

**IDEE Project  
Final Case Study**

**RWCT Romania**

**October 2010**

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## 0. Introduction

The commitment of RWCT Romania within the IDEE project centres around the engagement of around 150 Roma high school students, some of their teachers and their parents (at least 30), in several urban and rural locations in the central and north-western regions of the country, in debates regarding the different forms of disenfranchisement this group of youth experiences in the Romanian public education system<sup>1</sup> and in dialogue about the ways in which these forms of disenfranchisement might be ended through joint action at the local – and higher – level(s) of school governance. The present case study is structured into two more substantial parts. The first part is formed by section 1. General Background, offering a background discussion regarding Roma students' trajectories in the Romanian public school system, outlining mostly *forms of disenfranchisement* experienced by students. It is here that Roma high school students' status, the particular target group of the project, in public education are also highlighted. The second part, comprising sections 2-5., dwells on the particularities of the project as it was implemented in April-June 2010. As the Romanian project entailed nine different CPs in nine different locations, this case study is, in fact, a comparative summary of (most of) these nine different events. It highlights similarities and outlines differences in order to improve our understanding of the ways in which CPs as a method of participatory democracy have an impact at local and, possibly, higher levels of school governance in issues of direct concern to our target group and other stakeholders in their immediate communities (fellow students, their parents, their mentors and teachers, their school principals etc.).

## 1. General Background

This section focuses on providing a general picture of Roma students in the Romanian public education system, in particular Roma students in compulsory and high school<sup>2</sup> education across the country.

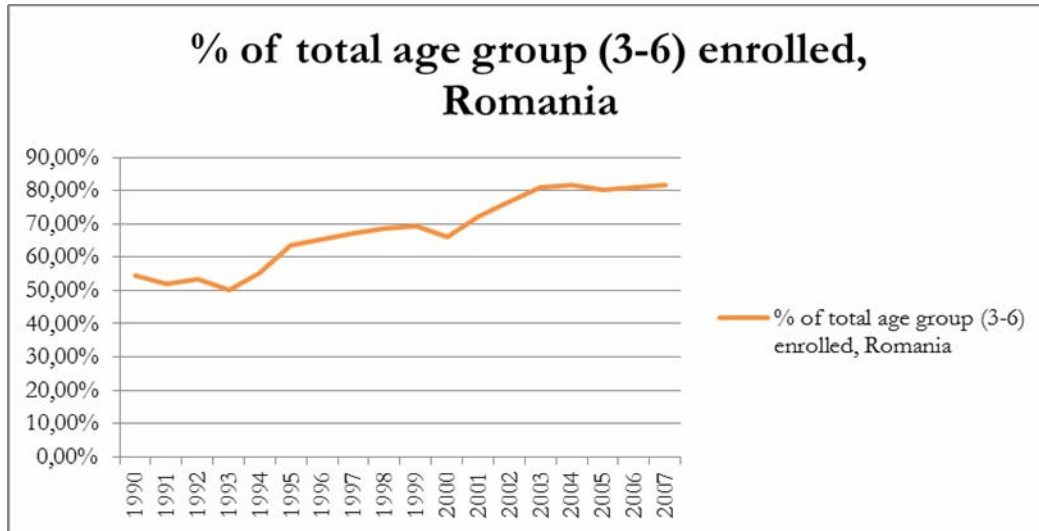
### 1.1. Roma children & youth in the Romanian public education system

A recurring issue in Roma children's and youth's school experiences is a chronic difficulty in accessing public education services and, once in, perpetual underachievement. Difficult access manifests itself in various forms. One is Roma students *absenteeism* at all levels of education, in particular pre-school, primarily school, lower and upper secondary education and all forms of post-secondary training. The national Statistical Institute reported the following pre-school enrolment rates, aggregated for Romania:

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<sup>1</sup> Please see Annex 1. for a description of the Romanian public education system.

