



A ROMANI PUPIL WITH SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC

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The text is about the educational context of Romani pupils in primary school in the Czech Republic. It deals with some specific educational areas concerning problem of social exclusion and disadvantage.

As a Romani pupil is in this text considered the pupil whose parents consider themselves Romani, are aware of their origin, claim themselves to their Romani identity (*romipen*) (*either directly – they declare it in various official documents, including a census or indirectly – they declare it by oral communication*) or they are considered Romani by a significant part of their surroundings which is based on deemed or real indicators (anthropological, cultural, etc.), and they live or come from socially excluded localities. (cf. Gabal analyses 2006, Kaleja 2010, Kaleja 2011).

Keywords: Romani pupil, Education, Special educational needs, The czech republic.

A Romani Pupil in the Primary Education

The education system of primary education in the Czech Republic is based on the National Programme for the Development of Education in the Czech Republic (so called White Book from 2001) and is legislatively anchored mainly by the Education Act (*no. 561/2004 Coll., on Pre-school, Primary, Secondary, Higher Vocational, and Other Education as amended*) in which the primary education is provided by:

- **a primary school** (*a school of the main educational stream*),
- **a primary practical school** (*a school for pupils with a mild degree of mental retardation*),
- **a primary special school** (*a school for pupils with health disability with a modified educational programme within the meaning of the act*).

The Education Act (no. 561/2004 Coll., as amended) defines three basic categories of special educational needs of children, pupils, and students (§16):

- **health disability** (*mental, physical, visual, and hearing disabilities, speech defects, autism spectrum disorder, parallel multiple disabilities, , developmental disorders of learning or behaviour*);
- **health disadvantages** (*i.e. health impairment, long-lasting illness or health disorders which lead to learning and behaviour disorders*);
- **social disadvantages** (*family environment with a low socio-economic status, ordered institutional or protective care, position of an asylum seeker or a refugee*).

Within the primary education a pedagogical-psychological counselling and an education of pupils with special educational needs are provided. These are legislatively anchored in the regulations of The

Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic. The regulation no. 72/2005 Coll., on providing counselling at schools and school counselling institutions and the regulation no. 73/2005 Coll., on education of children, pupils and students with special educational needs and of children, pupils, and students exceptionally talented valid from 1st September 2011. These regulations are supplemented by regulations no. 116/2011 Coll., and 147/2011 Coll. Pedagogical-psychological counselling can be in the context of school education generally divided into internal school counselling and external school counselling. The internal school counselling is provided mainly by an educational counsellor, a school prevention methodologist, a school special education teacher, and a school psychologist. The educational counsellor is involved in the field of counselling, methodical and information activities. The school prevention methodologist is involved in the field of methodical coordination, information and counselling activities. The school psychologist is involved in the field of diagnosis, screening, consultation, counselling and intervention work, methodical and educational activities. The school special education teacher is involved in the screening, diagnostic and intervention field, methodical and coordination activities. The external school counselling is provided by pedagogical-psychological advisory centres and special educational centres. In individuals with combined disabilities the counselling is provided by special education centres. Čech comes with an interesting incentive for the internal school counselling (in Vašátková – Loukotová (ed.) 2007). In his article he claims that the competences of current post of an educational counsellor and a school prevention methodologist could be at schools transferred to the newly established post of a (*school*¹, note – like for example in Slovakia) social educator which will be anchored in the Education Act with all the legislative support. Čech says that professional and personal skills cover the requirements for such a post. Apart from that, the (*school*) social educator without teaching obligation would have sufficient space for creating and implementation of preventive programmes, cooperation with specialised institutions, communication with parents and teachers, identification of troubled children or groups and more intensive cooperation with other specialists within the school, mainly with a psychologist and a special education teacher. Further the author says that the post of educational counsellor at schools survives in a rigid form and does not reflect sufficiently the current needs of the school and society. He assumes that an educational counsellor as well as a school prevention methodologist cannot, due to their high direct teaching practice, manage tasks imposed on the performance of these two posts well and effectively enough. (Čech in Řehulka and others 2007). This above mentioned problem is much worse when both positions are performed by one teacher. On the other hand, we should not confuse the competences of a (*school*) social educator with the competences of a school special education teacher – an ethopedic specialist. Nowadays, the professional society tends to discuss the scope of competences of these two professions. It is encouraged by the attitudes of the professional society in the world where the scope of competences of a school special education teacher – ethopedic specialist is completely covered by competences of a social educator (e.g. in Bulgaria, etc.) or a psychologist (e.g. in Russia). On the other hand, if we compare the undergraduate preparation of these two professions (a special education teacher – ethopedic specialist and a social educator) in the Czech Republic and in Slovakia with the other countries we can realise that they are completely different. The orientation of a special education teacher – ethopedic specialist is mainly the teaching one whereas the orientation of a social educator is the non-teaching one.

