

WAYS TO IMPROVE ACCESSIBILITY FOR ROMA CHILDREN IN SCHOOL: CHALLENGES AND EDUCATIONAL SOLUTIONS IN ROMANIA

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ABSTRACT: *Roma children's access to education in Romania remains deeply unequal and marked by structural, social, and cultural barriers. The Roma population, predominantly young and concentrated in marginalized urban and rural areas, faces significant effects of school segregation, stereotypes, and institutionalized discrimination (Kóczé & Rövid, 2017; Surdu, 2016).*

Educational segregation is not an accidental phenomenon; it functions as a mechanism of structural racialization, reproducing ethnic hierarchies and reinforcing social stigma, with severe psychological consequences such as loss of self-confidence, alienation from school, and reduced expectations for the future (Fleck & Rughini, 2008; Troc, 2020; Tzouriadou, 2015).

Recent data on the school population (2023-2024) show an overall decline in pupils and students, except at high school and higher education levels, but highlight major imbalances between urban and rural areas and the underrepresentation of Roma children in quality education and in post-secondary and higher education (FRA, 2018). Educational accessibility must be understood as a strategic tool for equal opportunities, which involves adapting the curriculum to cultural diversity, creating an inclusive and supportive school environment, and implementing mentoring and scholarship programs for Roma children (Lazić, 2016; Tzouriadou, 2015).

Effective educational interventions must simultaneously address structural and individual factors: institutional segregation, negative stereotypes, urban-rural gaps, and socio-economic vulnerabilities. Without such policies, education risks perpetuating the marginalization of Roma children, turning school into a mechanism of intergenerational social exclusion (Kende et al., 2021; FRA, 2018).

Therefore, ensuring real and equitable access to education is not only an educational necessity but also a social and ethical imperative for a democratic society.

Key words: *roma children; educational accessibility; school segregation; structural discrimination; cultural inclusion.*

Introduction

Roma children's access to education in Romania is not only a sectoral challenge, but a fundamental test of society's ability to guarantee equal rights and promote social justice. Beyond the rhetoric of official policies proclaiming equal opportunities and inclusion, empirical data show a persistent reality: educational gaps between Roma and majority children remain significant and, in some contexts, even tend to widen (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2021). Romania, the European Union member state with the largest Roma population, faces a profound contradiction: between its commitments at European and international level to combat discrimination and everyday practices that reproduce exclusion (Vincze, 2017).

The issue of Roma children's access to education must be understood within the broader

context of structural inequalities. Instead of functioning as a mechanism for correction and social mobility, school perpetuates the logic of marginalization and stigmatization (Surdu, 2016). In segregated school environments or poor communities, education merely reflects, almost mirroring, existing social and economic hierarchies (Rostas, 2012). This reality is exacerbated by an institutional culture that continues to tolerate subtle or explicit discrimination, as well as by inconsistent, fragmented, and insufficiently monitored educational policies (Troc, 2020).

Moreover, it is not just a question of formal access to school, but of the quality of education provided. Studies show that segregation, underfunding, and low expectations on the part of teachers are fundamental barriers that transform the right to education into a formal but not effective right (Fleck & Rughini, 2008).

Under these conditions, "equal opportunities" becomes a meaningless concept that masks the lack of public policies aimed at real equity and inclusion (Kóczé, 2018).

Thus, Roma children's access to education should be analysed not as a "cultural challenge" or as an isolated problem of a minority, but as a symptom of the state's failure to implement an educational model based on fundamental rights. In the current context, in which the European Union insists on inclusion as a key principle of social cohesion, Romania's inability to reduce the educational gaps of Roma children indicates not only institutional limitations, but also the persistence of structural racism that permeates both public policies and everyday practices (Cretan & Turnock, 2009; FRA, 2021). FRA, 2021). Although official censuses are the central tool used by the Romanian state to count the population, there is an emerging consensus among legislators, civil society representatives, and members of the academic community that they systematically underestimate the actual number of Roma (Achim, 2004; Surdu, 2016).

