

5 Equality of opportunity, desegregation

[Gábor Hauas]

An extreme degree of inequality of opportunity pervades the Hungarian public education system.

The extreme degree of inequality of opportunity pervading the Hungarian public education system and the segregation practices reinforcing it stem from social conditions and are grounded in grim social facts. The socio-economic processes accompanying the regime change led to the emergence of an at least 700 thousand strong, markedly marginalised, social stratum subsisting on the fringes of society, characterised by low educational attainment, sustained labour market exclusion and dire poverty. It is by now the third generation of this class that have grown up reproducing their parents' low educational attainment thereby precluding all chances of finding regular employment. This minority of Hungarian society is currently divided from the consolidated majority by a seemingly unconquerable gap and the despondent isolation of its members gives rise to barbaric and inarticulate reactions of self-defence. These living conditions have a profound detrimental effect on the social development of young generations and lead to the emergence of disadvantages from the very first years of life which are extremely difficult to counteract at a later stage even under optimal institutional conditions. The social processes characterising the period following the regime change forced large populations of children and their families into a virtually hopeless position with severely limited prospects for the future.

Dire poverty is not a Roma issue.

Public discussions concerning the issue of dire poverty tend to blur the ethnic and the social dimensions of the problem and treat all the consequences of social exclusion as a "Gypsy issue." We would therefore like to emphasise that dire poverty is not a Roma issue. A little more than a third, maybe almost half of those living in dire poverty are of Roma ethnicity and the proportion of the direly poor among the total Roma population is approximately the same. It is unquestionable, however, that the disadvantages of children from direly poor Roma families are substantially exacerbated by the relentless manifestations of implicit – often subconscious – or explicit ethnic discrimination.

As it is at present, the Hungarian public education system effectively reinforces the inequalities stemming from social origins rather than mitigate them. There are four major factors contributing to this effect.

1. The extreme polarization of all levels of the public education system: dramatic differences in teaching quality, the quantity and quality of regular and complementary services, the composition of teaching staff and the availability of equipment and facilities.

2. Segregation — the separation of disadvantaged and, especially, Roma children from the rest of the student population, which is both a cause and a consequence of polarisation. Currently about a third of Roma primary school students experience extreme segregation in education.

3. The pedagogical fatalism displayed by the teacher population with respect to children of poor and uneducated parents, especially Roma students. It is a fact that teachers are expected to face extraordinary challenges and special pedagogical problems while not being provided with appropriate theoretical, professional or methodological munitions in the course of their training. The schools where they teach also often lack even the most elemental conditions for efficient education. These teachers have therefore come to the conclusion that there are no pedagogical means of compensating for the academic disadvantage typical of children of poor and uneducated parents. What is worse, since there is a high proportion of Roma among the children of poor and uneducated parents, teachers tend to attribute the problem to ethnicity, i.e., the educational difficulties stemming from dire poverty and unemployment are seen as a characteristic ethnic problem. Schools tend to contend that the main cause of Roma children's school failures is their Roma origin *per se* and that a school is necessarily powerless with regard to the profound problems induced by a combination of their abominable social position and their families' negative "attitude" — the school thus being faced with a *fait accompli*. This attitude of course extends to children of poor and uneducated parents of non-Roma ethnicity since the two groups tend to be conflated because of the ethnic connotations, the consequences however being graver for the Roma. The children involved are well aware of the fatalist pedagogical attitude manifested towards them, i.e., of the firm belief that "you cannot be helped, nothing will ever become of you" even if their teachers conscientiously fulfil their duties and do not explicitly express this opinion. The stronger the segregation in a school, the firmer this belief will be.

4. The almost unanimous consensus among the social elite and especially the middle classes, including the lower middle class, that their children should avoid attending kindergartens, schools or classes where a large number of children of poor and uneducated parents, especially Roma students are enrolled because this would be detrimental to their development and impede the optimal unfolding of their talents. Parents can put substantial pressure on educational institutions in this context, occasionally by sending their children to another school or even to a school in another settlement.

■ DIAGNOSIS

Social groups living in dire poverty are concentrated in particular segregated areas.

1. *Regional concentration, segregation.* Social groups living in dire poverty are concentrated in particular segregated areas. There are about a hundred settlements in Hungary which have irrevocably turned into poor-Gypsy ghettos and a further two hundred settlements are on a seemingly unstoppable course to becoming ghettos. The majority of ghettos and near-ghettos are situated in the depressed north-eastern and south-western areas of the country and some of the micro-regions within these areas display several symptoms of regional ghettoization as a result of an aggregation of settlements of this type. Similar concentration processes can be observed in city suburbs (in former worker colonies, state industrial zones, etc.), in parts of the rural eastern Hungarian plains and in urban slum enclaves. (See the box *Depressed micro-regions.*)

This regional or neighborhood concentration of the poorest and most uneducated groups paves the way for school segregation.

This regional or neighbourhood concentration of the poorest and most uneducated groups paves the way for school segregation making not only its elimination but at times also any hope of alleviation illusory. There are at least 180 primary schools in Hungary where Roma students are in the majority. For a further 70 schools it is only a matter of time before this situation inevitably develops as the share of Roma students is already over 40 per cent (HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006). These are the schools of the poor, where the majority of non-Roma students are also from disadvantaged backgrounds. At least 3000 primary school classes have a Roma majority and at least 1200 of those are attended solely by Roma children. It is worth noting for comparison that in the early 1980s, when the issue of segregated Roma school classes was first put on the agenda by education authorities, 150 all-Roma classes were observed (HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2002). The proportion of Roma students among the total primary school population has more or less doubled since then while there has been an eight-fold increase in the number of homogeneous Roma classes (HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006). In total, about a third of Roma primary school students experience extreme segregation in education and, although we lack precise data, similar proportions are likely to apply to the educational conditions of children of poor and uneducated parents.

