

## Conference Proceedings



Photo by Poppy Szaybo

An international conference to launch two new reports:

**DENIED A FUTURE?  
- THE RIGHT TO EDUCATION OF ROMA/GYPSY AND  
TRAVELLER CHILDREN' IN SOUTH-EASTERN AND CENTRAL  
EUROPE'**

**&**

*Research on Selected Roma Education Programmes  
in Central and Eastern Europe*

**European Youth Centre Budapest, 28-30 November 2001**



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**Save the Children**

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# INTRODUCTION

The 'Denied a Future?' conference on the right to education of Roma children and young people in South-Eastern and Central Europe brought together policy-makers, practitioners and users of education services to apply their expertise and experience to the findings of two significant new pieces of research in the field of Roma education: the 'Denied a Future?' report by Save the Children (SC-UK) and the Roma Education Research Project by the Institute for Educational Policy (IEP) of the Open Society Institute.

The conference ran over three days from 28 to 30 November 2001. Nearly 200 participants attended from more than 20 European and North American countries. Delegates included representatives of intergovernmental agencies, education ministries, Roma leaders, international and grass roots NGOs, academics and experts. The participation of Roma young people to provide their perspective as users of education services was particularly important. Young people were included in each of the country delegations attending the conference. The fact that all of the key stakeholders in the education reform process were present made this a unique event, characterised by honest and thought provoking discussions and informed by the aspirations and expectations of Roma people and experts in the field of education on the one hand, and the financial, practical and technical constraints experienced by governments and schools on the other.

The two reports that provided the background to the conference clearly outline the barriers that Roma children face in accessing quality education services, and also provide clear guidelines and descriptions of approaches that have successfully overcome these in recent years. Case studies that were examined in the 'Your Chance to Ask' sessions provided a wealth of additional detail on how change can be successfully introduced, while also demonstrating the complexity of this task and the substantial efforts and resources that need to be committed for discriminatory school cultures to be transformed into inclusive ones. The creativity of NGOs and their important role as catalysts, fundraisers and advocates of innovation were recurring themes.

One of the main concerns raised by the reports was that many national governments' efforts to address discriminatory policy and practice were neither visible nor strategic. It was therefore encouraging to hear from government representatives from Hungary, Czech Republic, Romania and elsewhere of initiatives that indicate the beginnings of a systemic, rather than an ad-hoc approach. The commitment of several governments to co-finance initiatives alongside European agencies also did much to assuage long-standing concerns that governments had become over-reliant on European funding. The willingness of government delegates to be open about the obstacles and constraints that they face was much appreciated, as was their evident commitment to overcome these.

The presence of international and intergovernmental organisations was essential. The European Union, the Council of Europe, the World Bank and agencies of the United Nations such as UNICEF are significant actors and investors in safeguarding human rights and supporting institutional reform. The UN High Commissioner for Human Rights' address to this conference provided a robust, clear and succinct summary of what the right to education

means in fact and in practice. However, there remains much misunderstanding about what their mandate is - and isn't - where their responsibilities end and those of national governments begin, and what grass roots organisations can reasonably expect of them. It was therefore immensely useful that these matters were discussed, explained and clarified. In particular, participants were encouraged to hear of the continuing attention being paid to the issue of education provision for Roma children's in the negotiations leading up to EU enlargement and of the World Bank's recent engagement with this issue. As was clear from discussions in the 'Your Chance to Ask' sessions, international institutions can (rightly or wrongly) be perceived as being remote and inaccessible. The presence of representatives from so many agencies, their openness and willingness to answer questions, was an important demonstration of their commitment to accountability.

The presence and high visibility of Roma young people at the 'Denied a Future?' conference was extremely important. Many stereotypes still prevail in the discourse about problems that Roma youth might face in accessing a good quality education. The presence of the young people ensured that some discussions began with 'we' as opposed to the usual 'they'. Their participation as group leaders, film-makers and presenters, as volunteers assisting with the event's organisation and as hosts for evening events was a constant reminder to all delegates of what Roma young people are capable of when they are offered positive educational experiences.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Save the Children UK and the Open Society Institute would like to thank all of the donor agencies that helped to make this conference possible. These include the Swiss Agency for Development Cooperation and the US State Department who provided support to the conference via the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe Quick Start Package; KulturKontakt and UNICEF; the Canadian and British Embassies in Budapest.

