

The Educational Circumstances of Romani Refugee Children in Hungary

Summary of the
questionnaire
survey



ROMA
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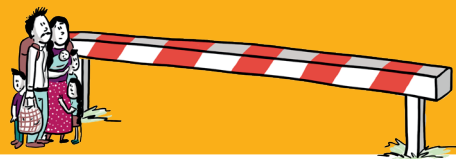


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Introduction

At the time of publishing this research report, more than a year and a half has passed since the invasion of Ukraine by Russian forces, which began on 24 February 2022. Of Ukraine's estimated 400,000 Roma inhabitants, 100,000 left the country searching for refuge in the first few months of the war alone¹. Many came to Hungary from the Transcarpathian region, plagued by territorial and social inequalities². Due to the compulsory military service and the fact that many Romani men from Transcarpathia had already been working in Hungary before the war, it was mainly women and children who arrived in Hungary. Therefore, Romani refugees are an intersectionally vulnerable group who often suffer exclusion from state and civil services based on ethnicity. Similarly to Roma living in Hungary, Romani refugees from Ukraine face considerable discrimination upon arrival, which, as Romaversitas' research from 2022³ shows, is particularly visible in the sites of housing, labour market, health-care and the focus of our study: education. While it is primarily Romani refugees who reside in refugee shelters, often far from any services⁴, they usually only have access to the lower segments of the labour market too. That is, if the burden of childcare even permits it.

1 More on Roma refugees (Reicher, 2023.04.08.): <https://ccl.org.ua/en/news/ukrainian-roma-refugees-and-discrimination-a-call-for-action-on-international-roma-day/>

2 As our 2022 report (Eredics 2022) explains in more detail

3 (Eredics 2022)

4 (Reicher, 8th April 2023)

Furthermore, their access to education is also limited in several ways⁵. Although all refugee children have the right to free education in Hungary, there are cases where the enrolment of Romani refugee children is hindered by prejudice that permeates the education system. However, due to the lack of available and realistic data, it is challenging to estimate how many school-aged refugee children there are in Hungary⁶. Therefore, they are invisible to the system. Moreover, it is typical that NGOs, often performing public duties, do not have access to essential information on the situation of refugees either. All this occurs in a run-down refugee care system, with the lowest aid for refugees among the V4 countries⁷ and a weakening welfare state and civil sector⁸. In addition, Romaversitas⁹ and several sources reported that Romani refugees face significant discrimination even at the border crossing. There have also been examples of them being turned back at the border or treated not as refugees but as economic migrants, which raises the question of worthiness¹⁰.

This report presents the complex situation of educational opportunities for Romani refugees from Ukraine. While the underfunded Hungarian educational system is beginning to threaten even the more privileged segments of the educational system, inclusive education for Romani children is still an important issue. This underfunded educational system has difficulty dealing with students who are disadvantaged in any way, whether they are Roma, special-needs students or come from poverty. The case of Romani refugees from Ukraine illuminates these processes. The educational system lets down these refugee children in many ways, which is the subject of this survey research carried out in the Summer of 2023. Our study presents the experiences of 108 Romani refugee parents in the Hungarian education system. Firstly, we describe the legal and institutional environment in which they arrive and the welfare services to which they are entitled. Then, we briefly outline the Hungarian education system

5 As presented in Tribune's article (Ataii, 2022.09.04.): <https://tribunemag.co.uk/2022/09/roma-refugees-hungary-ukraine-war>

6 (Pataki, 4th February 2023)

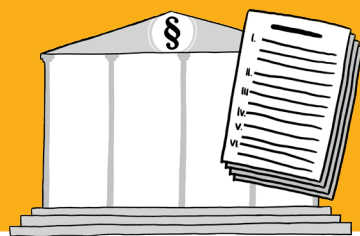
7 (Sarkadi Nagy and Szabó, 25th August 2022)

8 (Feischmidt and Neumann 2022)

9 (Eredics 2022)

10 (Feischmidt 13th September 2023)

and its issues, followed by the methodology we used to collect our data. We then present our findings, exploring the perspectives of Romani refugee parents based on our questionnaire survey.