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Educational segregation is almost invariably accompanied by substantially lower standards in terms of educational facilities, teaching quality and educational services (KERTESI & KÉZDI, 2005). Teachers are reluctant to work in ghetto schools since they have to meet far more difficult challenges requiring special professional skills for the same pay. The composition of teaching staff in segregated schools is therefore heavily influenced by adverse selection processes. Children learn at least as much from each other as from their teachers in schools or classes with a heterogeneous composition in terms of social origin. The homogeneous composition resulting from segregation deprives children of this opportunity. The models and challenges enhancing the motivation to learn are completely absent.

DEPRESSED MICRO-REGIONS

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The social and demographic composition of depressed settlements and micro-regions is also typical of poor enclaves in larger and more prosperous settlements. An instructional example is “Dzsumbuj” (Bedlam) an infamous poor neighbourhood in an inner city district of Budapest (Ferencváros). A survey conducted in 2005 found that 37.3 per cent (!) of the local population were under the age of 18 and 58 per cent of the adults had only primary education and 19 per cent had not even completed primary school (TORNAI, 2005).

[TABLE 5.1] The characteristics of depressed micro-regions (proportions of categories)

MICRO-REGION	GHETTO OR NEAR-GHETTO SETTLEMENTS ¹	AVERAGE OF JOBLESS HOUSEHOLDS IN SETTLEMENTS ²	ROMA STUDENTS WITHIN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL POPULATION ³	GHETTO SCHOOLS ⁴
ABAÚJ-HEGYKÖZ	20.8	68.9	40	40.0
BODROGKÖZ	35.3	62.1	37	35.7
ENCS	48.6	70.1	51	36.8
EDELÉNY	23.9	68.7	45	22.7
MEZŐCSÁT	11.1	61.6	21	20.0
ÓZD	34.5	58.8	41	21.9
SÁROSPATAK	11.8	61.4	22	18.8
SZIKSZÓ	29.2	65.7	38	30.8
SZERENCS	27.8	57.9	27	21.1
HEVES	41.2	59.4	42	42.9
CSENGER	27.3	63.1	21	12.5
FEHÉRGYARMAT	20.4	64.6	38	17.2
MÁTÉSZALKA	30.8	58.6	30	20.0
NYÍRBÁTOR	35.0	65.9	30	21.7
VÁSÁROSNAMÉNY	22.2	62.7	33	21.7
SARKAD	8.3	64.7	22	33.3
SÁSD	29.6	55.4	37	28.6
SELLYE	48.6	57.9	46	33.3
SZIGETVÁR	34.8	57.2	26	20.0

¹ Estimation based on data from local government estimates collected for a number of school and kindergarten surveys. Ghetto settlement: where more than 50 per cent of the population are Roma; near-ghetto settlement: where more than 30 per cent of the population are Roma.

² Average of all settlements: 48.1 per cent.

³ Estimation based on 1992/1993 Education Statistics figures (data on the number of Roma students were not included in later surveys) and on data from two studies on the position of Roma students (HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2002; HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006). 15 per cent of the total primary school population are of Roma ethnicity (JANKY, KEMÉNY & LENGYEL, 2004).

⁴ Ghetto school: where more than 50 per cent of the student roll are Roma.

Educational inequalities stemming from regional or neighbourhood segregation are not necessarily reduced by the forming of micro-regional school associations and integrated education centres.

Educational inequalities stemming from regional or neighbourhood segregation are not necessarily reduced by the forming of micro-regional school associations and integrated education centres. Various decrees and other education policy measures have recently been introduced to encourage local governments to enhance cost efficiency and education quality by co-ordinating their local administration duties, including education services, through associations. This policy has partly been motivated by the consideration that by transferring education management from a local to a micro-regional level of administration some of the segregated and low quality institutions can be gradually eliminated. In practice, however, associations often have the opposite effect. When forming and maintaining urban integrated education centres or micro-region educational associations, the local governments of settlements located in the vicinity of towns and inhabited by populations of relatively high social and financial status often dismantle the decade-long district divisions and cancel their institution maintenance partnerships with poorer neighbouring settlements in favour of so-called micro-associations with a nearby county seat, city or, perhaps, one of its integrated education centres. This step institutionalises and makes complete the practice of children of relatively high social status attending schools in the nearby town while the former district school becomes susceptible to ghettoization.

A case in point is the village of Bakonya near the city of Pécs. Bakonya belonged to the Kővágószőlős school district for decades – the local children attended the school in this regional centre of uranium mining. When the mines were closed, the position of the village quickly declined and as a result of selective migration from the village, the proportion of the Roma population steadily increased both in the village and in the school. In 2007 Bakonya formed a micro-association with educational institutions in the nearest suburb of Pécs. This step has institutionalised the option of Bakonya families to send their children to school in Pécs even though the city is three times as far from Bakonya as Kővágószőlős and the only road leads through Kővágószőlős.