According to estimates by the Quality of Life Research Institute, used by both authorities and non-governmental organizations, the Roma population in Romania ranges between 1,452,700 and 1,588,552 people, or approximately 7% of the total population (Quality of Life Research Institute [ICCV], 2019). Other sources put the actual number at 1.8–2.5 million, which would represent between 8.5% and 11.5% of the general population reported in the 2002 census (Kóczé, 2018).

This statistical gap is not a simple technical problem, but reflects political and epistemic tensions: the ethnic self-identification of Roma is influenced by stigmatization, and public institutions prefer to underreport the size of the community in order to avoid recognizing the socio-political responsibilities that derive from this reality (Surdu, 2016; Vincze, 2017).

In addition, the age structure of the Roma population highlights a particular demographic dynamic: the average age of the population is 25.1 years, and 33.9% of Roma are under 14 years of age, compared to only 15.6% in the majority population (ICCV, 2019).

This relative youthfulness should be a strong argument for inclusive and proactive educational policies, but it is often ignored or addressed through flawed paradigms.

At the same time, the Roma population in Romania is characterized by significant internal diversity, structured around distinct subgroups, dialects, and cultural practices (Cretan & Turnock, 2009). Approximately 60% of Roma speak Romani, which indicates not only the linguistic resilience of the community, but also the need to adapt educational and social policies to this multilingual reality (Matras, 2015). Therefore, understanding the demographics of the Roma cannot be reduced to simple statistical accounting, but must include critical reflection on classification mechanisms, the role of stigmatization, and the direct implications that these data have on the formulation of public policies. Roma children face a number of major structural challenges in terms of access to and integration into education systems, both in Romania and in other European countries.

The literature emphasizes that these challenges are not isolated or circumstantial phenomena, but reflect historical and contemporary processes of marginalization, racialization, and institutionalized exclusion (Kóczé, 2018; Surdu, 2016).

In Eastern Europe, where Roma populations are significant, school, which should be an instrument of social mobility and emancipation, often becomes a space for the reproduction of inequalities and structural discrimination (Rostas, 2012; Vincze, 2017).

The social and educational context of Roma children

Socio-economic factors are a central obstacle. High levels of multidimensional poverty affect Roma children's access to basic educational resources such as school supplies, textbooks, transportation, or food (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2021). In addition, poor housing and a lack of basic infrastructure in segregated communities contribute to low attendance and early school leaving (Troc, 2020). These material factors are closely interlinked with structural discrimination: Roma children not only enter the education system with a major socio-economic disadvantage, but also face low expectations from teachers and stereotypes that limit their chances of success (Fleck & Rughini, 2008).

Cultural and linguistic barriers constitute another significant dimension of exclusion.

Although approximately 60% of Roma speak Romani as their mother tongue (Matras, 2015), the national curriculum and pedagogical practices rarely value bilingualism or multilingualism, preferring an assimilationist approach that penalises linguistic difference. This lack of curricular adaptation fuels feelings of alienation and increases the risk of school dropout. At the same time, the use of Romani is often stigmatized in school settings, reinforcing mechanisms of symbolic marginalization (Kóczé, 2018).

The fundamental problem, therefore, lies in the inability of education systems to adequately respond to the needs of Roma children.

Instead of being designed as inclusive spaces, many schools in Central and Eastern Europe operate with segregating practices, either through "special" classes for Roma or by marginalizing them in low-resource schools (Rostas, 2012). From this perspective, Roma education cannot be discussed in terms of "cultural integration," but must be analyzed as a battleground for recognition and social justice.

Understanding the social and educational context of Roma children is therefore essential for formulating effective and equitable educational strategies. These must go beyond the deficit paradigm, which interprets school difficulties through the lens of cultural or family "deficiencies," and focus on removing structural barriers, combating institutionalized discrimination, and developing educational policies based on equity (Surdu, 2016; FRA, 2021). Only in this way can real equality of opportunity be ensured for all students, and education can become a tool for emancipation rather than a mechanism for perpetuating exclusion.