Legal and institutional background

As mentioned in the introduction, the current situation of the Hungarian refugee care system is very poorly adapted to assist large numbers of refugees, and the resources available for refugee families are meagre by international standards. In this context, local governmental institutions, churches and the civil sector are the organisations that often take on the responsibility of assisting refugees. These organisations partake in various activities, from distributing donations to providing accommodation and educational services. Legally speaking, persons from Ukraine in Hungary have multiple statuses. Typically, and also in our questionnaire survey of Romani parents, people who left Ukraine on or after 24 February 2022 are registered as dual citizens (45%) or Temporary Protection status holders (48%), but a smaller number of respondents with a temporary residence certificate (3%) and without legal status (4%) were also included in our sample.

Relevant Terms:

Asylum: An entitlement for a foreign national to reside in the territory of Hungary.

Refugee status: May be granted to a person whose life and liberty are threatened in his/her country of origin.

Temporary Protection: Parliament grants temporary protection to foreign nationals, e.g., Ukrainian people arriving to Hungary in masses.

Dual citizenship: A person who is a citizen of both Hungary and Ukraine.

According to the summary of the Hungarian Ministry of Human Capacities¹¹, refugees with dual citizenship are entitled to all the provisions and benefits of Temporary Protection status holders unless they receive more favourable benefits based on their Hungarian citizenship. Asylum seekers with temporary protection are entitled to: documents proving their identity and right of residence, employment, education, accommodation and care in reception centres, health care, reimbursement of the cost of translating their documents, assistance for permanent departure from Hungary and regular subsistence allowance. The regular subsistence allowance is HUF 22,800 per person per month for adults and HUF 13,700 per person per month for minors. Still, by accepting the allowance, the person also undertakes to accept any job offered within 45 days if they are fit to work¹². However, dual citizens are also entitled to various family allowances such as family allowance, maternity allowance, if they can meet other administrative conditions such as registered address.

The issue of housing assistance in refugee shelters is particularly relevant to our research, as Romani refugees are the most vulnerable group, as they are forced into these – often segregated – institutions by ethnic discrimination in the housing market and high rental prices. In addition to the refugee shelters, municipalities and other accommodation providers can also provide accommodation for refugees at a state subsidy. However, a regulation that took effect on 1 August 2023 restricts the duration and amount of this allowance, which also means that refugees who can work but are not working will no longer receive the 7,000 HUF per day allowance. Only one adult in a family will be exempted if they have children, which the Helsinki Committee¹³ believes could lead to family break-ups, as many Romani refugee men work in the black economy and their partners cannot because of the burden of childcare and domestic labour. This could harm the educational opportunities of Romani refugee children from Ukraine.

Children with refugee status and those with dual citizenship are subject to compulsory schooling from the age of three if they stay in

11 (EMMI, May 2022)

12 (Website of the National Directorate-General for Aliens Policing)

13 (Hungarian Helsinki Committee, 13th September 2023)

Hungary for more than three months. They are also entitled to all educational services that a Hungarian citizen would receive. This includes nursery, kindergarten, school and secondary school (dormitory in the case of secondary school), specialised pedagogical services and the Sure Start Children's Centres. In addition, refugee children are entitled to free textbooks and meals for six months, after which free school meals become means-tested¹⁴. To overcome language barriers and help them catch up, the state provides 5 hours of tutorage per student per week in addition to the standard curriculum organised by the institution concerned¹⁵. Partaking in Ukrainian education online does not excuse compulsory Hungarian schooling. However, in many cases, obtaining the necessary documents to enrol in school – such as an address and social security number – is a significant obstacle for families with dual citizenship, including the Roma from Transcarpathia. According to a report by Romaveritas in 2022, 59% of the families surveyed had children of compulsory school age who were not yet enrolled¹⁶.