In the context of education of pupils with special educational needs we talk about an individual or group integration, principles and objectives of special education, types of special schools, individual education plans and other supportive mechanisms. Amendment to regulation no. 73/2005 Coll. (147/2011) specifies the supportive and countervailing measures, defining precisely the social disadvantages specified in §16 of the Education Act. It says that as a socially disadvantaged pupil we can consider a pupil from an environment which does not provide enough support needed for a proper course of education, including cooperation of legal representatives with a school and a pupil which is disadvantaged by insufficient knowledge of language of teaching. From the above mentioned it is clear

¹ Note from the author of this text, the word „school“ emphasizes the scope of authority.

that the pupil's ethnicity does not directly place them in the group of pupils with special educational needs. A pupil with special educational needs is a pupil who meets the criteria specified in the Education Act and in the related regulations.

Two years ago the Czech School Inspectorate (CSI) engaged itself in the problem of the social disadvantages (*in this way a Romani pupil is often perceived*²) through investigation at primary practical schools. In 2009 / 2010 CSI checked the accuracy of placement of pupils outside the main educational stream. It focused on the efficiency of using the diagnostic stays and on the possibility of returning (reintegration) of pupils into the main educational stream. Further the Inspection checked how the schools themselves take into account the language, culture and previous experience with learning in their evaluation of Romani pupils. During the inspection activity CSI visited 171 out of 398 primary practical schools. Results of the inspection showed that some Romani pupils were misdiagnosed as pupils with mental handicap and that the legal requirement for their inclusion into the special classes was not met in all cases and that the diagnostic stays of pupils were not always distributed in accordance with the rules (CSI 2010).

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic processed A Methodological Requirement for Ensuring of Equal Opportunities in the Education of Children and Pupils with a Social Disadvantages (reference no. 27607/2009-60) for preschools and primary schools. It contains supportive and countervailing measures for supporting of an individual educational potential, for preventing placement of pupils into schools outside the main educational stream and for elimination of possible confusion of social disabilities and health disabilities. (The Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic 2009) Curricular content of primary education is made by frame educational programmes (state level). Schools create their own curriculum – school educational programmes. The frame educational programmes for primary education are as follows:

- Frame Educational Programme for Primary Education (2007, 2010),
- Frame Educational Programme for Primary Education – supplement regulating education of pupils with mild mental disability (2005),
- Frame Educational Programme for education at primary special school (2008).

Education of Romani pupils during their compulsory school attendance is characterised by certain educational specifics. Even a project “Variants” from 2002 says that the main problems of a Romani pupil to deal with soon after the beginning of school attendance are as follows:

- insufficient time and space for home preparation;
- unwillingness [note: also inability] of parents to provide basic school aids;
- priority of working at home (*taking care of brothers and sisters*) than working at school;
- no strict daily routine, strict rules or activities that require long-lasting concentration;
- inability to make independent decisions and be responsible for themselves;
- no developed fine motor skills, lack of knowledge how to draw and read;
- lack of knowledge of terms that are needed in real life and which children get from books and encyclopaedias;
- language barrier with children who do not speak Romani language any more but still use ethnolect of Czech language (Člověk v tísní, o.p.s. [People in need, public service company] 2002:2)

M. Bartoňová (2005) states the following strategies that should help with the education of Romani pupils:

² The Education Act was established in 2004 and it determines groups of children, pupils and students with special educational needs. Social disadvantages as one possible category of special education diagnosis have not been diagnosed to any child, pupil or student yet.

- support of school: special classes, assistants in the classrooms, mobile teachers appointed by The Ministry of Education Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic;
- support of teachers, pupils and parents: informative and preparative activities, educational and direct help which is provided by social workers. It is a help for pupils and families with the housework routine, financial support of Romani organizations;
- pedagogical means and pedagogical materials: containing two different forms of pedagogical supervision;
- teachers, their initial and further education: specialised centres for preparation of teachers for work with Romani children, internships, summer schools;
- attention to the cultural identity of Romani pupil: to implement the Romani history and culture into the school educational programme;
- to create a support system for pupils during their movement from educational programmes of special education into the programmes of the main educational stream: methodological materials, remedial classes, etc.;
- to prepare actively for entrance exams to secondary schools: teacher's assistants and Romani intelligentsia as models;
- to organise educational courses for Romani mothers;
- to establish a consulting team.