The involvement of institutions characterised by relatively poor standards and facilities and an unfavourable social composition in associations or other types of collaborative network does not necessarily offer a solution. The extreme differences pertaining between member institutions and organisational units when they join urban integrated education centres or micro-region educational associations often persist or even widen during their membership. Joint management or the joint administration of some of the services tends to cover up rather than suppress inequalities.

Similar problems arise when – citing its obligation to provide regional education services and to fulfil other centralised educational functions – an association establishes an education centre and uses the grants thus becoming accessible to finance development plans only benefitting the central settlement of the region while the education services in less privileged settlements do not improve or, in some cases, even decline. The developments implemented in

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the central settlement prompt families of relatively high status living in other settlements of the region to send their children to the improved schools, which leads to increased segregation in the remaining institutions of the association. Moreover, it appears to be a robust observation that while an increasing number of children abandon local village schools in favour of schools in nearby towns, local village schools owe their continued existence to predominantly the children of poor and uneducated parents commuting from neighbouring settlements of substantially lower status and income position (ZOLNAY, 2007).

2. *Pre-school education.* The current institutional conditions in pre-school education are inadequate for the task of compensating for the disadvantages accumulating over the first few years in the lives of children of poor and uneducated parents. These children, especially children of Roma ethnicity, are far more likely than the general population to delay kindergarten enrolment until the age of five or even later (HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006). Although as a consequence of the decline in the child population there are overall more kindergarten places in Hungary than there are kindergarten-age children and institutions are constantly closed down or merged, the distribution of places across the country is far from being even. Settlements or areas inhabited by a markedly high proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents are the most likely not to have a kindergarten at all or else not a sufficient number of kindergarten places. The problems caused by the shortage of places are further exacerbated by a growing share of children staying at kindergarten for an extra year. Previous regulations required children to start school in September if they attained the age of six by 31st August that year but this cut-off date has been modified to 31st May. Also, an increasing number of parents choose to retain their children in kindergarten for an extra year. In 2006/2007 76.2 per cent of six year olds and 4 per cent of seven year olds attended kindergartens (OKM, 2007). A further reason for the increase in the number of six and seven year olds attending kindergartens is that education advisers and professional committees often recommend an extra year at kindergarten naming the children's immaturity for school as a reason.

These recommendations usually apply to children of poor and uneducated parents who started kindergarten at the age of five or later. The substantial overall increase in the number of six and seven year olds attending kindergartens "robs" places from younger children. When there is a shortage of places, children aged 5 or older are given first priority and children with both parents employed come next in the line. It is children of poor and uneducated parents whose parents are unemployed or unwitting disability pension claimants who are most likely to be turned away, i.e., those who are in the greatest need of prolonged kindergarten education.

In 2003, settlements likely to have major problems with regard to kindergarten education were identified on the basis of objective statistical indicators in preparation for a survey (HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006). 103 settlements without and

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226 settlements with kindergartens were selected to be included in the survey sample. Figures indicating the proportion of Roma inhabitants were available for 81 of the 103 settlements without kindergartens. 35 of these 81 settlements had more than 25 per cent Roma populations and 15 had more than 50 per cent Roma populations. That is, almost half (43.2 per cent) of the settlements where there is no kindergarten even though there is a sufficient number of children to justify maintaining one are poor-Roma ghettos or near-ghettos. The figures characterising the settlements with kindergartens included in the sample show similar results. The proportion of Roma inhabitants was more than 25 per cent in almost half (45.2 per cent) of these. The probability of kindergartens being overcrowded and having to reject some of the applicants increases with the proportion of Roma inhabitants in the settlement. The seriousness of the place shortage problem is clearly shown by the fact that kindergartens admitting 125 per cent of their capacity could provide for only about 72 per cent of kindergarten age children and those accommodating 150 per cent of their capacity covered only about 75 per cent of the population.

In the settlements under study on average 74.2 per cent of the kindergarten age population attended kindergartens compared to the national average of 92 per cent. In 57.7 per cent of the settlements the proportion of children who started kindergarten at the age of five or even later was over 20 per cent, this proportion reaching 33 per cent in almost 40 per cent of the settlements under study and over 50 per cent in every fourth or fifth settlement. The results of the study clearly show that the shortage of kindergartens or kindergarten places predominantly applies to settlements characterised by chronic unemployment, long-term dire poverty and high proportions of Gypsy inhabitants.

In 2005 another study looked at kindergarten services in towns for which statistical evidence indicated inadequate institutional conditions (HAVAS, 2005). Complete sets of data required for the study were available for 27 towns. The data collected from health visitors and kindergartens revealed that nine of these towns experienced a critical shortage of kindergarten places. Eight of the nine towns had an exceptionally high proportion of Roma inhabitants relative to a typical urban ethnic composition and within the Roma population a markedly high proportion of inhabitants were found to live in dire poverty. In the nine towns there were 3,724 kindergarten places to 5,266 kindergarten-age children, i.e., kindergartens could accommodate scarcely more than 70 per cent of the local children. The head teachers of 237 kindergartens in the 27 towns were asked what they thought were the most acute problems in connection with kindergarten services. The shortage of places was (among others) mentioned as a response in 53 of the institutions. Kindergarten admission procedures took place in May–June 2005. The data collected from health visitors revealed that during this period there were 1,031 children who had had their fourth birthday by 31st December 2004 but had not yet spent a single day at kindergarten. With one or two exceptions the children concerned were all children of poor and uneducated parents and most of them were of Roma ethnicity.

The kindergartens of children from stimulus-deficient background environments tend to be considerably more stimulus-deficient than others.