<sup>2</sup> It should be noted that the Romanian state's intervention at (upper) secondary education level with a focus on Roma students has been significantly shier than at primary or lower secondary level, i.e. compulsory education. As a result, much of the data reviewed in this section refers to compulsory school years.



**Chart 1.** Kindergarten enrolment levels in Romania between 1990 and 2007.  
 Source: CNS/INS (1990, 1994, 1996, 1999, 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007, 2008).

In spite of an aggregate above 80% enrolment rate in pre-school education among children in Romania in 2007, OSI (2007: 346) reports findings of previous research indicating that only around 20% of Roma children of pre-school age attend kindergarten. By comparison, enrolment rates of Roma students at other levels of study remain precarious, too. UNDP sources cited by the OSI report (2007: 349) indicate that while 76% of Roma between ages 7-15 (up to lower secondary school level) are in school as compared to 94% among non-Roma living in close proximity to Roma, only 17% of Roma between ages 16-19 (upper secondary education) remain in formal education as compared to 69% of non-Roma. Sources cited in an Euroactiv article indicate that in 2008 “436,000 children aged between three and 17 were not enrolled in any kind of education institution, be that kindergarten, school, secondary or professional school. The economic crisis, which hit Romania hard, appears to have worsened the situation.” (Euractiv, 2010).

Open Society Foundation Romania estimates for 2007 comparing school attainment levels among non-Roma and Roma highlight opposite trends regarding the relationship between age and level of school attainment: while among non-Roma increase in age is accompanied by an increase in aggregate levels of graduation from increasingly higher levels of education, among Roma increasing age is associated with decreasing aggregate levels of graduation from increasingly higher levels of training (OSI, 2007: 357). (This trend stops at figures for post-secondary education, percentages of graduates declining in both groups.) To be more exact, the following table offers an insight into these opposite trends:

Education level	Non-Roma	Roma
No education at all	0.8%	20.9%
Primary education	2%	23.1%
Lower secondary education (5 <sup>th</sup> to 8 <sup>th</sup> grade)	18.7%	38.2%
Upper secondary: professional & vocational training (9 <sup>th</sup> -10 <sup>th</sup> grade)	25.3%	12.6%
Upper secondary (up to 12 <sup>th</sup> grade / baccalaureate)	42.4%	4.3%
Higher education	10.8%	0.8%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 1.** Educational attainment among Non-Roma and Roma under 40.  
 Source: OSF Romania data cited in the OSI report (2007: 357).

In other words, among Roma it is significantly more likely to be concentrated among those with no education or little education and as one ages, to be more likely *not to* advance in education, whereas among non-Roma the tendency is the attainment of higher educational levels as one ages.

*Lack of enrolment* in school is another occurrence mainly affecting Roma children in Romania. 1998 data supplied by ICCV<sup>3</sup> suggests that around 18% of Roma children between 7 and 16 (mandatory education according to Romanian legislation) never registered for education (OSI, 2007: 353). However, as the above table suggests, in 2007 this figure rose slightly to above 20% (OSI, 2007: 357). The rate of non-enrolment among Roma students in *rural* settings was found to be four times higher in majority Roma schools as compared to schools where Roma students fell under 50%: 14.1% as compared to 3.6% non-enrolment (OSI, 2007: 353). In other words, residential and, thus, related school segregation (see also below) is associated with a substantial knock-on effect as concerns non-enrolment among (rural) Roma.

Another manifestation of difficulty of access is the *mismatch between expected age of enrolment* in a particular year of study *and Roma students' ages* when attending these classes. On average, Roma children are 6-7 months older in every year of elementary school than their peers (see Table 6., OSI report, 2007: 350). By the end of 4<sup>th</sup> grade, according to data cited in the OSI report, Roma children are close to two and a half years older than their peers. Whether due to class repetition, the late start of elementary school or temporary drop-out, Roma children tend to be too old among their non-Roma peers. In non-majority Roma classes especially this factor has been seen as a cause for school drop-out, particularly in the 5<sup>th</sup> grade<sup>4</sup> (see OSI report, 2007: 350).