In the field of formal education, Roma children face multiple obstacles that go far beyond the simple issue of physical access to school. Their integration into mainstream education remains low in many EU Member States, including Romania, and institutional practices contribute to perpetuating this situation (European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights [FRA], 2021). A particularly problematic phenomenon is the disproportionate placement of Roma children in special schools or classes for students with disabilities, often without objective medical justification (Tzouriadou, 2015). This form of educational segregation, disguised under the pretext of "special needs," not only significantly

reduces children's academic performance, but also affects their perception of education, diminishing their motivation and prospects for social mobility (Rostas, 2012).

Another key obstacle is the lack of adequate personalized support in schools. Many Roma children do not benefit from educational support programs such as remedial lessons, counseling, or mentoring, which are designed to mitigate the gaps accumulated due to poor socio-economic conditions (Fleck & Rughini, 2008). Furthermore, language barriers play an important role: when the mother tongue is different from the language of instruction, adaptation becomes difficult, and misunderstanding the teaching material amplifies feelings of exclusion and discouragement (Lazić, 2016; Matras, 2015).

Added to these difficulties is the lack of training for teachers to work with students from disadvantaged backgrounds or ethnic minority communities. Many teachers lack the intercultural skills and methodological resources to address cultural and social diversity in the classroom (Kóczé, 2018). As a result, some educational practices can perpetuate, even unintentionally, discrimination and exclusion, turning schools into spaces that reproduce social inequalities rather than instruments of correction and inclusion (Troc, 2020; Vincze, 2017).

Thus, formal education, instead of functioning as a ramp for equalizing opportunities, risks becoming an institutionalized mechanism of marginalization. The problem lies not only in limited resources or individual barriers, but in the organizational structure and culture of the education system, which refuses to adapt to the realities and needs of Roma children.

The educational segregation of Roma children cannot be reduced to a simple "system error" or the result of individual prejudices.

It is the most visible and brutal expression of institutional racialization, whereby the school, an institution that should guarantee equality, becomes a mechanism of systematic exclusion.

In Central and Eastern Europe, and particularly in Romania, school segregation functions as a tool for consolidating ethnic hierarchies and legitimizing social marginalization, with the direct effect of reproducing inequalities of class and status (Kóczé & Rövid, 2017; Surdu, 2016). Cases in which Roma students are concentrated in "special classes" or abusively pushed into schools for

children with disabilities, without a real medical diagnosis, are not isolated accidents, but systematic practices of exclusion and stigmatization (Tzouriadou, 2015; Rostas, 2012).

This segregation must be understood as an institutionalized arrangement, tacitly legitimized by permissive educational policies and the complicity of local authorities. In this context, school becomes a "laboratory of ethnic difference" (Troc, 2020), where Roma are deliberately fixed at the bottom of the social hierarchy. This architecture of exclusion produces stigma, internalization of inferiority, and, more seriously, blocks access to any form of upward social mobility (Fleck & Rughini, 2008).

In Romania, segregation is not only tolerated but also fuelled by pressure from majority communities. Many Romanian parents openly declare that they want "schools without Roma," and educational authorities, instead of combating this racism, validate it by organizing separate classes or masking segregation under pseudo-neutral pretexts such as "performance level" or "residential proximity" (Matras, 2015; Vincze, 2017). Thus, ethnicity becomes a decisive predictor of educational trajectory, completely overshadowing individual skills or motivation.

The effects of segregation are devastating: lower academic performance, alarming dropout rates, and massive exclusion from secondary and tertiary education (FRA, 2021). Instead of offering a chance for emancipation, segregated schools become a mechanism for the intergenerational reproduction of marginalization and the perpetuation of a racialized social order (Kende et al., 2021).

To talk about Roma segregation only in terms of "ineffective public policies" is to minimize reality.