Institutional selection procedures applying to children starting formal education substantially increase the probability that the disadvantages of children of poor and uneducated parents will become more pronounced over their primary school years.

An inevitable consequence of a child missing kindergarten education altogether or enrolling at an older than optimal age is a delayed start of formal schooling. The extreme polarisation of conditions also holds for the kindergarten institution network. Speech therapists, remedial teachers, psychologists, swimming, music and language instruction, etc. are all available in kindergartens attended by children from families of relatively high social status while the small budgets of kindergartens attended by children of poor and uneducated parents cannot afford any of these services and families may even struggle to obtain clothes appropriate for the season of the year in which to dress their children for the trip to the kindergarten. While kindergarten teachers (too) rarely fail to mention in connection with the challenges related to children of poor and uneducated parents that “they come from a stimulus-deficient environment,” the kindergartens attended by these children tend to be considerably more “stimulus-deficient” than the kindergartens of children from “stimulus-rich” background environments.

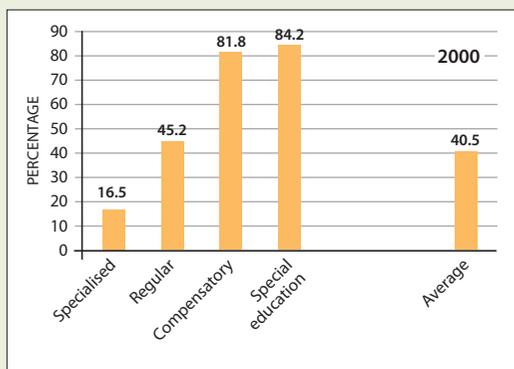
Families living in dire poverty excluded from society tend to have little trust in public institutions including kindergartens. No efforts seem to be made, however, to improve the relationship with parents and encourage earlier kindergarten enrolment for children of poor and uneducated parents even where place availability is not a problem. In defiance of the pertinent provision of the Public Education Act, the majority of education providers and institutions do not consider it their duty to “lure” children into the kindergarten at the age of three if they come from direly poor families whose financial difficulties, mistrust or weary resignation prevent them from taking the initiative.

3. *Selection at the start of primary education.* Institutional selection procedures applying to children starting formal education substantially increase the probability that the disadvantages children of poor and uneducated parents bring with them will become more pronounced over their primary school years. The results of school readiness assessments assign a far higher than average proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents to special education classes or so-called reduced-size compensatory classes, and inadequate kindergarten education greatly contributes to this outcome. As revealed by a study conducted in 2000, 36.8 per cent of sixth year Roma students attending special education classes had not attended kindergarten at all while the corresponding proportion for sixth year Roma students attending regular classes was only 4.9 per cent (HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2002). A markedly high proportion of Roma students and an even higher proportion of children who are wards of the state are referred to special education classes. (See the box *The overrepresentation of Roma and orphaned students in special education classes.*)

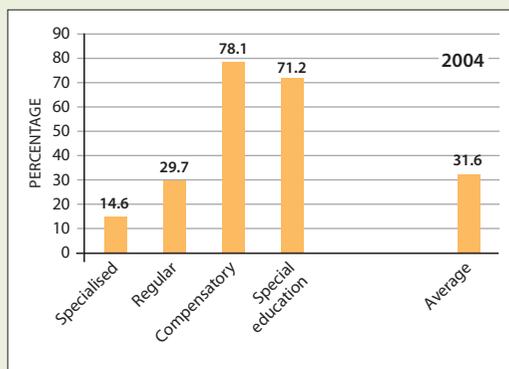
Children who are assigned to special education classes in the first year of schooling have very little chance of being transferred to regular classes at a later stage and if they remain in special education classes their further education prospects will become fatally limited. In 2004, for instance, 16.8 per cent of eighth year special education students did not continue their studies at all and

THE OVERREPRESENTATION OF ROMA AND ORPHANED STUDENTS IN SPECIAL EDUCATION CLASSES

Roma students are extremely unevenly distributed across different types of school class (HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2000; HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2004). Their proportion in specialised classes providing higher than average quality educational services is very low while they are represented in compensatory and special education classes characterised by reduced academic standards in a markedly high proportion.



[SOURCE] HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ (2000), based on data from 198 schools.

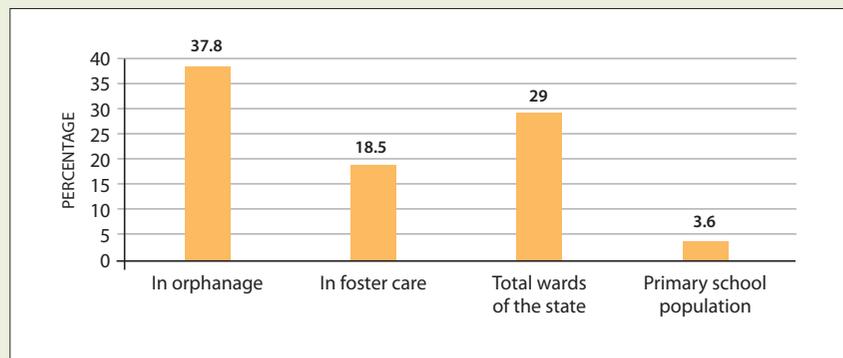


[SOURCE] HAVAS & LISKÓ (2004), based on data from 553 schools.