Educational Consequences of Social Exclusion / Disadvantages

The context of social exclusion of families of Romani pupils has a wide dimension. Specialists who deal with the question of social exclusion approach this phenomenon from several fields of social science. Its width cannot be categorically defined. It interferes with the full horizontal dimension of social relationships (micro-social environment, mezzo social environment, macro-social environment). Ethnical Romani family has its own specifics that lie in many attributes of social life. They reflect and express themselves on the horizontal level (depth) and vertical level (width). Their real form is asymmetric, continuous. The image of an ethnical Romani family is always an individual one; it depends on many circumstances. The view of majority society is usually generalised and not always the right one. The context of ethnic Romani family is based on historical, cultural, social and local attributes and attributes that reflect the current state of the society (for more see Kaleja in Franiok, Kaleja, Zezulková 2010).

The context of **social disadvantages** with respect to the Romani pupils themselves is mainly connected with the social dimension with respect to the education of ethnic pupils. Social exclusion of pupils above all results from the social exclusion of their families. Vanková (2009) states that to talk about a social exclusion means to talk about general, long-lasting disadvantages connected with education, employment, living condition and supply of financial resources. In this phenomenon we also talk about the lack of access to civil, political and social rights and protection. Accompanying phenomenon is feeling of despair, shame, uncertainty and feelings of one's own failure, etc. The author (Vanková 2006) further mentions that the development of socially excluded environment involves many factors:

- **historical factor** – it determines the development of socially excluded environment in connection with the different historical development (*with ethnic groups, among others the Romani one*) in comparison with the majority society. The process of acculturation and integration into the majority society is accompanied by separation and building of protective mechanisms on both sides.
- **family factor** – it manifests itself by the lack of economic potential that results from a low level of education and consequently from the inability to be successful in the labour market. This is reflected in the development of various socially pathological manifestations or tendencies.

- **personal / individual factor** – here we include somatic, communicative and cognitive determinants that manifest themselves when Romani children start going to school. It concerns the impacts in the education line of pupils.
- **cultural factor** – this one has the least negative influence on the development of social environment of the Romani. Romani culture is rich in music, dance, literary and artistic products (cf. Ševčíková 2008), provides wide space for reinforcing and development of the Romani identity. Through this it is possible to remove the boundaries of social exclusion. The Romani can do that by their own – thanks to their newly developed healthy identity³.

In the last mentioned point (*cultural factor of social exclusion*) we would like to emphasize that the **cultural difference of the Romani themselves is becoming animus to the majority society, for some people even xenophobic**. Because of that, the Romani culture as a sociological construct is understood as the factor of exclusion. **Not the culture of this ethnic group but the attitude of the majority society**. The ethnic Romani families cannot be perceived generally in the conditions of the Czech Republic. **All knowledge in this work is in connection with the Romani living in the socially excluded localities or localities that are endangered by social exclusion** in the Czech Republic according to the definition of GAC analysis from 2006 called *Analysis of Socially Excluded Roma Localities and Communities and the Absorption Capacity of Subjects Operating in the Field*. In this analysis social exclusion is defined as “...the process whereby individuals, a group of individuals or a community are hindered or completely denied the access to the resources, positions and opportunities that allow participation on social, economic and political activities of the majority society.” (pg. 9) **With respect to the social development in the Czech Republic and to the social events, which have happened during recent years, it is fair to state the arguments of experts to the above mentioned “Analysis”. They say that the “Analysis” is out of date and that it does not provide a real image about the current state of this socially significant phenomenon any longer**. In the analysis, following groups are defined as socially excluded: poorly educated people, long-term or repeatedly unemployed, people with mental or physical handicap, persons suffering from some kind of addiction, seniors living alone and lonely, immigrants, members of variously defined minorities (*ethnic, religious, sexual orientation, etc.*), people in a difficult life situation which they cannot solve themselves. In 2011 the Government of the Czech Republic approved a *Strategy for combating social exclusion for the period 2011 – 2015*. The submitter of this document is Government Commissioner for Human Right (Monika Šimůnková). The document contains measures⁴ leading to: **safety, housing, social services, education, employment and benefit system, regional development**. The document defines social exclusion as *spatially isolated, socially isolated, economically isolated, culturally different and symbolically excluded*. It further states that “...absence or imperceptible presence of some of them⁵ does not necessarily mean that we cannot define a certain locality as socially excluded.” (Strategy... 2011) The approved document is closely linked to the key strategic documents of the Czech Republic:

- The Concept of Roma Integration⁶,
- National Action Plan for Social Integration⁷,
- National Action Plan for Inclusive⁸.

