children but don't read for themselves send a different message.

Parents who are more literate are more likely to ask questions that are creative, interpretive, or connective, such as, "What do you think will happen next?" "Does that remind you of what we did yesterday?" Middle-class parents are more likely to read aloud to have fun. Their children learn that reading is enjoyable and are more motivated to read in school.

The conversation gap

There are stark class differences not only in how parents read but in how they converse. Explaining events in the broader world to children at the dinner table, for example, may have as much of an influence on test scores as early reading itself. Through such conversations, children develop vocabularies and become familiar with contexts for reading in school. Educated parents are more likely to engage in such talk and to begin it with infants and toddlers.

Soon after middle-class children become verbal, their parents typically draw them into adult conversations. Being included in adult conversations this early develops a sense of entitlement in children;

they feel comfortable addressing adults. Children who ask for reasons, rather than accepting assertions on adult authority, develop intellectual skills.

Parents whose professional occupations entail authority and responsibility typically believe more strongly that they can affect their environments and solve problems. At work, they explore alternatives and negotiate compromises. They naturally express these personality traits at home when they design activities in which children figure out solutions for themselves.

But parents whose jobs entail following orders or doing routine tasks are less likely to encourage their children to negotiate and more likely to instruct them by giving directions without extended discussion. Following orders, after all, is how they themselves behave at work.

Middle-class children's self-assurance is enhanced in after-school activities that sometimes require large fees for enrolment and almost always require parents to have enough free time and resources to provide transportation. Organized sports, music, drama, and dance programs build self-confidence and discipline in middle-class children. For children with greater self-confidence, unfamiliar school challenges can be exciting. These children, who are more likely to be from middle-class homes, are more likely to succeed than those who are less self-confident.

Homework exacerbates academic differences between these two groups because middle-class parents are more likely to help with homework. Yet homework would increase the achievement gap even if all parents were able to assist. Parents from different social classes supervise homework differently. Consistent with overall patterns of language use, middle-class parents—especially those whose own occupational habits require problem solving—are more likely to assist by posing questions that break large problems down into smaller ones and that help children figure out correct answers. Lower-class parents are more likely to guide children with direct instructions.

Twenty years ago two researchers from the University of Kansas, visited families from different social classes to monitor the conversations between parents and toddlers. They found that, on average, professional parents spoke more than 2,000 words per hour to their children, working-class parents spoke about 1,300, and welfare mothers spoke about 600. So by age 3, the children of professionals had vocabularies that were nearly 50 percent greater than those of working-class children and twice as large as those of welfare children.

Deficits like these cannot be made up by schools alone, no matter how high the teachers' expectations. For all children to achieve the same goals, the less advantaged would have to enter school with verbal fluency that is similar to the fluency of middle-class children.

The Kansas researchers also tracked how often parents verbally encouraged children's behaviour and how often they reprimanded their children. Toddlers of professionals got an average of six encouragements per reprimand. Working-class children had two. For welfare children, the ratio was reversed -- an average of one encouragement for two reprimands. Children whose initiative was encouraged from a very early age are more likely, on average, to take responsibility for their own learning.

The role model gap

Social class differences in role modelling also make an achievement gap almost inevitable. Not surprisingly, middle-class professional parents tend to associate with, and be friends with, similarly educated professionals. Working-class parents have fewer professional friends. If parents and their friends perform jobs requiring little academic skill, their children's images of their own futures are influenced. On average, these children must struggle harder to motivate themselves to achieve than children who assume, on the basis of their parents' social circle, that the only roles are doctor, lawyer, teacher, social worker, manager, administrator, or businessperson.

Lower-class parents say they expect children to get good grades, but they are less likely to enforce these expectations, for example with rewards or punishments. Teachers and counsellors can stress doing well in school to lower-class children, but such lessons compete with children's own self-images, formed early in life and reinforced daily at home.

As John Ogbu and others have noted, a culture of underachievement may help explain why even middle-class black children often don't do as well in school as white children from seemingly similar socioeconomic backgrounds. On average, middle-class black students don't study as hard as white middle-class students and blacks are more disruptive in class than whites from similar income strata.