Underachievement<sup>5</sup>, the second major trend among Roma children in Romanian (public) education has been documented in many ways, as well. One expression of poor achievement is *illiteracy* in spite of attending formal education, as the 2009 impact study of successive PHARE projects of the Romanian government entitled Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups also suggests. Focus groups with Roma parents in (rural) schools revealed that children can be illiterate even after 8 years of formal education (Ulrich et al., 2009: 105). Unfortunately, the level of illiteracy among Roma and particularly among Roma children and youth is hard to assess given lack of data (or poor approximations, e.g. 2002 census data, but which grossly understated the size of the Roma population).

Another facet of poor school achievement is *class repetition*, i.e. students' inability to progress from one year of study to the next<sup>6</sup>. Of the 45 schools included in the sample of the impact study carried out by Ulrich et al. (2009: 113), 31 registered cases where students did not have sufficient grades to receive an average at the end of each semester over the past 3 academic years. 86% of all such cases were Roma students, moreover Roma students in schools with a Roma student population exceeding 40% (Ulrich et al., 2009: 114). In 9 schools, only Roma students repeated the year because of insufficient grades to receive an average. The authors indicate – as in the case

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<sup>3</sup> Institutul de Cercetare a Calitatii Vietii, i.e. the Research Institute for Quality of Life.

<sup>4</sup> For understanding why 5th grade in particular, see Annex 1.

<sup>5</sup> Underachievement should not be understood in this text as Roma children's inability or disinterest to perform in school, but rather as an outcome of factors to do with Roma children's education trajectories, their families and immediate environments, but especially with the school system, the quality of teaching and teachers, the school environment etc. In other words, underachievement should be seen as a complex outcome rather than solely as Roma children's low interest in education, lack of study or poor intellectual endowment.

<sup>6</sup> Repetition occurs in two cases: when students cannot achieve a grade of minimum 5 (on a scale from 1 to 10) in at least 3 different subjects at the end of the academic year or don't have sufficient grades in at least 3 subjects and cannot get an average calculated at the end of each semester and they don't pass the exam before the beginning of the new academic year in the problem subjects.

of insufficient grades for finishing the school year – that the greater the proportion of Roma students in the school population, the greater the likelihood of repetition. In other words, the concentration of Roma students in institutions of education has – again – a knock-on effect on poor school achievement among Roma students.

Other differences among Roma and non-Roma student populations persist, as well. Even when Roma children are taught and do study, their grades and overall averages tend to be (sometimes substantially) lower than those of their peers. The share of 8<sup>th</sup> grade Roma students receiving grades above 7 (on a scale from 1 to 10, 5 is the lowest pass) in Romania was 43% for Roma students as compared to 61% for all students. In Maths, this was 27% for Roma students, but 53% for all students. Moreover, as Ulrich et al. (2009: 65) also indicate, the greater the share of Roma students in the school, the lower students' academic performances (i.e. the incidence of high grades steadily falls as the share of Roma students rises). Again, majority Roma school status has a knock-on and negative effect on student academic outcomes.

*Poor exam results or lack of registration for exams*, compulsory after 8<sup>th</sup> grade, has been another indicator of poor academic record. Ulrich et al. (2009: 114-115) found in their sample of 45 schools with a total of 17,600 students, of which 6,500 Roma, that in 6 schools no Roma student took the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade exams or received passing grades at the semester papers with unique subjects, administered in 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade as an alternative to the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade exams. Again, the greater the number of Roma students in the overall student body of the school, the less likely that students (Roma and non-Roma) will take and especially pass these forms of mandatory examination. Case studies reveal a dismal situation as regards exam taking at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade among Roma students. In one school with 30% Roma students and 60-70% success rates in national examinations, not one Roma student received a pass at these exams. In another rural school in a different part of the country, with success rates at end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade exams ranging between 57-75% between 2006 and 2008, not a single Roma student passed the examinations (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 101-102).<sup>7</sup>

A third facet of Roma children's and youth's disenfranchisement observable in Romanian public education is their heightened rate of *school drop-out* or *drop-out*, a direct result of – primarily – poor school achievement. The mechanisms of school drop-out are complex, but drop-out is strongly associated with unpreparedness for school (as a result of no or little pre-school attendance) and subsequent poor school achievement, combined with other factors such as migration, marriage or paid work at a later age (OSI, 2007: 355).