[FIGURE 5.1]
Proportion of Roma students in various class types, 2000, 2004

In 2004 3.6 per cent of the total primary school population attended special education classes. Although we do not have precise data on the corresponding proportion among Roma primary school students, a conservative estimate based on research results by HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ (2000) and HAVAS & LISKÓ (2004) and on data from a national representative survey from 2003 (JANKY, KEMÉNY & LENGYEL, 2004) puts this figure at a minimum of 15 per cent. Data collected by child protection services in 2004 reveal that the proportion of students receiving non-integrated special education was almost twice as high among wards of the state and two and a half times as high among children living in orphanages.

[FIGURE 5.2]
Proportion of ward of the state students receiving special education, 2004



[SOURCE] Child protection services, 2004.

47.4 per cent enrolled in special vocational training schools which effectively constitute a dead end (HAVAS, 2004). The high incidence of the classification of children as having *special educational needs* is to a considerable extent motivated by education providers' and institutions' financial interests. The declining student numbers and the higher-rate special education allocations prompt local authorities to provide services for students with special educational needs because the resources thus becoming accessible can be used to finance the maintenance of their institutions.

The majority of public education institutions are not equipped to meet the professional requirements of special education. Public education funding is adjusted to the assessment of children's/students' needs and entitlements rather than to the *de facto* availability and quality of services.

The majority of public education institutions are not equipped to meet the pedagogical and teaching requirements presented by children with special educational needs. In Hungary public education funding is adjusted to the assessment of children's/students' needs and entitlements rather than to the *de facto* availability and quality of services. The use of funding is accordingly audited in terms of financial and accounting accuracy while its professional efficiency and outcomes are not inspected beyond the fulfilment of the pre-specified minimum conditions. A practical consequence of this model is that the diagnosis of a child as having special educational needs is not followed by compensatory instruction but the child is placed in a class where the quality of teaching and the general conditions of education may be substantially inferior to the usual standards. This is especially true for special education classes offered by regular primary schools.

It is no use setting a two and a half times higher rate of per-student funding for children with *special educational needs* if these grants are more than likely to be absorbed by the schools' overall budgets and spent on services unrelated to the needs of these children or even used to cover the expenses of segregation (substantially reducing class sizes).

The results of an analysis carried out in 2004 reveal that 93.4 per cent of general primary schools also providing special education classes merge the higher rate funding received for students attending these classes into their general budgets and fail to spend it on the enhancement of special education services (HAVAS, 2004). Several special education programmes are run without qualified special education teachers and as many as 8 years of students may be taught together in defiance of the regulations, which specify a maximum of three years of students in a class. In 2004, 30.4 per cent of primary schools providing special education classes had no qualified special education teachers among their staff and 27.2 per cent of the schools merged more than the legally permitted number of years in a class (HAVAS, 2004).

Educational prospects are not significantly better for children who are assigned to reduced-size compensatory education classes in the first year of primary school. As shown by a number of studies, these classes follow a simplified curriculum and thus increase the gap between these students and their typical peers with the result that when the students are transferred to regular classes, they cannot keep pace with their new classmates (GIRÁN & KARDOS, 1998; HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2002; HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006).

Recent education policies encouraging integration and the redesigned funding system have led to a decrease both in the number of segregated compensatory and special education classes and in the number of students assigned to these programmes. The outcomes of the changes have provided unequivocal evidence that the earlier practice of separating student groups was unnecessary in a significant proportion of cases and only had the effect of reinforcing disadvantages. The current positive trend, however, still leaves a considerable number of children of poor and uneducated parents becoming the powerless victims of segregative education policies. It is at the same time highly exceptional for children of poor and uneducated parents to be admitted to specialised (advanced or bilingual) programmes, which start in year one, offer higher educational standards and substantially improve the chances of a successful student career for the future.

The selection process applying to first year students is reinforced by the choice of parents of relatively high social status to enrol their children in a non-local school in their home town or in another settlement.

The selection process applying to students entering primary school is reinforced by the choice of parents of relatively high social status not to enrol their children in their local schools but send them instead to another settlement or a non-local school in their home town. (See the box *Non-district school attendance*.)

The social compositions of student rolls at various educational institutions therefore display far more extreme differences than could be expected from the composition characterising the given settlement or town district. This has the consequence that the education standards of the various institutions are similarly divergent commencing with the first year of formal schooling. In the summer of 2007 a ghetto school maintained for decades in the slum district of a county town was closed down. The students were transferred – individually, in pairs or threesomes – to various same-year classes in high-prestige schools in the town. The competencies of upper-primary students transferred from the ghetto school were found to be several years behind the average competencies of host classes.

In year five several schools assign the best students of the year to an advanced track, which has the consequence that the education services of the institution are divided into an advanced programme preparing students for further education and a basic programme providing “remedial” education.