³ Provided that the Romani is proud of their origin and in the interiorization is aware of the fact that a member of a Romani ethnic group can obtain quality education, perform professionally related work, have a full social life, integrate into majority society.

⁴ Note of the author: intervention and also preventive nature.

⁵ Note of the author: spatially isolated, socially isolated, economically isolated, culturally different and symbolically excluded.

⁶ A Concept of Roma Integration for period 2010 – 2013. Available on: <http://www.vlada.cz/cz/ppov/zalezitosti-romske-komuniti/dokumenty/koncepcie-romske-integrace-na-obdobi-20102013-71187/>

⁷ The Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs (2008-2010).

- National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic⁹,
- EU Agenda 2020¹⁰.

Globally, we can summarize the consequences of social exclusion in the socio-economic, cultural and political dimensions. All stated consequences in relation to children themselves can be interpreted on the following concrete example of two boys named Tomáš, both 10 years old.

Concrete Examples

- **Socio-economic consequences:**
 - **Tomáš A** comes from stimulating environment, does not live in a socially excluded locality. Both parents are employed. The family reaches a standard social level. It gets a regular monthly income, the parents are actively engaged in their children's activities, their education is intentional.
 - **Tomáš B** comes from poorly stimulating family environment, he lives in a socially excluded locality. Both parents are unemployed, they receive benefits of state social support. The father occasionally works illegally. Their social level is low. The family has a regular monthly income, however, the economy of the household is not regulated adequately. Functionalism prevails in the education, the parents are not actively engaged in their children's activities.
 - **Concrete manifestations – differences, e.g.:**
 - *in the standard of living and its quality,*
 - *in the style and hygiene of clothing, in overall hygiene,*
 - *in the style of eating, routine and the quality of eating,*
 - *in the conscious needs, in the value components,*
 - *in the educational starting line and building of motivation for learning,*
 - *in the relation to work, work ethic and accepting of state social benefits, etc.,*
 - *in the way of running the house and in social cooperation,*
 - *in the pattern of model family situations, in the models of parents as general,*
 - *in the way of communication with extra-familiar environment,*
 - *in the life perspective of the child and other.*
- **Cultural consequences:**
 - **Tomáš A** visits various cultural events at certain intervals (theatre performances, cinema, etc.), he has visited a few museums, he visits various extra lessons (piano lesson, sport, etc.), he attends various entertaining events. Every year he spends his holiday for example at the seaside, with relatives in the mountains or at a cottage in the countryside.
 - **Tomáš B** has not visited any cultural event yet, he is aware about the existence of museums only theoretically, he has not been there yet. He has been once at the cinema to see an interesting film with his schoolmates as a part of school education. He does not attend any extra lessons, he does not even know that he could attend them and which ones he could

⁸ Available on: www.msmt.cz/uploads/Skupina_6/NAPIV.doc.pdf

⁹ Full title: Investing into European Competitiveness: Contribution of the Czech Republic to European 2020 Strategy. National Reform Programme of the Czech Republic 2011. Available on: <http://www.vlada.cz/scripts/file.php?id=92896>

¹⁰ Full title: Territorial Agenda of the European Union 2020. Towards an Inclusion, Smart and Sustainable Europe of Diverse Regions. Available on: <http://www.mmr.cz/CMSPages/GetFile.aspx?guid=261c141e-b4c2-43ca-bd4b-4e587f5573a1>

choose. During his summer holidays he stays at home, spends his time outside, almost always without the parental supervision.

- **Concrete manifestations – differences, e.g.:**
 - *in the relation to the cultural and social values,*
 - *in the general cultural and social awareness,*
 - *in the social behaviour in the given social situations,*
 - *in the relation to the aesthetics and its value,*
 - *in the conditions of development of skills, taking an advantage of dispositions,*
 - *in the assumptions of the susceptibility to negative social deviations (so called socially pathological phenomena).*
- **Political consequences:**
 - **Tomáš A** grows up in a family which is aware of the legal system, of the legal power. The parents lead their child to follow the law, the basic awareness is provided. The child is informed about the principles of an operation of law in our country. The family leads the child to respect the rights and duties.
 - **Tomáš B** grows up in a family which is limitedly aware of the legal system. Awareness is connected with a system of demands and requirements connected to financial state subsidy. The interpretation of the legal system, the legal power or respecting of rights and duties is interpreted in the limited extend. It is often connected only with subjectively perceived rights of individuals.
 - **Concrete manifestations – differences, e.g.:**
 - *in the moral and social development of a child,*
 - *in the subjectively (inadequately) perceived aspects of rights and duties,*
 - *in the precondition to problems and behavioural disorders,*
 - *in the precondition to deviant behaviour.*

