

January 22, 2020  
Budapest

## **Roma Education Fund's Statement on the court case surrounding the segregation of Roma children in Gyöngyöspata**

Roma Education Fund (REF) calls upon the Hungarian government to recognize the state's responsibility in providing quality education to all, in integrated school settings adhering to Hungary's legal frameworks, and the Roma Integration Strategy with its commitment to international regulations in education. REF also calls attention to the infringement procedures initiated by the European Union regarding school segregation of Roma. Currently, as the Gyöngyöspata case illustrates among others, the Hungarian government has failed to comply with the law on the long-standing issue of segregation regarding Roma children.

The Debrecen Court of Appeal's verdict on the case of Gyöngyöspata, states that Roma children's right to equal treatment was violated. Accordingly, the victims deserve the ruled upon compensation. However, Prime Minister Viktor Orban's chose to assess the verdict from a polarizing angle stating, *"If I lived there (in Gyöngyöspata), I would wonder why the members of an ethnically dominant group living with me in one community, in one village, receive a large amount (of money) without working for it while I am struggling here all day,"*.

REF expresses its concerns regarding the statement made by Prime Minister Viktor Orban and the public discourse surrounding the case. In a democracy where rule of law is upheld, the legitimacy of an independent judiciary should not be called into question. The verdict should not be used to exacerbate the divisions between citizens in the local community. Finally, the verdict represents the infringement of rights of Roma and not the preferences of the majority. Therefore, the compensation to individuals for the violation of rights - is a matter of justice, upholding the decisions of judiciary and ensuring the respect for basic human rights. Instead of awarding the compensation, the Hungarian government proposes to provide educational trainings and re-trainings to the plaintiffs, we are concerned given that the responsible institutions have already failed to provide adequate services.

REF strongly condemns the actions of the government and calls for the implementation of the court decision. Roma communities should not be used as scapegoats and stigmatized in any manner. In addition to paying the lawful compensation, REF calls on the government to ensure access to high-quality education for all, including Roma.

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