In fact, school segregation is a form of structural violence, an institutional act of systemic racism that condemns tens of thousands of children to a crippled future. Romania continues to tolerate, through the passivity of the authorities and the lack of clear sanctions, a deeply discriminatory practice that should be considered not only a failure of the state, but a social crime with intergenerational effects.

The educational segregation of Roma children in Romania is therefore not just a remnant of historical prejudices, but a deliberate instrument of the racialized social order. Treating segregation as an "administrative slip-up" means hiding the

fact that it constitutes a tacit state policy, through which the "Roma problem" is managed through exclusion and marginalization.

In this sense, the Romanian state practices institutionalized racism that transforms schools from spaces of equality into spaces of structural violence (Kóczé & Rövid, 2017; Surdu, 2016).

The creation of "special classes for Roma," the disproportionate placement of children in special schools without medical justification, or the maintenance of educational ghettoization under the pretext of "residential proximity" are not accidents, but administrative strategies of exclusion (Rostas, 2012; Vincze, 2017). These practices reflect institutional complicity between local authorities, school inspectorates, and majority communities, which prefer "Roma-free" schools (Matras, 2015). In reality, education becomes a social technology through which the Romanian state maintains Roma in a position of structural subordination.

What is more serious, however, is the complicity of the European Union. Although school segregation has been officially condemned by the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) in famous cases such as *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* (2007), European monitoring mechanisms have proved ineffective. In Romania, segregated schools continue to exist unhindered, and FRA reports (2021) document the same educational gaps, without these being accompanied by real sanctions.

The European Union, through its tolerance, legitimises a racialised educational order, preferring to maintain "social peace" in member states, even at the cost of sacrificing Roma children (Kende et al., 2021).

Thus, school segregation must be understood not only as a failure of educational policies, but as a structural strategy of exclusion, a cynical compromise between national states and European institutions. Roma students are systematically deprived of their fundamental right to equal education, and the effects extend across generations: low academic performance, high school dropout rates, and blocked access to secondary and university education (FRA, 2021).

Segregation can no longer be described in technocratic language, but must be denounced as a form of structural violence, institutional racism, and social crime with intergenerational effects. Romania is responsible for maintaining this

practice, and the European Union is responsible for perpetuating it through inaction and complicity.

Accessibility in education cannot be treated as a mere administrative concept; it is the foundation of equal opportunities and an indicator of a society's ability to combat systemic marginalization. For Roma children, access to quality education is not only a matter of rights, but also an essential mechanism for breaking the cycle of poverty and social exclusion (FRA, 2018). The lack of a coherent and inclusive education policy keeps Roma in structurally disadvantaged positions, perpetuating intergenerational inequalities.

Lazić (2016) argues that a truly accessible education system must implement integrated measures: curriculum adaptation, training teachers to work with children from disadvantaged backgrounds, and providing additional resources to meet the diverse needs of students. Accessibility is not limited to the physical infrastructure of the school; it includes access to technology, support programs, mentoring, and, crucially, the removal of language barriers.

For Roma children, who speak Romani, these barriers represent major obstacles to understanding and assimilating knowledge (Lazić, 2016; Matras, 2015).

Remedial lessons and cultural integration programs can no longer be considered optional; they are tools for reducing inequality and preventing educational exclusion.

Accessibility cannot be achieved without radical changes in the training and support of educators. Teachers need to be trained in cultural diversity, inclusive teaching methods, and empathy so that they can support students with diverse needs, especially those from marginalized communities (Tzouriadou, 2015). The lack of such training turns teachers, intentionally or not, into agents of exclusion, reinforcing negative stereotypes and segregation.

Furthermore, schools cannot operate in isolation. Local communities, non-governmental organizations, and authorities must provide a consistent support framework and sufficient resources so that inclusion policies do not remain mere theoretical promises (FRA, 2018). Without this coordination, accessibility remains a theoretical concept, and Roma children continue to be treated as educationally inferior citizens.

The education of Roma children is marked by

complex structural challenges: discrimination, stereotypes, poverty, and cultural and linguistic barriers. Discrimination manifests itself at all stages of education, from primary school to higher education (Tzouriadou, 2015).