This culture of underachievement is easier to understand than to cure. Throughout American history, many black students who excelled in school were not rewarded for that effort in the labour market. Many black college graduates could find work only as servants or Pullman car porters or, in white-collar fields, as assistants to less-qualified whites. Many Americans believe that these practices have disappeared and that blacks and whites with similar test scores now have similar earnings and occupational status. But labour market discrimination continues to be a significant obstacle—especially for black males with high school educations.

Evidence for this comes from studies that find black workers with darker complexions have less success in the labour market than those with identical education, age, and criminal records but lighter complexions. Still more evidence comes from studies in which blacks and whites with similar qualifications are sent to apply for job vacancies. In one recent study where young, well-groomed, and articulate black and white college graduates, posing as high school graduates with identical qualifications, submitted applications for entry-level jobs, the applications of whites with criminal records got positive responses more often than the applications of blacks with no criminal records.

So the expectation of black students that their academic efforts will be less rewarded than the efforts of their white peers is rational for the majority of black students. Some will reduce their academic efforts as a result. As long as racial discrimination persists, the average achievement of black students will be lower than the average achievement of whites, simply because many blacks (especially males) who see that academic effort has less of a payoff will respond rationally by reducing their effort.

The health and housing gaps

Overall, lower-income children are in poorer health. They have poorer vision, partly because of prenatal conditions and partly because, even as toddlers, they watch too much television, so their eyes are poorly trained. Trying to read, their eyes may wander or have difficulty tracking print or focusing. A good part of the over-identification of learning disabilities for lower-class children may well be attributable to undiagnosed vision problems that could be easily treated by optometrists and for which special education placement then should be unnecessary.

Lower-class children have poorer oral hygiene, more lead poisoning, more asthma, poorer nutrition, less-adequate paediatric care, more exposure to smoke, and a host of other health problems. Because of less-adequate dental care, for example, they are more likely to have toothaches and resulting discomfort that affects concentration. They are more likely to suffer from asthma, leading to more absences from school and, when they do attend, drowsiness from lying awake at night, wheezing. In addition, there are fewer primary-care physicians in low-income communities, where the physician-to-population ratio is less than a third the rate in middle-class communities. For that reason, disadvantaged children—even those with health insurance—are more likely to miss school for relatively minor problems, such as common ear infections, for which middle-class children are treated promptly.

Each of these well-documented social class differences in health is likely to have a palpable effect on academic achievement; combined, their influence is probably huge.

The growing unaffordability of adequate housing for low-income families also affects achievement. Children whose families have difficulty finding stable housing are more likely to be mobile, and student mobility is an important cause of failing student performance. It is hard to imagine how teachers, no matter how well trained, can be as effective for children who move in and out of their classrooms as they can be for those who attend regularly. Differences in wealth are also likely to be important determinants of achievement, but these are usually overlooked because most analysts focus only on annual family income to indicate disadvantage. This makes it hard to understand why black students, on average, score lower than whites whose family incomes are the same. It is easier to understand this pattern when we recognize that children can have similar family incomes but be of different economic classes. In any given year, black families with low income are likely to have been poor for longer than white families with similar income in that year.

White families are also likely to own far more assets that support their children's achievement than are black families at the same income level, partly because black middle-class parents are more likely to be the first generation in their families to have middle-class status. Although the median black family income is about two-thirds the median income of white families, the assets of black families are still only 12 percent those of whites.

Narrowing the gaps

If we properly identify the actual social class characteristics that produce differences in average achievement, we should be able to design policies that narrow the achievement gap. Certainly, improvement of instructional practices is among these, but a focus on school reform alone is bound to be frustrating and ultimately unsuccessful. To work, school improvement must combine with policies that narrow the social and economic differences between children. Where these differences cannot easily be narrowed, **school should be redefined to cover more of the early childhood, after-school, and summer times**, when the disparate influences of families and communities are most powerful.

Because the gap is already huge at age 3, **the most important new investment should no doubt be in early childhood programs.** The quality of early childhood programs is as important as the existence of such programs themselves. Too many low-income children are parked before television sets in low-quality day-care settings. To narrow the gap, care for infants and toddlers should be provided by adults who can create the kind of intellectual environment that is typically experienced by middle-class infants and toddlers. This requires professional caregivers and low child-adult ratios.