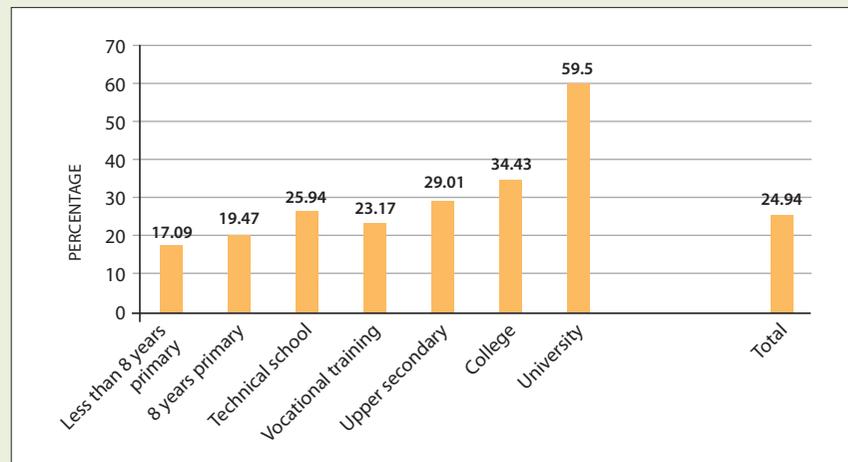
4. *Selection in primary education.* Further selection practices appear in later years. Advanced education programmes (subject specialisation, bilingual education, etc.) are organised for classes of students in upper years. Whether a student is admitted to one of these classes is determined through the same selection mechanisms as admission to the first year. In year five several schools assign the best students of the year to an advanced track, crossing class boundaries, which has the consequence that the education services of the institution are divided into an advanced programme preparing students for further education and a basic programme providing “remedial” education following, once again, the logic of social selection. A large share of students from families of relatively high social status transfer to 6 or 8 year secondary schools after year four or six of primary education. Primary schools having a high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds, where the quality of education tends to be poorer than usual, are more likely to be affected by this process.

At the same time, the proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents and, especially, Roma students gradually decrease in upper years primarily as

NON-DISTRICT SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The results of the National Assessment of Basic Competencies reveal that in 2006 approximately every third eighth year student (31.46 per cent) attended a non-district school.* It is especially easy to choose a non-district school in large towns where there are several schools but some choice is available to parents in every settlement where more than one school is provided. In one-school settlements – 75 per cent of settlements in Hungary – however, choosing a non-district school means that the child has to commute to another settlement. As shown by the survey data, a fairly high proportion of children living in these one-school settlements attend non-district schools and the smaller the settlement, the higher the proportion of commuting students. The proportion of eighth year students attending non-district schools is 19.85 per cent among students living in villages having a population of 2–5 thousand inhabitants, 20.57 per cent among those living in villages of 1–2 thousand inhabitants and 24.94 per cent among those living in smaller villages. (These figures do not include those who attend schools in other settlements because their home settlements do not have a school or only offer lower primary education since these students are classed as attending their district schools.) It is also demonstrated by the data that the probability of non-district school attendance increases with the mother's educational attainment, i.e., non-district schooling substantially increases social selection between schools. This observation holds for all settlement types. As an illustration, *Figure 5.3* displays the figures characterising villages having a population of fewer than a thousand inhabitants by the mothers' level of education.

[FIGURE 5.3]
Percentage of students attending non-district schools as a function of mothers' educational attainment, home settlement: fewer than one thousand inhabitants



[SOURCE] Based on data from the National Assessment of Basic Competencies, 2006.

* Figures computed by Gábor Kertesi.

a result of grade retention and dropping out. A large share of overage students are recommended homeschooling, which is a recourse used by schools in an effort to escape from the responsibility of their education. (See the box *On homeschooling*.)

A considerable share of students displaying low educational achievement fail to complete primary school or only complete it at the age of 16 or 17 (2–3 years later than usual), which in itself reduces their chances of continuing their studies in secondary education. Moreover, those completing primary education later than usual are the most likely to be hampered by serious deficiencies in skills and competencies or to be functionally illiterate.

ON HOMESCHOOLING

§7 of the Public Education Act states that “Compulsory education may be satisfied by school attendance or homeschooling – as chosen by the parents.” Sections (3) and (4) of §69 add that “Home-schooled students are exempted from all compulsory classes at school” and “The achievements of those who are exempted from attending compulsory classes at school shall be assessed at times specified by the head master and by methods specified by the teaching staff.” This means that in principle homeschooling should only be an alternative to formal education in exceptional cases (for outstandingly gifted students, students excelling in a special area, such as arts, sport, etc., children living with profound physical disabilities or suffering from chronic illnesses requiring regular treatment, etc.). Many schools, however, recommend homeschooling for students who are over-aged, difficult to manage or have poor and uneducated parents. Formally, the transfer to homeschooling must be initiated by the parents but in many cases this happens under informal pressure from the school, which is its means of trying to escape from the responsibility of educating unusually problematic children.

In these cases the authorisation of homeschooling essentially amounts to the school relinquishing the education of these students and treating the end of year examinations as a mere formality. The regulations were tightened in 2004 and the authorisation of homeschooling for stu-

dents from disadvantaged backgrounds was made contingent on the approval of child welfare services. This measure, however, has not led to a decrease in the proportion of home-schooled children; a slight increase has in fact been observed in the last two school years. Between 2001 and 2005 the share of home-schoolers remained in the range of 0.61–0.63 per cent, while it rose to 0.64 per cent in 2006 and to 0.69 per cent in 2007 (Education Statistics, 2001–2007). This slightly higher value still does not appear to be very high but taking into account that the great majority of home-schoolers are children from disadvantaged backgrounds and, within them, children of Roma ethnicity, the probability of home schooling among this social group must be substantially higher. In 198 schools observed in 2000, 3 per cent of Roma students and 0.4 per cent of non-Roma students were exempted from regular school attendance, i.e., Roma students were eight times as likely to be granted exemption (HAVAS, KEMÉNY & LISKÓ, 2002).