According to statistical data provided by the National Statistical Institute cited by the OSI report (2007: 352), drop-out rates aggregated for the entire country rose from 0.6% of all students in compulsory education (8 grades) in the 2000/2001 academic year to 1.7% in the 2004/2005 academic year. However, Romanian Ministry of Education estimations reveal that as much as 20% of Roma children and youth (up to 8<sup>th</sup> grade) might be dropping out by comparison (OSI, 2007: 351). Moreover, the report also highlights that the number of rural schools with above 5% drop-out rates was 1.9% nationally, but rural schools with Roma pupils and an drop-out rate above 5% represented 4.6% of the total of these types of schools (OSI, 2007: 353). Euractiv sources indicate that school drop-out rates increase after children reach 13 and peak for youth aged around 16 and 17. Moreover, the article also suggests that only around 25% of youth from rural areas stay in secondary school (9<sup>th</sup> grade onwards) (see Euractiv, 2010).

Ulrich et al. (2009: 62-63) have found that in the schools that benefitted from PHARE projects

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<sup>7</sup> It should be noted that the absolute number of Roma pupils in 8th grade in many of these schools is low because – as indicated above – the chances for Roma students to stay in school declines as they mature in age.

focusing on the access of disadvantaged groups to education, school drop out among elementary school students of Roma ethnicity was observable in all types of schools irrespective of the share of Roma students in the student body. An apparent lack of trends in the numbers of Roma students abandoning school is reported in a different section of the impact study: data reported by the management of the 45 schools included in a qualitative component focusing on segregation indicates that of the total number of drop-outs registered as such, a bit over 80% of cases was represented by Roma children and youth. Given that the share of Roma students in these schools averaged around 37% in 2008, it is clear that Roma students are more at risk of drop-out than their non-Roma peers.

*Segregation* of multiple kinds also affects many Roma children's and youths' school experiences. The OSI report (2007: 358-359) identified four different routes to segregation within classes, within schools (by class or by class *and* building) and within local communities. One was the refusal of Roma children's enrolment in particular schools and their guidance towards a majority or all-Roma school in close proximity to the Roma part of the village or town. The other one was the channelling of Roma students and non-Roma students in different classes in the same year of study. In some cases this was justified by management as a way to avoid non-Roma parents' complaints (OSI, 2007: 358), in other cases by academic achievement criteria, leading nevertheless to ethnically segregated classes in the same year of study (Ulrich et al., 2009: 107). A third source of segregation in education was reported a "well-intentioned" segregation of Roma children, particularly in traditional Roma communities, where Roma parents expressed their wish to have their children among other traditional Roma pupils (OSI, 2007: 358). Indeed, focus groups with Roma parents in some of the 45 schools included in the qualitative component of the PHARE projects' impact study also indicated many Roma parents' preferences for a school geographically closer to the Roma neighbourhood (see for example Ulrich et al., 2009: 106; 108). A fourth source of segregation is that when incoming 5<sup>th</sup> graders from other schools are not mixed with the welcoming school's own 5<sup>th</sup> graders or not changing the composition of already existing classes, be they the school's own or incoming (see OSI, 2007: 358-359).

The qualitative component of the impact study focusing on segregation specifically highlighted that in 80% of the schools included in the analysed sample some form of segregation occurs, but most frequently (45% of cases of segregation, in 20 schools) this is represented by *residential segregation*: Roma children end up in majority Roma schools in close proximity to their home. In another 29% of cases of segregation analysed (including 13 schools), *segregation is within mixed schools*: Roma children are unequally distributed in classes in the same year of study, meaning that they form a minority in the better performing classes and a majority in the poorer performing classes (Ulrich et al., 2009: 111).