Fortunately, after almost a year, the situation is somewhat more encouraging, but there are still very diverse educational experiences reported by different actors. The main problem is that many refugee children from Ukraine do not speak Hungarian, and it is challenging to organise language teaching in underfunded state schools. However, without a centralised inclusion programme, knowledge of the Ukrainian curriculum or a plan to involve Ukrainian teachers, the work falls, in many cases, to educational institutions and civil society¹⁷. A particular concern for Romani refugees is addressing the educational disadvantages accumulated within the Ukrainian education system. In many institutions, the extra 5 hours of education per week for refugees cannot be provided due to complicated bureaucracy and a shortage of teachers, and there is little access to special education teachers or school psychologists¹⁸. This is of concern because Romani children from Ukraine often arrive with health problems and significant trauma. The reasons for this can be found in the

14 (UAINFO, 8th April 2023)

15 (EMMI, May 2022)

16 (Eredics, 2022)

17 (Neumann, 12th December 2022)

18 (HVG, 9th November 2022)

complete lack of centralised measures in the education of refugees on the one hand and in the functioning of the Hungarian education system on the other.

The Hungarian education system is highly selective and underfunded¹⁹, which mainly manifests in a shortage of teachers and professionals. In this context, children who are different in any way, be they Roma, disadvantaged, special needs, or with language barriers, can only appear as a problem in the eyes of the system, as an extra workload for already overburdened teachers. This is compounded by the fact that teacher training places little emphasis on working with disadvantaged children, as only the children of high-status parents tend to be in training schools²⁰. This causes considerable segregation in the schooling system, according to some authors, a process which limits the access of Roma to educational resources and contribute to their marginalization²¹. In this educational context, a Romani refugee child may face serious difficulties, not only because of discrimination and inter-ethnic bullying but also because of the lack of educational resources, which are often compensated by the families. However, in the case of Romani refugees, there are very few family resources to make up for the education system's shortcomings. As Romaversitas' 2022 study²² explains in more detail, they often come from localities affected by unequal development; many children have significant educational disadvantages, and parents have very low levels of educational attainment. This is compounded by the fact that their circumstances in Hungary are far from ideal regarding housing or material conditions.

19 (Fejes and Szűcs, 2018)

20 (Fejes, 2018)

21 (Zolnay 2018)

22 (Eredics 2022)



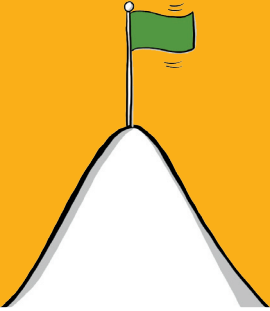
Research context and methodology

The present report draws heavily on the results of our action research²³, which highlighted, among other things, the difficulties of the educational situation of Romani refugees from Ukraine. This report draws on the following data. Our research team collected 108 questionnaires from Ukrainian Romani refugee parents in their accommodation or summer camps. The structure of the questionnaire was developed together with our researchers. The questionnaire, which consisted of several open-ended questions, was more like a structured interview, recorded in a questionnaire format by the interviewers. A key aspect of our data collection was to include the perspectives of Romani refugee families, whose problems and conditions are often not expressed because they are rarely asked about their educational experiences. The survey was carried out in the summer of 2023, a year and a half after the outbreak of the war. This entails that our respondents had more experience with the Hungarian education system. The respondents to this non-representative questionnaire were reached through NGOs, accommodation providers and various stakeholders, meaning that the sample was heavily influenced by the organisations we could reach during the recruitment period.

An essential aspect of our research was to break down the distance between interviewers and interviewees as much as possible. Our experience suggests that a smaller cultural and power distance helps subjects to open up more, to speak about their experiences of discrimination and for our interviewers to understand their experiences in

23 (Eredics 2022)

context. As our interviewing team highlighted during our joint supervision, in many cases, the subjective experience of the interviewees is challenging to translate into the questionnaire or institutional logic, which is why reducing distance is also crucial. Our team of interviewers, Boglárka Balogh, Jennifer Balogh, Fanni Iváncsik, Bianka Lólé, Tímea Mezei, Kamilla Rafael, Erik Szőcsi Dániel, Norbert Varga and Ádám Virág, are all Romani students/young professionals who are committed to fighting discrimination against Roma.