Moreover, there has recently been an increase in incidents implying that in certain schools difficult to manage and/or overage children of poor and uneducated parents are informally transferred to homeschooling and permitted not to attend classes regularly. A recent extreme case in point is the school in Kerepes, where a few students were required to attend school only twice a week even though they were not officially home-schoolers.

The recent explosion of participation in secondary education has had little impact on the schooling of children of poor and uneducated parents, especially Roma students.

5. *Secondary education.* The recent explosion of participation in secondary education has had little impact on the schooling of children of poor and uneducated parents, especially Roma students. The rate of enrolment in secondary schools offering qualifications has displayed a very slow increase among them. While 80 per cent of an average primary school class continue their studies at secondary schools offering qualifications, the corresponding proportion is scarcely more than 20 per cent among the Roma (HAVAS & LISKÓ, 2006).

Uneducated parents lacking vocational qualifications, who are little equipped to grasp and appraise the consequences of the radical changes in the economy and in the education system, tend to view vocational training as a continuation of the tradition that emerged during the communist Kádár regime. At that time vocational training indeed offered an opportunity of social mobility to children from unskilled families by providing vocational qualifications after three years of training, which guaranteed employment. A considerable share of these parents still harbour illusions of this sort with regard to vocational training and fail to observe the radical shift brought about by the regime change.

The primary schools to which the issue has the highest relevance often contribute to the persistence of these illusions. They fail to inform parents of the expected consequences of their decision and, in some cases, teachers may even share the parents' illusions. What primary schools are concerned with is that every final year student should submit an application and that no-one should end their formal education at that point. In the case of children of poor and uneducated parents who are over-aged and/or have substandard academic results, schools see the solution in nearby vocational training schools with which they have established close contacts for precisely this reason. This practice has led to the emergence of a network of vocational training schools of low standards, which are ready to admit functionally illiterate students struggling with serious knowledge deficiencies and a lack of elemental competencies, thus absorbing a substantial share of children of poor and uneducated parents successfully completing their eight years of primary education. This solution is accompanied by the lowering of academic requirements and training standards to a minimum level, the fatal devaluation of the vocational qualifications offered by these institutions and an all but hopeless narrowing of labour market opportunities. The situation is further aggravated by the exceptionally high secondary school dropout rates among children of poor and uneducated parents. Half of Roma students enrolling in secondary education drop out within their first two years (LISKÓ, 2002). That is, all in all, at most 4–5 per cent of Roma students attain qualifications in each year and these are often of dubious quality.¹

[1] The issue of vocational training and dropping out are discussed in Chapter 4.

■ SUGGESTED SOLUTIONS

Children of poor and uneducated parents must be given the opportunity to attend kindergartens regularly and full time from the age of three.

1. Children of poor and uneducated parents must be given the opportunity to attend kindergartens regularly and full time from the age of three. To achieve this goal
 - more kindergarten places must be created in settlements and town districts where there is a shortage of places and
 - new kindergartens must be opened in settlements where there are currently none but the number of local children justifies a local kindergarten;
 - a record must be kept of all kindergarten-age children;
 - the relationship of kindergartens and disadvantaged families must be improved with the help of other actors involved (health visitors, child welfare services, etc.);
 - programmes helping the child to settle in should be introduced with the participation of parents;
 - the conditions for early years' development and education must be created;
 - kindergarten programmes should be adjusted to the children's assessment results and other important details;
 - the pertinent regulations must be amended.

The social and ethnic selection applying to children entering formal primary education must be substantially reduced.

2. The social and ethnic selection applying to children entering formal primary education must be substantially reduced. An essential component of this change is the prevention of professionally unjustified decisions which assign a considerable share of children of poor and uneducated parents to special education classes.² The practice of diagnosis based per-student funding allocation, which has the effect of encouraging schools to classify children as having *special educational needs* (SEN) must be abolished and replaced by service based funding. In parallel with the introduction of integrated education for children with special educational needs the specialised programmes currently offered by some general primary schools should be gradually phased out as these are predominantly used as a means of ethnic and social segregation. In the meantime schools should be regularly inspected in order to ensure lawful operation since some of the specialised programmes currently fail to observe even the most basic regulations. The practice of assigning first year primary school students to classes on the basis of social and ethnic origins must be terminated. Significant differences between the classes in terms of the proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents must not be tolerated.

In settlements having more than one school and in schools having more than one class in a grade all forms of school segregation must be gradually diminished.

3. In settlements having more than one school and in schools having more than one class in a year, all forms of school segregation must be gradually diminished. §66 of the amended Public Education Act setting out rules of establishing school district boundaries and the complete ban on primary school entrance examinations provide an appropriate legal framework for this goal. Outcomes

[2] This proposal also pertains to the issue of special educational needs (SEN), which is discussed in Chapter 6.

should be continuously monitored and analysed in an effort to refine and improve the integration process as needed. Schools should be regularly inspected to ensure that the integration process is sensitive to students' needs and the principle of equal treatment is observed at all times and to prevent the reduction of between-school segregation from contributing to within-school segregation.

An important factor to consider in implementing the desegregation programme is the proportion – if any – of private educational institutions in a given settlement. In some relatively large settlements middle class children are likely to attend private schools and this trend may extend to several more settlements in the foreseeable future. The educational integration programme is at risk of failure if private schools become the preferred choice for the middle classes while relatively poor social groups continue to attend local government schools. Standardised, universal regulations and academic requirements must therefore be introduced in order to ensure that private schools providing regular educational services financed from public sources take their share of the responsibility of providing high quality education for children of poor and uneducated parents.

