

Looking for Solutions:

REF's response to the current governmental communication on the Gyöngyöspata case

Roma Education Fund (REF) observes that the government's response to the issue of Gyöngyöspata is focused on increasing the tension between Roma and non-Roma instead of addressing the right to education and basic human rights. **The government communication continues to over-politicize a human rights issue to a political battle while questioning basic democratic principles, division of power and the independence of the judiciary.**

In Hungary, **REF has supported more than 5000 Roma children in desegregation projects since 2016.** Our work has resulted in 80% of beneficiaries transitioning to next grade, while ensuring a dropout rate of 0% in primary education.

Our results and rich international experience in Central Europe and Western Balkans clearly demonstrate the impact that positive education interventions have on Roma children in building their knowledge, skills, resilience and leadership. Our results also shed light on the negative impact of segregation which further exacerbates the marginalization of Roma. Desegregation is in the interest of all citizens. By desegregation, Roma and non-Roma children and communities get closer to each other, forging meaningful relationships that lead to social integration of not only children, but also communities. Additionally, education is often seen as a primary tool to support Roma in accessing the labour market, increase employment rates, and enable them to lead a successful and beneficial life for themselves and society.

Prime Minister Viktor Orban's and governmental representatives' statements point out the lack of political willingness to implement the court decision. **While scapegoating and initiating political battles against marginalized Roma, the most urgent issues in relation to social and economic status and education of Roma remain unchanged.**

REF offers its two specific educational models to the local educational institutions and the municipality addressing both, early childhood development (ECD) services and segregation. In order to ensure successful access to primary schools, and quality early childhood developmental programs, REF is willing to share, facilitate and provide its expert input for introducing our Toy Library model. Since 2016, REF has supported over 750 Toy Library members mostly in North-Eastern Hungary and more than 960 mothers and caregivers in education specific workshops such as, "Your Story" sessions.

Altogether more than 12,000 Roma children have been supported in early childhood education programs leading to 0% dropout rate and successful enrolment in quality primary schools. The Toy Library model is not only pivotal from an educational preparation

perspective, but also from a preventative perspective, in avoiding the misplacement of children in special schools thus eliminating further segregation.

For desegregation, REF has developed a specific desegregation toolkit based on more than 15 years of international experience working on Roma education. The toolkit has proven its great impact both in Hungary and in other European states ensuring access to quality education and social integration of Roma children and communities.

Given our experience in Roma education, and the impact of REF's interventions, we call upon the government and the relevant institutions to adopt REF positive educational models in order to promote equal access to quality education for all, instead of avoiding the obligation to compensate the Roma children.

Furthermore, REF is ready to support the development of integration strategies and policies with special focus on the upcoming Post-2020 National Roma Integration Strategy and the ongoing infringement procedures to ensure joint efforts in combating segregation of Roma students in Hungary in partnership with the respective Ministry.

REF is looking forward to continuing the communication regarding the ECD program development and desegregation either via email or in person discussions.

Should you have any further inquiries, please contact:

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