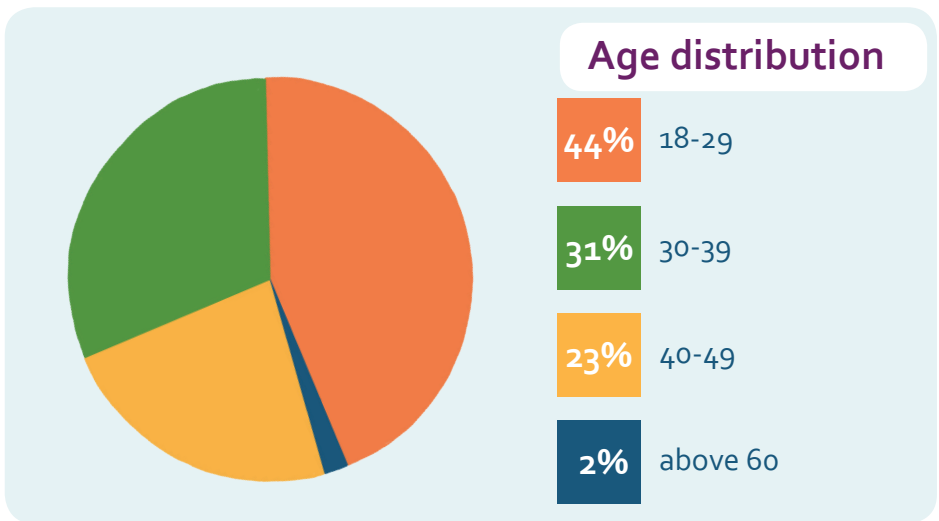


Results

Introducing the respondents of the questionnaire

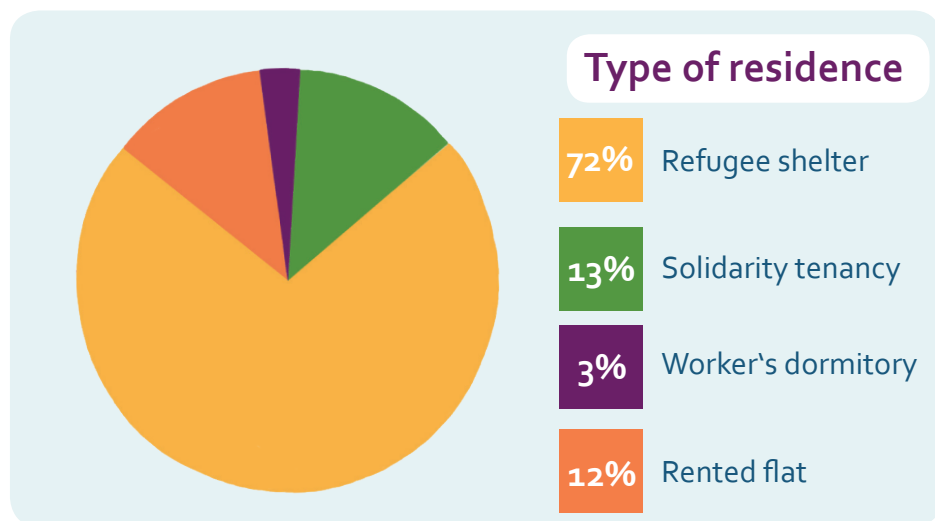
We interviewed 108 parents who identified themselves as Roma, of whom 89% were women. Their age distribution shows that they were predominantly under 40.

Figure 1, the age distribution of respondents



92% of our respondents came from Transcarpathia, from the districts of Munkach (21%), Berehovo (40%), Huzh (3%) or Uzhhorod (27%), and 62% of them arrived in February 2022, with a further 19% arriving in the next two months. 48% found permanent housing within one month of their arrival and did not have to move for more than six months, but more than 20% only six months after their arrival. 45% of the interviewees are now living in Budapest, but many reported having to move a lot. As for their housing situation, it can be seen that they, indeed, predominantly stay in refugee shelters. 83% of respondents do not have to pay for their housing. However, some also reported that they let go of the cost of their housing in exchange for various household jobs.