The incidence of student migration must be reduced.

4. The incidence of student migration must be reduced. The migration of students from families with relative high social status to non-district schools promotes segregation even if children of poor and uneducated parents are in the majority in their home settlements. To discourage migration, authorities must be consistent in adhering to the principle that *the costs of commuting* must be borne by the family and no aid of any kind may be granted by the state. Schools' eligibility for commuter support allocations and school bus subsidies should be restricted to cases when the students need to commute to their district schools.

Comprehensive reform programmes are needed.

5. The problems of ghettos and near-ghetto areas call for comprehensive reform programmes.³ In ghettos and regions or settlements at risk of ghettoization comprehensive programmes involving parallel developments in several areas – employment, housing, education, welfare and health services, etc. – should be given priority as the isolated enhancement of educational conditions cannot reasonably bring about more than limited improvement. Special non-competition based resources must be allocated for these programmes since the most disadvantaged settlements do not have a fair chance in competitions for funding. The necessary infrastructural developments and investments must be implemented and equipment supplies and other facilities must be substantially improved.

Differentiated wage incentives should be introduced to recompense extra achievements.

6. To curb the adverse selection processes applying to teaching staff, teachers' pay schemes should be reformed to allow for differentiated wage incentives in recompense for the extra efforts indispensably required for the successful

[3] A similar proposal is discussed in Chapter 11 concerning employment policies.

education of children of poor and uneducated parents. To prevent local governments from making arbitrary decisions of association formation disregarding their students' interests, the regulations must clearly set out the conditions, including quantitative criteria, under which a small school or lower primary school may be sustained and those under which a school should be closed. In addition to student roll thresholds adjusted to settlement type and to the commuting distance between the institutions of the association, infrastructural parameters should also be specified.

Considerations of educational equality should be given special emphasis in pre-service and in-service teacher training.

7. Considerations of educational equality should be given special emphasis in pre-service and in-service teacher training and it must be ensured that the necessary pedagogical competencies are invariably acquired. There should be a sufficiently high proportion of children of poor and uneducated parents in schools participating in teaching practicum programmes for trainees and the programmes should compulsorily involve visits to schools where trainees can observe the education methods successfully used in teaching such students. Teacher training curricula should include at least one semester devoted to the pedagogical challenges specific to the education of children of poor and uneducated parents and to the educational methods and procedures suitable for meeting these challenges. In-service teacher training programmes should include at least one compulsory module preparing teachers for the challenges of classes with a heterogeneous social composition of students and equipping participants with the pedagogical competencies needed to meet these challenges.

Secondary education participation rates must be substantially improved among children of poor and uneducated parents. Civil education initiatives should be subject to standardised quality assurance and the professionals involved in these initiatives should receive standardised training.

8. Secondary education participation rates must be substantially improved among children of poor and uneducated parents. To achieve an improvement in secondary education participation rates, the standardised assessment and evaluation system currently under implementation should, for each primary school, incorporate data on secondary school enrolment rates and secondary education careers among former students. These indicators should also be part of primary school self-assessment systems. In the long term an incentive scheme could be implemented rewarding schools that achieve outstanding results in preparing children of poor and uneducated parents for the successful completion of secondary education in institutions offering qualifications. Efforts should be made to implement general improvements and methodological enhancements in civil education initiatives providing remedial instruction; these initiatives should be expanded and granted uninterrupted and reliable financial support. In line with the overall standardisation process, the programmes should be subject to standard quality assurance and a training scheme should be developed for the teachers and other professionals involved. Current student grant schemes targeting children of poor and uneducated parents should be reinforced and their long-term reliability should be ensured. Children of poor and uneducated parents attending secondary schools offering qualifications should be unconditionally entitled to student grants.

The incidence of students dropping out of secondary education must be substantially reduced.

9. The incidence of students dropping out of secondary education must be substantially reduced. To achieve a decrease in secondary school dropout rates, data related to dropping out should be mandatorily provided for education statistics. Primary schools should be given regular feedback on the secondary school careers of their former students, including a possible event of dropping out. Secondary schools characterised by higher than average dropout rates should be subject to compulsory quality improvement programmes connected to the standardised assessment and evaluation system. Initiatives to establish or expand *second chance* schools and institutions should be encouraged. The conditions and extent of state support for these institutions should be clearly set out.

Support policies driven by considerations of equal opportunity should be consistently enforced.

10. Support policies driven by considerations of equal opportunity should be consistently enforced. To be able to deliver support policies promoting equality of opportunity, reliable methods must be established for the collection of data concerning children of poor and uneducated parents. The current system of educational data collection should be redesigned to permit the monitoring of segregation/selection trends and the inspection of general processes taking place in public education for lawfulness. To ensure efficient public education spending, the information related to financing and the information related to assessment and evaluation should be accessible to education providers in a form that allows the relationship between them to be investigated. The central administration must make it clear that segregative education management practices shall not be tolerated and supplementary funding shall only be granted to education providers who strictly enforce the requirements set out in the Public Education Act and observe the principle of equality in their use of the supplementary funding. The compulsory preparation of equality of opportunity programmes in public education may constitute an important step in the fight against educational segregation provided that the programmes are planned with reference to a pre-defined set of considerations. Education providers must ensure that the equality of opportunity programmes are delivered in the institutions under their authority, i.e., that they are incorporated in the educational programme of the institutions in concordance with educational and equity considerations.

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