Roma children are often stigmatized as "difficult" or "less capable," and these perceptions affect both teachers' expectations and relationships with peers, creating a hostile educational environment.

Stereotypes and discrimination are not just symbolic: they translate into the placement of Roma children in special classes or segregated schools, where the quality of education is significantly reduced and opportunities for social mobility are diminished (FRA, 2018; Tzouriadou, 2015). These practices perpetuate cycles of marginalization and negatively affect children's perception of their own worth and their ability to succeed in society.

Accessibility in education is not only a right, but also an instrument of social justice. For Roma children, this means removing structural, cultural, and linguistic barriers, training teachers for real inclusion, and actively involving communities and authorities. Only in this way can education become a vector for social mobility and emancipation, and society can claim to offer equal opportunities to all children, regardless of ethnicity or social status.

Accessibility also depends on the existence of a friendly and inclusive school environment that promotes the active participation of all students. Schools must implement strategies that prevent discrimination and promote respect for diversity (Tzouriadou, 2015). Teachers must be trained to respond to the needs of Roma students through inclusive teaching methods and by recognizing their cultural value. An inclusive environment fosters interaction between students from different ethnic groups, encourages collaboration through joint projects, and develops a culture of tolerance and respect (Lazić, 2016).

Alongside curriculum reforms and the creation of an inclusive environment, specific projects for Roma children, such as scholarships and mentoring programs, play a decisive and h e role in reducing social and economic barriers.

Educational scholarships cover tuition fees, teaching materials, and transportation, thereby reducing the risk of school dropout and encouraging continued education (FRA, 2018).

Mentoring provides personalized support,

guidance, and counseling from teachers, peers, or members of the Roma community who have overcome challenges in the education system.

Studies show that mentoring contributes significantly to the educational success of Roma children, supporting their integration and the development of personal and social skills (Lazić, 2016).

Improving educational accessibility for Roma children requires a comprehensive approach that includes curriculum adaptation, an inclusive school environment, and dedicated projects. Implementing these measures not only promotes equal opportunities but also contributes to reducing structural inequalities and strengthening the social integration of Roma children. Without such interventions, education risks remaining an instrument of exclusion and perpetuating ethnic marginalization.

Educational scholarships are one of the main forms of support for Roma children in Romania, having a significant impact on preventing school dropout and promoting their access to quality education. In many cases, Roma children live in extreme poverty, and their parents cannot afford to pay for schooling, teaching materials, or other educational needs. According to a report by the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA, 2018), financial support in the form of educational scholarships contributes significantly to keeping Roma children in the education system, thus reducing the risk of school dropout.

In Romania, there are various educational scholarship initiatives, both from the state and from non-governmental organizations, which offer financial assistance to Roma children to continue their studies. One successful example is the Scholarships for Roma Students program run by the Romanian Business Leaders (RBL) Foundation, which supports Roma students from disadvantaged backgrounds by providing them with school scholarships, supplies, and personalized mentoring to improve their academic performance. These scholarships are essential for ensuring Roma children's access to education, allowing them to participate in educational and extracurricular activities without being limited by financial constraints.

The Romanian Ministry of Education and Research has also launched several programs aimed at providing scholarships for Roma students. These initiatives are designed to reduce disparities between children in urban areas and

those in rural or marginalized areas and to support their integration into mainstream schools.

Mentoring is another essential educational measure that supports the education of Roma children, having a significant impact on their school performance and integration into educational communities. The mentoring program provides Roma students with personalized support from experienced individuals who can guide children through the educational process, answer their questions, and offer support in overcoming difficulties.

Mentors can be teachers, members of the Roma community, or volunteers from non-governmental organizations, and their main goal is to encourage and support Roma children in their educational journey.