## **1.2. Main prejudices against Roma students in the public education system**

Roma students at all levels, including high school, face a variety of *negative expectations* as regards academic performance and *prejudices*. In addition, non-Roma teachers, students and parents *manifest dislike* and react with avoidance and marginalising attitudes towards issues affecting Roma children arising from extreme poverty.

Teachers and school principals in majority Roma schools – or "ghetto Roma schools" – have been often found to exhibit lower academic attainment expectations than in non-Roma or majority non-Roma schools. The OSI reports that in many "Roma ghetto schools" or majority Roma schools, basic literacy was the top expectation from students. Often, Roma students in such schools are not expected and not advised to aspire to continue studies or, if they are, they are directed towards professional or vocational training (10 grades) (OSI, 2007: 358-359; Ulrich et al., 2009: 45). Focus groups in the qualitative component of the PHARE projects' impact study

also revealed that in many majority Roma schools teachers' performances are precarious, interest to invest in alternative teaching methods to cater to children with no prior educational experiences (given lack of pre-school education) low and where within school segregation exists, Roma classes are regarded as inferior and taught accordingly (see case studies in Ulrich et al., 2009: 101-108). The underlying assumption is that the vicious circle of extreme poverty (including poor housing conditions, lack of sanitation and other utilities), parents' lack of education, lack of jobs and, thus, the lack of any opportunity for material improvement over time, the high number of children all contribute to the impossibility of educating children from socially and educationally marginalised groups, especially if Roma (Ulrich et al., 2009: 45).

In many schools, Roma parents' participation in school life is seen as exceptionally low by teachers, although the authors note that a negative appreciation of Roma parents' involvement occurs when parental involvement in general is seen as low. Where parental involvement is seen in a more optimistic light, parents of marginalised student groups are also seen as more involved (Ulrich et al., 2009: 44; 85). Focus groups with parents in this impact study revealed, however, that initiatives to involve parents in school life (especially in majority Roma schools) often lack or have nothing to do with the children's progress: teacher-parent meetings might never happen or teachers might be invited to the inauguration of the refurbished school, but not to other child-centred events in the school (see case studies in Ulrich et al., 2009: 101-108).

Roma children, however, are appreciated for their alleged "traditional talents", in particular for singing and dancing, relied upon during school festivities. Teachers regard these as worthy for compensation when Roma students' academic results are poorer than those of non-Roma students (Ulrich et al., 2009: 43; 107).

### **1.3. Dimension of discrimination / marginalization against Roma youth**

As indicated earlier, Roma students – and particularly Roma students in secondary education – represent a group of children and youth whose experiences with formal education are more often than not marked by difficulties in accessing and making use in a sustained fashion of public education services. In addition, the *quality* of services available to Roma students of all grades is often low or in many cases lower than that enjoyed by the non-Roma population living in close proximity to Roma communities. Forms of discrimination or marginalisation in formal education occur at both micro – classroom and school – level, as well as macro (systemic) level.

At *classroom level*, Roma students have been reported to encounter a series of differentiated behaviour especially from staff. In mixed Roma and non-Roma classes, Roma students – who often lack the preparatory years of kindergarten or the assistance of literate parents for whatever reason – tend to be marginalised in the teaching process. Roma parents in rural schools in the qualitative component of the PHARE impact study revealed in several instances that their children are taught less and paid less attention to than their non-Roma peers. Others indicated that sometimes it happens that lessons are not taught, but children are expected to learn on their own, through homework. Given parents' inability to assist their children in homework, the latter are left behind. The result is often that Roma students become discouraged, ashamed, shy and respond with self-imposed marginalisation. If they also fail to get passing grades, class repetition speeds up their drop-out (see Ulrich et al, 2009: 103; 105). Other forms of classroom marginalisation are children's seating at the back of the class. Academically poorer students, who may often be Roma, have been reported to be sitting alone, in the back, making their participation in the learning process less likely. In some majority Roma and residentially segregated schools, parents have also reported the lack of textbooks or lack of homework for children, indicating that the quality of teaching was less than mediocre (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 101-108).