We would also like to express our gratitude to all the speakers, facilitators, chairs and translators and the many individuals who put so much effort into making this conference a success. Particular thanks are due to Patricia Coelho, Poppy Szaybo, Judit Kovacs and Hayo de Vries, without whose ceaseless hard work, this event would not have been possible. Thanks also to the students and graduates of the Gandhi Gymnazium whose evening of music was one the highlights of the conference programme.

## SOME COMMENTS FROM PARTICIPANTS



“George Soros’ message was very direct and mobilizing. It was great to have the Hungarian ministry of education present.”

“The conference is full of useful topics and is very well organized. Congratulations!!!”

“Excellent music in the evening.”

“Useful opportunity to gather information and to discuss about Roma educational situation AND NEEDS.”

“Strength of the Conference was the high number of Roma representatives and NGO members”

“Integrative approach to solving problems”

# 'DENIED A FUTURE?' CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

**28-30 November 2001**  
**European Youth Centre Budapest (EYCB)**

## Conference aims

The 'Denied a Future?' conference on the right to education of Roma children and young people in South-Eastern and Central Europe will bring together policy-makers, practitioners and users of education services (Roma young people) to apply their expertise and experience to the findings of two significant new pieces of research in the field of Roma education: the 'Denied a Future?' report by Save the Children (SC-UK) and the Roma Education Research Project by the Institute for Educational Policy (IEP) of the Open Society Institute.

## Conference working methods

- **Plenaries** will present the findings, conclusions and recommendations of SC-UK and IEP's work, examine the role and impact of inter-governmental agencies as investors in education reform and provide a forum for Roma young people themselves to present their views on the education services that are currently on offer to them and new initiatives that are emerging
- **'Your Chance to Ask'** are structured thematic discussions resourced by policy-makers and practitioners whose work in promoting the successful management of diversity in education is at the forefront of innovation in Europe and North America. To ensure that delegates have the information they need to ask detailed and informed questions. Discussion Papers for 'Your Chance to Ask' sessions will be distributed to delegates before the meeting.
- **Workshops** will offer opportunities for practitioners to learn about and try out methods of working with groups of children and young people from diverse backgrounds using photography, role-play and drama.
- **Working Groups** are discussion fora on themes that present particular challenges to education systems such as provision for working children, provision for refugee and displaced Roma children and the barriers to 'scaling up' good practice from projects into mainstream provision.

## Tuesday 27<sup>th</sup> November

- |               |                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| 14.00 - 20.00 | <b>Registration</b>           |
| 19.00 - 22.00 | <b>Welcome buffet at EYCB</b> |

## Wednesday 28<sup>th</sup> November

- 08.00 - 09.00 Registration
- 09.00 - 10.00 **CONFERENCE OPENING ADDRESS**
- Chair: Judy Lister, Save the Children UK  
**Peter Jakab**, Ministry of Education, Hungary  
**Mike Aaronson**, Director General, Save the Children UK  
**George Soros**, Chairman of the Open Society Institute (via video)  
**Mary Robinson**, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (via video)
- 10.00 - 10.30 Coffee Break
- 10.30 - 11.30 **PLENARY I - Main findings of SC-UK's 'Denied a Future?' report and OSI/IEP's Roma Education Research Project**
- Chair: Judy Lister SC-UK  
**Katherine Pinnock**, Save the Children UK  
**Martin Kovats**, University of Birmingham  
**Christina McDonald**, OSI/IEP
- 'Your Chance to Ask' - preparatory sessions (6 groups)**  
Delegates will have the opportunity to join one group on Day 1 and one group on Day 2. See below for themes.
- 12.30 - 14.00 LUNCH
- 14.00 - 15.30 **Workshops and Working Groups (7 groups)**  
Delegates can attend one session on Day 1 and one session on Day 2. See below for themes.
- 16.00 - 17.00 **'Your Chance to Ask' - Discussions**  
Questions on issues of policy and practice from the morning's preparatory session put to the panel members for discussion.
- 18.00-20.00 **Evening drinks at EYCB**
- 22.00 onwards **Party at EYCB - all welcome!**

## Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> November

- 09.30 - 11.00            **PLENARY II: Investors in a Future for Roma Children?**  
Clarifying the role of intergovernmental organisations
- Chair: Maria Anduszkiewicz, Save the Children UK  
**Alexandros Tsolakis**, European Commission  
**Dena Ringold**, World Bank  
**Consuelo Holtzer**, Council of Europe  
**Rob Fuderich**, UNICEF
- 11.00 - 11.30            Coffee Break
- 11.30 - 12.30            'Your Chance to Ask' - Preparatory Session
- 12.30 - 14.00            LUNCH
- 14.00 - 15.30            Workshops and Working Groups
- 15.30 - 16.00            Coffee Break
- 16.00 - 17.00            'Your Chance to Ask' - Discussion
- 17.30 - 18.15            Chairs and facilitators meeting (Marion Molteno & Jean-Pierre Liégeois)
- 18.00 - 20.00            Reception at British Embassy (by invitation only).

## Friday 30<sup>th</sup> November

- 09.30 - 11.00            **PLENARY III: Education For Us**
- Chair: Bharti Mepani and Poppy Szaybo  
**Introduction by Prof. Kornblum**, City University of New York, USA  
**Youth led plenary session** - Roma youth delegates convey their vision of inclusive education.
- 11.00 - 11.30            Coffee Break
- 11.30 - 12.45            **Closing remarks and conclusions**
- Chair: Elvis Ali  
**Prof. Jean Pierre Liégeois**, Director, Gypsy Research Centre, Paris  
**Marion Molteno**, Education Advisor, Save the Children UK
- 12.45 - 13.00            **Evaluation of the conference**

## 'Your Chance to Ask ...' Discussion themes

### ***A: The Role of Intergovernmental Organisations***

Chair: Judy Lister

Given that one of the main findings of the Denied a Future? report was that most funding for Roma education initiatives in Central and South Eastern Europe originate from external donors and in particular inter-governmental agencies, this session will enable delegates to consider and discuss in depth issues relating to this as addressed in the Plenary II session. Representatives of organisations featured in the Plenary will be available to answer delegates' questions.

### ***B: Education for All (I): Innovations in school management and teaching practice***

Chair: Michelynn Lafleche

A significant part of the Denied a Future? report deals with aspects of good practice that primarily exist in the NGO sector. In order to explore this further, practitioners from Central and Eastern Europe, Western Europe and North America will present examples of successful initiatives from schools serving students of diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Can principles and practice that have been developed elsewhere to meet the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse populations contribute to the goal of providing Education for All in South-East and Central Europe?

### ***C: Education for All (II): Strategies for building on existing educational models***

Chair: Marion Molteno

The Future Development of Roma Educational Programming in South-East and Central European countries - Based on the outcomes of OSI-BP's research project on Roma education programming, this session will discuss the concrete outcomes and lessons learned about direct educational programming and institutional change efforts, and the implications for further program development in the region. The concept of an "integrated program approach," a project model that covers the age spectrum for children from K-12 and that meets the array of needs, will be introduced.

### ***D: The needs of bilingual children***

Chair: Maria Andruszkiewicz

The failure of many schools to appreciate bilingualism as an asset in today's Europe is evidenced by the high numbers of bilingual children being channelled into Special Schools for the mentally disabled. Issues discussed in the Denied a Future? report to be considered include teacher training, classroom support, curricula and textbooks, the challenges presented by and benefits of mother-tongue provision. Resource people for the session will include a policy advisor, practitioners and Roma young people who work as 'cultural interpreters' in the classroom.