A remarkable example of a mentoring project is the Mentor Rom program implemented by the Foundation for the Development of Civil Society (FDSC). It aims to create a network of mentors to support Roma children in schools in disadvantaged areas. The program focuses on improving the academic performance of Roma children and developing trusting relationships between students and mentors, which helps to increase their confidence in their own abilities. According to studies conducted by Latrubesse (2012), mentoring programs for Roma children have shown that they are more likely to learn effectively and complete their studies when they have consistent emotional and academic support.

Mentoring not only helps Roma children cope with school difficulties, but also provides them with positive role models, helping them to build a positive vision of the future. Mentors act as role models and encourage Roma students to overcome the stereotypes and discrimination they may face in society.

In addition to educational scholarships and mentoring, there are other educational projects aimed at integrating and supporting Roma children in the Romanian education system. The projects organized by the "Roma Children in Romania" Foundation are a relevant example. These include training activities for teachers, awareness-raising programs to combat discrimination, and psychological support for Roma students who encounter difficulties in schools.

In addition, educational programs such as "My School" are dedicated to Roma children in marginalized communities and include school

preparation sessions, intercultural education, and extracurricular activities that promote inclusion and combat prejudice. These initiatives have proven that, when properly implemented and supported by authorities and non-governmental organizations, they can significantly contribute to the integration of Roma children into mainstream education and reduce school dropout rates.

School population in the 2023-2024 school/university year: trends, imbalances, and the inclusion of Roma children

In the 2023-2024 school/university year, the number of pupils and students enrolled in the national education system was 3,466,500, a slight decrease compared to the previous year (-6,200). However, this trend masks significant differences between educational levels: high school and higher education increased by 1.1% each, while primary, middle school, and vocational education recorded significant decreases (-9,500 and -4,200). This indicates a major risk of losing students in the early years of school, a period that is essential for consolidating fundamental skills.

The number of graduates in 2022-2023 was 505,000, a modest increase (+0.3%), signaling that although more students are completing their studies, challenges regarding retention and dropout persist, particularly affecting children from vulnerable backgrounds, including Roma children (FRA, 2018).

Almost half of enrolled pupils and students (46.1%) were in primary and lower secondary education, while 17.4% were in upper secondary education and 15.8% in early childhood education.

Of the total school population, 50.2% were girls and 73% were studying in urban areas, highlighting a clear imbalance: children in rural areas, including the majority of Roma children, face limited access to modern schools, teaching resources, and additional support programs.

This urban-rural gap has direct implications for the inclusion of Roma children: in rural areas or marginalized communities, many Roma children face additional barriers such as lack of school transportation, long distances to school, and insufficient teaching resources. These obstacles contribute to early school dropout and perpetuate a cycle of educational and social marginalization (Lazić, 2016).

Post-secondary education continues to be the least represented, with 82,600 enrolled (2.4%), but here there is a high proportion of 46.1% of students in private schools, indicating dependence on financial resources and the risk of exclusion of children from disadvantaged communities. For Roma children, this economic limitation can be a decisive factor preventing access to higher or post-secondary education, reinforcing intergenerational inequalities.

The data highlights several critical issues for education policy:

The vulnerability of primary and lower secondary education requires urgent interventions, including personalized support and remedial programs for children in rural areas and Roma children.

Urban-rural imbalances suggest that equitable access to education cannot be achieved without investment in rural school infrastructure, transportation programs, and additional teaching resources.

The inclusion of Roma children must be a priority, through scholarships, mentoring, and programs that recognize cultural and linguistic diversity, reducing dropout rates and stigmatization (FRA, 2018; Lazić, 2016).

Post-secondary and private education remains inaccessible to a significant portion of the vulnerable population, highlighting the need for financial support and inclusive accessibility policies for Roma students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds.

In conclusion, although the overall school population is relatively stable, children from rural areas and Roma children continue to be marginalized.