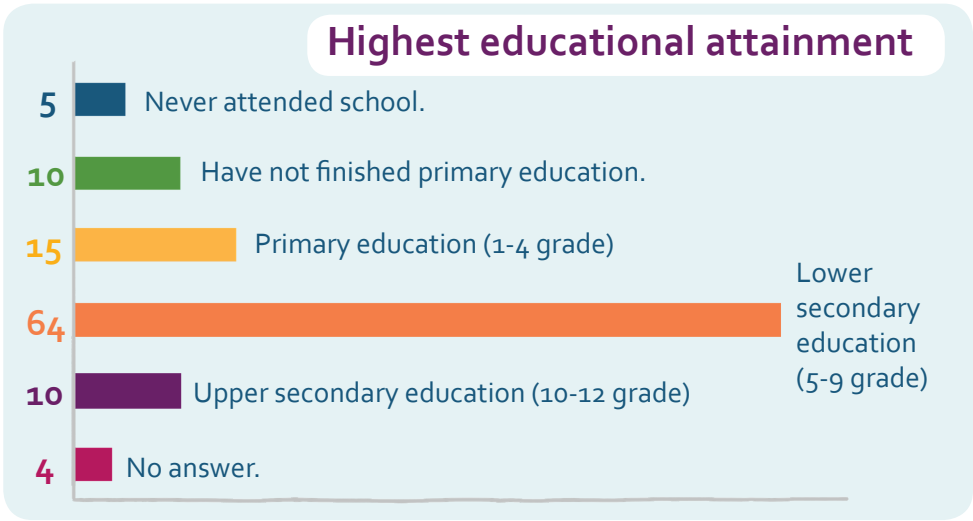
Figure 2, type of residence



The employment rate of the respondents was very low, with 72% either homemakers or unemployed. However, only eight respondents were unemployed and had no other forms of family income because 68% of the respondents' partners were employed. This is also connected with the very low educational attainment of the respondents, with only 9% having completed secondary school or higher. Furthermore, 84% of children came to

Hungary from segregated schools²⁴ in Ukraine.

Figure 3, highest educational attainment



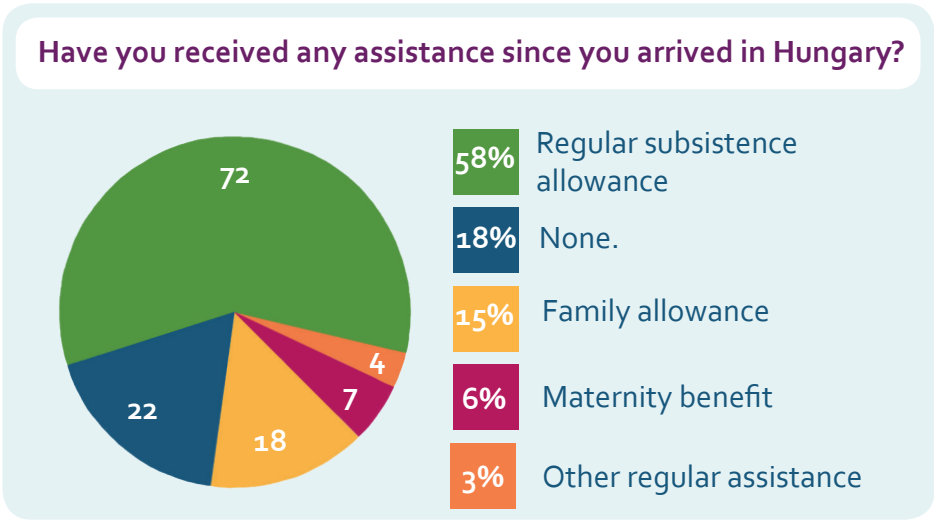
Our respondents, therefore, tend to be marginalised. They are the ones who are predominantly forced into shelters because they face difficulties in accessing the rental market due to a lack of adequate income and significant discrimination. In many cases, these families also find it challenging to access the labour market, and when they do have access to it, they can only find employment at the lowest end of the scale. Female respondents typically find it challenging to find work that they can perform alongside their caring responsibilities. Those who have found jobs tend to be in domestic positions. It is only in the context of these circumstances that the education of Romani refugee children can be understood, which is discussed in the next chapter.