### ***E: Effective Preparation for School - the importance of pre-school***

Chair: Rob Fuderich

The Denied a Future? report demonstrates that pre-school education is an important component of inclusive education. This session will discuss a number of areas including the impact of fees and charges being introduced for pre-school services and practice models that successfully serve children from majority and minority communities enabling them to enter the first grades of primary school on an equal footing.

## ***F: Out-of-school support for children and their families***

Chair: Martin Emerson

The need to address the context in which children learn and for developing a holistic approach to education is highlighted in the Denied a Future? report. This session will consider the contribution of community involvement and outreach programmes that aim to involve parents more actively in their children's schooling, programmes designed to overcome practical barriers to learning (homework clubs, supplementary weekend and evening classes) and other initiatives that seek to influence the wider learning environment.

## **Workshops and Working Group Themes**

### ***#1 Interactive Photography Workshop***

Facilitators: Poppy Szaybo, Beata Olah and young people from Gandhi College, Hungary

Using photography in and outside the classroom breaks down barriers and enables adults and young people to see the world through each other's eyes. This workshop will be facilitated by a professional photographer and led by Roma young people for adult and youth participants.

### ***#2 Developing Dialogue using Drama and Role-Play***

Facilitator: Bharti Mepani

Drama and role-play are communication media that rely as much on non-verbal as verbal messages. Sensitively used, drama and role play are powerful tools for addressing difficult and sensitive issues such as the stereotyping, discrimination, bullying and the effect of peers and teachers' behaviour on minority pupils' self-esteem. This workshop offers an opportunity to try out practical exercises and techniques that practitioners can adapt for use in their own classrooms.

### ***#3 The Role of the Media in Advocating for Diversity and Promoting Responsible Reporting***

Facilitators: Gabor Miklosi and Andrew Stroehling

The media are powerful shapers of public opinion. Negative reporting or the absence of certain groups from mass communications can create a hostile political climate for policy-makers seeking to introduce measures promoting equal opportunities. Journalists, NGOs, politicians and others have a vital role to play in reminding media outlets that the public interest is not served by promoting a divided and xenophobic society beset by stereotypes. This workshop is for anyone whose work entails making the case for equal opportunities. It will explore ways to use the media to overturn stereotypes, challenge biased reporting and raise public awareness and support.

### ***#4 The Educational Needs of Children with Adult responsibilities***

Facilitator: Miranda Kazantsis

The reality of some children's lives is often ignored in the design of education provision and curricula. Being a young parent, needing to work, or having caring responsibilities for elders or younger family members should not automatically disqualify a young person from taking up their right to education. As yet, there are few initiatives that address the challenge of developing education services for children and young people who are unable to attend school, or attend only irregularly, due to their family responsibilities or economic circumstances. What would such services look like, how would they be financed and how could they be made appealing to young people who already have many pressing demands on their time?

### **#5 *The Educational Needs of Refugee and Displaced Roma Children***

Facilitators: Rasa Sekulovic and Roza Ilic

Refugee, returning refugee and displaced Roma children are a presence in many communities throughout South Eastern and Central Europe. The 'Denied a Future?' reports document how refugee and displaced Roma children can be subjected to discrimination in schools and kindergartens, in addition to their families being disadvantaged with regard to access to housing, welfare and health assistance. Refugee children returning to their home countries may have not received schooling for months or years, or been educated in a different system and/or language, sometimes for a period of several years. With support they can re-integrate successfully into the schools they return to but such support is rarely provided. This session will examine the particular educational needs of Roma children whose schooling has been disrupted by the experience of displacement.

### **#6 *Policy Implications of the Roma Education Research Project IEP, OSI-BP.***

***Beyond Projects: how can successful pilot initiatives and research inform policy development***

Facilitators: Christina McDonald and Peter Rado

This session will begin to explore how to scale-up the impact of Roma education projects studied in the IEP Roma Education Research Project. It will also discuss how successful pilot initiatives and research inform policy development.

### **#7 *Focus on collecting data and evaluating the success of Roma education programs***

Facilitator: Noe Medina

This session will look at procedures, standards, and challenges.