After-school and summer experiences for lower-class children, similar to programs middle-class children take for granted, would also be needed to narrow the gap. The advantage that middle-class children gain after school and in summer comes from the self-confidence they acquire and the awareness of the world outside that they develop through organized athletics, dance, drama, museum visits, recreational reading, and other activities that develop inquisitiveness, creativity, self-discipline, and organizational skills. After-school and summer programs can be expected to narrow the achievement gap only by attempting to duplicate such experiences.

Provision of health-care services to lower-class children and their families is also required to narrow the achievement gap. Some health services are relatively inexpensive, such as school vision and dental clinics. A full array of health services will cost more, but it cannot be avoided if we truly intend to raise the achievement of lower-class children.

The connection between social and economic disadvantage and an academic achievement gap has long been well known. Most educators, however, have avoided the obvious implication: Improving lower-class children's learning requires ameliorating the social and economic conditions of their lives. Calling attention to this link is not to make excuses for poor school performance. It is only to be honest about the social support schools require if they are to fulfill the public's expectation that the achievement gap will disappear.

Annex C: Stakeholders required to successfully get “Every Child in School”

	Government: funding & implementation	Business & industry: sponsorships, lobbying, volunteers	Media: news, talk shows, telethons, sponsorships	Roma orgs: recruitment, public awareness & lobbying	Religious orgs: public awareness & volunteers	Civil Soc orgs: funding, public awareness, monitoring & oversight	Federations & unions: public awareness & lobbying
International	European Union		BBC, CNN, EuroNews	Decade of Roma Inclusion			
			Int'l Herald, Financial Times, etc.	Roma Education Fund			
National	Ministries of Education, Labor, Internal Affairs	Ro and foreign chambers of commerce	TVR	Roma party	Romanian Orthodox Church	UNICEF, UNDP	Teachers Unions
	N'l Agency for Roma	Multi-nationals	private TV chains		Catholic church	Foreign Embassies	N'l League of Mayors
	N'l Authority Child Protection	JCI	National newspapers		Protestant churches	Salvati Copiii	N'l Union of Local Councils
	Ministerial commissions for Roma		newspaper chains		Missionary groups	World Vision	Ro. Assoc. Of Towns & Cities
	Interministerial working groups for public policies for Roma		other print & internet outlets			Private Romanian foundations	N'l Fed. Parents' Assoc.
			Ad industry: billboards, posters, etc.			Foreign foundations	N'l Student Council
	2% campaigns	2% campaigns	2% campaigns	2% campaigns	2% campaigns	2 % campaigns	2% campaigns
County	Prefectura	Chambers of Commerce	Regional newspapers		Diocese		
	Roma School Inspector	Business associations (Rotary/Lions)	other media				
Local	City Hall/Local Council			local action groups	Individual churches	Local action groups	
	School inspectorate	local companies		NGOs		NGOs	
	2% campaigns	branches of n'l companies		community mediators			

The mission of Ovidiu Rom is to help the poorest members of Romanian society become self-sufficient through education, training, community development and public awareness.

Ovidiu Rom currently serves:

- **2000 children** from impoverished families in summer School Preparation Programs called *Sotron* (hopscotch) in seven counties*
- **500 children** with year-round educational programs including after-school activities, hot lunches, special classes for over-age children, and summer school.
- **300 families** through monitoring of students' school progress, counselling, PTA meetings, emergency aid, transportation to jobs, housing improvements etc.
- **400 teachers, social workers and psychologists** through professional workshops.

Ovidiu Rom launched *Fiecare Copil în Școală*, an initiative to **get every child in Romania in school and on a path to high school graduation** in partnership with the Ministry of Education in 2006. Ovidiu Rom trains municipal teams to implement its successful methodology for getting and keeping “at-risk” children in school. Other partners are the National Child Protection Authority, Telefonul Copilului (Romania’s children hotline) and nine Major Investors (Citi, Hilton, Nobel, Pepsi/Prigat, Pro TV, Rompetrol, Toyota, Vodafone și Unilever).

Implementation of a *Fiecare Copil în Școală* program requires the active participation of a neighbourhood school and the local authorities. The involvement of a local NGO is recommended. Ovidiu Rom provides training, ongoing consultation, student workbooks and teacher’s guides. The local council provides a classroom from which the school or NGO manages the program.

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