Nikolai (in Svoboda, Morvanová et al., 2010) points out the terminological sensitivity of psychological diagnostics of children from different sociocultural environment. He distinguishes social disadvantage, sociocultural disadvantage, sociocultural diversity and also the term socio-culturally disadvantaged pupil or Romani pupil. He emphasizes that the terminology which refers to a particular group of pupils plays a key role in the formation of prejudices and stereotypes. It is not possible to generalize or legitimate to state that a particular ethnic group is characterised by the lack of cultural features or even to attribute to it a characterisation that results from the reduced mental ability, etc. only for its dimensional difference. A social disadvantage results from the consequences of a social exclusion of families which Romani pupils come from (for more see Kaleja in Franiok, Kaleja, Zezulková 2010).

From the above-mentioned it results that there is still a terminological inconsistency, especially with the terms: social exclusion, social disadvantage, sociocultural diversity and other. **Social disadvantage** represents the consequences of social exclusion in the process of education. Within **sociocultural disadvantage** we talk about principles of social cooperation when one ethnic group is limited in its full integration (on the side of a majority or minority). Within **sociocultural diversity** we emphasize the **acceptance of different** not the **difference** itself. Social disadvantage is legislatively defined in the Act no. 561/2004 Coll., where there are stated *groups of children, pupils and students with special educational needs. Third group is formed by children, pupils and students with social disadvantage. According to the standard we include here:*

- **family environment with low sociocultural status**
- **danger of socially pathological phenomena,**
- **ordered institutional education, imposed protective education,**
- **recognised refugee and an asylum seeker in the Czech Republic.**

Further the regulation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports no. 147/2011 Coll., supplementing the regulation of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports no. 73/2005 Coll., states that into the group of pupils with social disadvantages we also include:

- **a pupil from an environment which does not provide them enough support for a proper course of education, including cooperation of legal representatives with school,**
- **a pupil disadvantaged by insufficient knowledge of teaching language.**

According to the above mentioned regulation the following countervailing measures are prepared for these pupils:

- pedagogical and special pedagogical methods and procedures appropriate to the educational needs of pupils,
- individual support in a lesson and during the preparation for lessons,
- use of advisory services (at school and outside the school)
- individual educational plan, teacher's assistant.

Summarily

Czech primary schools of main educational stream are attended by 72 % of Romani pupils (*with others children it is 92 %*), i.e. almost one third of Romani pupils goes to schools outside the main educational stream. From the primary schools of main educational stream leave for the schools outside the main educational stream on average two out of ten Romani girls and 2,4 Romani boys. School marks are affected by increased absenteeism, with Romani children absences are threefold in comparison with their peers and they increase with the higher classes. A decline of school performance of Romani pupils in the second grade which is indicated by attendance and school marks significantly affects their educational chances both in terms of probability of successful mastering the primary school and particularly in terms of their chances of going to secondary school. Responsibility for the education of these children is in most cases sought in the family; almost 80 % of headmasters agree that most of the teachers are able to work with these children – they do not seek the problem at school but move responsibility and solution only to the side of the family. (GAC 2009) Bernstein's theory of language codes (In Giddens, A. 1999) says that speech habits reflect from the early age the social conditions from which the person comes. He states that particular social groups do not differ only by the range of vocabulary or expressive skills but the differences are noticeable in the way of communication itself. He speaks about a limited language code and about a developed language code. The limited one is typical for social groups with lower social status. They are characterised by high degree of transferring practical experience and unambiguous expressions rather than discussing abstract concepts, relationships and processes. On the contrary with the developed language code the verbal expression is less tied to a specific context which allows easier generalisation and expressing abstract concepts. Marie Vágnerová (2007) talks about peculiarities in different socio-cultural environment. She thinks that they considerably affect the communication between the majority and minority society. In the mutual interaction it can be manifested by quite different or ambivalent interpretation of behaviour of the majority society from the side of minority society. In the same way the majority society can interpret the behaviour of the minority one.

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