24 According to the literature on Roma inclusive education, a segregated school is an institution with a 50 percent or higher Roma ratio

Access to education and state services

In our questionnaire survey, 108 Romani parents had 252 minor children in Hungary, 209 of whom were of compulsory school age. This gives an average of 2.32 children per family. 41% of respondents have three or more children, so they are considered to have large families. Those with temporary protection status cannot access the relatively low family allowance and other family support. Furthermore, they are only eligible for the subsistence allowance if they do not have a job. Of our respondents, 22 do not have access to any support, 15 of whom are homemakers or unemployed and would, therefore, be entitled to at least a subsistence allowance. Of our 49 Ukrainian-Hungarian dual national respondents, 33 do not receive family allowances, although they would be entitled to them.

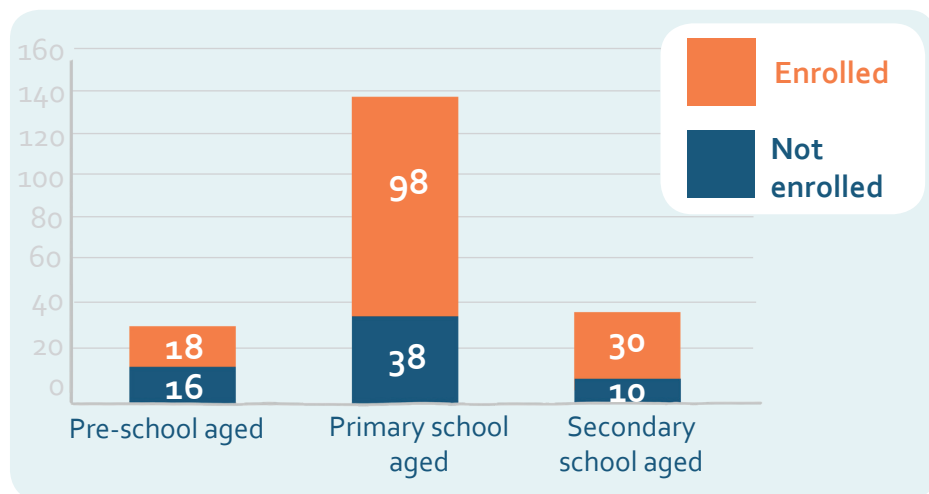
Figure 4, receiving assistance



Compared to our 2022 survey, where 59% of respondents had a non-enrolled child of compulsory school age, our survey one year later shows that there has been a significant improvement, with only 31 out of 109 respondents having children of mandatory school age not enrolled, which is 28 per cent of them. This represents 30.5% of all school-age children (64). Still, when we look at them by type of institution, we find a high proportion of pre-school age children who are not enrolled (47%), compared

to 28% of primary school children and 25% of secondary school children. This might be because kindergarten is not compulsory in Ukraine.

Figure 5, distribution of children not enrolled



Respondents highlighted the following reasons for not enrolling their children: they attend online Ukrainian schooling as 54% of them would return home after the war, the fact that children are educated in the shelters, the considerable amount of moving causing the lack of stability, which would mean many school changes, the administrative difficulties, the inability to travel to school in two cases and the lack of free meals. Of the 31 parents with children who are not enrolled, 19 reported that they had not received any help to do so despite the significant administrative burden of enrolling. In addition, 22% of enrolled children do not receive free meals, 19% do not receive free textbooks, and only 15% receive psychological care. Our data shows that access to services for Romani refugee families from Ukraine is often hindered. This is often due to inadequate assistance, information and administrative knowledge. In addition, four of our respondents reported experiences of discrimination: they were turned away during enrolment and only found a host school afterwards with help. In addition, the lack of stable housing and adequate financial conditions also contribute to limiting access to education.