Education policies must be deliberate and inclusive, not only to increase enrollment figures, but to ensure real opportunities for success and social integration for all children. Official data from the Integrated Information System for Education in Romania (SIIR) for the 2023-2024 school year indicate a total of 97,614 students who identify as Roma, marking an increase of approximately 10% over the previous year (National Reform Program, 2024). However, this seemingly positive increase masks the persistence of structural inequalities: most Roma children are concentrated in primary and lower secondary education, and participation in upper secondary (6,006 students) and vocational (5,071) education remains dramatically low. In pre-school and

post-secondary education, the figures are almost symbolic (32 and 170 students, respectively), highlighting a marked gap between early access and opportunities for educational continuity (National Reform Program, 2024; Edupedu.ro, 2024).

The situation in universities is even more alarming: in the 2023-2024 academic year, only 772 Roma students were reported, of whom only 428 actually occupied the places allocated to them in the first year (Edupedu.ro, 2024). Comparatively, previous years reveal the same discrepancies: in 2022-2023, 773 places were allocated, but only 392 were occupied; in 2019-2020, 998 places were allocated, but only 371 were occupied (Edupedu.ro, 2024). These data suggest that formal mechanisms for university inclusion are insufficient and that the allocation of places does not guarantee actual participation, reflecting persistent economic, social, and cultural barriers.

Inequalities become even more evident when we compare the Roma population with the national majority. According to a study by *Salva i Copiii România* (Save the Children Romania) (2024), only 78% of Roma children attend compulsory education, compared to 95% of majority children, and only 22% of Roma children continue their high school education, compared to 80% of majority children. Older data show that 44.2% of Roma children aged 7 to 11 do not attend any form of education, a striking contrast to the much lower percentages among non-Roma children (All in School, 2007).

These statistics highlight not only a numerical gap, but also a deep structural deficit in the Romanian education system with regard to the inclusion of Roma children. The marginal increases recorded at the SIIIR level do not compensate for the reality: education continues to be a field of inequality and segregation, and the lack of access to higher levels of education perpetuates the social and economic marginalization of the Roma community. Thus, the data call for urgent interventions and integrated strategies to ensure effective access, personalized support, and real educational continuity for Roma children and young people (FRA, 2018; Lazić, 2016; *Salva i Copiii România*, 2024).

Conclusions

Discrimination and stereotypes against Roma children are not simply occasional manifestations of intolerance, but structural mechanisms that function as systemic barriers to access to education and personal development. In many societies, including Romania, Roma are perceived through the lens of historical prejudices: poverty, "indiscipline" or cultural marginality, labels that quickly become tacit norms of the education system (Tzouriadou, 2015).

The effects of these prejudices are not limited to social labeling. Roma children are constantly stigmatized by their peers, teachers, and sometimes even school administrators.

This stigmatization translates into placement in special classes or segregated schools, reduced educational expectations, and restricted access to quality educational resources (FRA, 2018).

The result is a hostile educational environment that has a devastating psychological effect: feelings of inferiority, loss of confidence in one's own abilities, and alienation from the educational process.

Negative stereotypes also affect children's social relationships. They frequently become the target of bullying and social exclusion, which amplifies their isolation and increases their emotional vulnerability (Tzouriadou, 2015; Lazić, 2016).

Over time, these experiences contribute to the internalization of discrimination, developing what psychologists call the "self-stereotype"—the belief that you are less capable because of your ethnicity.

This internalization has intergenerational consequences: children who grow up in a hostile educational environment tend to reproduce these limiting perceptions and disengage from the school system, perpetuating the cycle of marginalization.

Moreover, stereotypes and discrimination affect not only academic performance but also the life prospects of Roma children.

Children who are constantly labeled and segregated develop low expectations for their own future, which reduces the likelihood that they will aspire to higher education or upward social mobility (FRA, 2018; Lazić, 2016).

In practice, education becomes a tool for reproducing ethnic and social inequalities, and

Roma children are turned, against their will, into victims of a system that legitimizes exclusion.

In conclusion, discrimination and stereotypes against Roma children are not just individual acts of prejudice; they are structural forms of violence that profoundly affect children's psyche,

socialization, and development.

Any educational intervention that does not address these structural mechanisms risks being ineffective, perpetuating the marginalization of Roma children and reinforcing ethnic segregation in schools.

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