Experiences within schools

Of the Romani refugee children in our sample, 96% attend state institutions, a sector with significant levels of educational segregation²⁵. Yet, unlike their experience in Ukraine, where they were mainly from segregated institutions, our respondents reported that 74% of their children who arrived here were educated amongst local non-Roma children, with only 7% of those placed in segregated schools. The remaining children study in shelters with fellow Romani children from refugee backgrounds. However, a high rate of parents in public education, 37.4%, reported that their child had to repeat a year due to a lack of basic skills, differences between the Ukrainian and Hungarian curricula and a lot of moving around. Many parents agreed in the absence of a better alternative, such as individual tutoring. However, some parents pointed out that their child, who was too old for their classmates, experienced feelings of failure and bullying.

46% of parents surveyed had some kind of difficulty related to education, but almost all had received some help. They mainly mentioned learning difficulties, prejudice and financial disadvantages. Bullying was also mentioned by 15% of respondents, but our respondents also reported many positive experiences. These include that for many of them, this is the first time they have access to education in their native language or swimming lessons and that the children enjoy being in school amongst other children. When asked about their needs, 60% of parents reported some material needs: toiletries, school supplies, clothing, gym equipment, food, or even diapers. In addition, 22% wanted some form of additional educational service: a group or private tutoring. In addition, some mentioned travel support or arrangements for travel, a child psychologist, or activities with fellow refugee children.

The parents' questionnaire shows they have varying experiences within the school system. Some reported that teachers are prejudiced and pick on their children because of their financial situation and ethnicity, but many positive experiences were also mentioned. One can conclude from this that it is difficult for institutions to deal with heterogeneous

25 (Fejes and Szűcs 2018)

classes without a central educational inclusion programme, adequate resources, and teachers²⁶. This also entails Romani refugee children, who are often traumatised and marginalised. In a shortage of resources, year repetition is often the way of dealing with educational disadvantages. Another is the provision of educational services by NGOs, which 45% of our respondents received through tutoring or other activities.



26 (Neumann, 12th December 2022)



Conclusion

In our research on Romani refugee parents' experiences of school, several problems emerged. Drawing heavily on our 2022 report²⁷, we found that the housing, material and labour market situation of Romani refugees is far from ideal, and these problems often spill over into the educational sector. However, as Neumann²⁸ and Feischmidt²⁹ have highlighted, it is essential to note that this is taking place in the context of a shrinking welfare state, refugee care system and civil society. Based on our questionnaire research, we identified the following problem areas.

First and foremost, Romani refugee families who arrive in Hungary must have access to the services and support they are entitled to, currently limited by administrative barriers and discrimination. To this end, it would be vital for them to access extra administrative help, as those who have received such assistance have found it easier to access these. In addition, our respondents raised discrimination within the school, inter-ethnic bullying and the use of grade repetition to deal with educational disadvantages as problems. This would require a response from the education system: trauma-informed education, sensitisation, inclusion and differentiated education that can deal with Romani refugee children who are marginalised in many ways. These are very much in line with the needs of the parents interviewed, who highlighted financial support to provide secure housing and adequate equipment for their children and

27 (Eredics, 2022)

28 (Neumann, 12th December 2022)

29 (Feischmidt 13th September 2023)

additional educational services to address their children's educational disadvantages.

However, it is important to stress that this report also has limitations. On the one hand, we have not been able to include the perspectives of civil society and actors in the education system in the analysis³⁰, so only the experiences of Romani refugee parents are the subject of this report. Furthermore, due to the questionnaire methodology, we could not understand and convey the exact circumstances and narratives of the parents in more detail. In any case, the situation of Romani refugee children highlights that although the crisis of education has infiltrated even the more prestigious levels of the education system, the issues of inclusive education for Romani children are still unresolved and fundamental problems. So long that in the context of underresourced education, children from disadvantaged backgrounds can only be seen as a problem, educational equity is compromised.

30 However, the policy recommendations of Romaversitas based on many stakeholders can be found here:

https://romaversitas.hu/Roma_menekultek_helyzete_Magyarorszagon_final.pdf?t=1684398694



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