Another form of *classroom level* discrimination was overt racism, in particular the use of derogatory terms for Roma children or humiliating language used with Roma children (see Ulrich et al, 2009: 104), although this was more common among classmates than among teachers. (It should be noted that the component of the impact study focusing on teachers' and school managers' opinions and perspectives did reveal a high frequency of political correctness when talking of students' diversity (Ulrich et al, 2009: 39-41).) At the same time, some Roma parents – reflecting on the reasons for their children's marginalisation in the teaching process – indicated that in their view ethnicity was the reason why teachers avoided their children in class.

As indicated earlier, probably one of the most problematic forms of discriminatory behaviour on the part of the teaching staff in schools with a high number of Roma students, especially, is the adjustment of the curriculum to students' academic unpreparedness. Teachers teaching in mixed schools, but with class-based segregation or in majority Roma schools, especially, tend to lower their expectations to such an extent that hardly any learning occurs in the classroom. Low expectations may also mean sporadic teaching activity, the lack of textbooks, the lack of a schedule and, subsequently, students who remain illiterate in spite of attending school (for narratives in this regard, see especially Ulrich et al., 2009: 104-106). Roma classes in mixed schools with class-based segregation tend to be unpopular ones and teachers may regard the allocation of such classes as expressions of school principals' grudge against those particular teachers (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 107). In short, the presence of Roma students in mixed classrooms tends to be related to double standards in teaching in the detriment of the academically poorer, often Roma students. In addition, in majority Roma schools, teaching may be simply a euphemism for a complete lack of pedagogical activity. It is rare that teachers adjust their teaching methods to cater to the often less prepared Roma students and work with the same curriculum as in majority non-Roma classes.

*School level* forms of discrimination and/or marginalisation is represented primarily by segregation – class-based segregation and residential segregation, which in turn leads to majority Roma schools – and aspects related to the quality and stability of *qualified* staff. As indicated earlier, Roma parents may be denied the entry of their children into majority non-Roma schools (the school management is often identified as doing this) and may be redirected to residentially segregated, majority Roma schools (see OSI report, 2007). Segregation (within the school) in itself is a form of discrimination. The fact that it is often not recognised (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 125-126) may be seen as another form of discrimination. Given that Roma students often come from extremely impoverished and illiterate family backgrounds<sup>8</sup>, their concentration and separation from non-Roma students is associated with the multiple ills described up to this point. To sum up, the quality of education is incomparably lower than in majority non-Roma schools as is their entire school experience. Secondly, especially rural and majority Roma schools encounter high rates of staff turnover and it is in such schools that unqualified teaching staff is mostly found (see OSI, 2007: 359-360; Ulrich et al., 2009: 116).

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<sup>8</sup> The Cabinet's estimates for poverty rates for 2003, disaggregated by ethnicity, revealed that while 9.3% of ethnic Romanians lived in extreme poverty, 52.2% of ethnic Roma did so. While 24.4% of Romanians were catalogued as poor, 75.1% of Roma were categorised as such (see Jigou et al.).

Share of Roma students in the school's student body	Percentage of fluctuating staff of all staff <sup>9</sup>	Number of schools	
		Urban	Rural
3.00-15 %	18.47	4	3
15.1-30%	15.24	2	6
30.1-50%	20.01	3	9
50.1-75%	15.20	0	8
75.1-100%	20.60	6	4

**Table 2.** Staff turnover in 45 schools included in the PHARE projects' impact study (Ulrich et al., 2009)  
Source: Ulrich et al., 2009: 116.

The lack of teachers' stability and skill (and often dedication!) exacerbates the poor start that Roma students tend to have in elementary school, then – if they make it – in their transition to the lower secondary years (5<sup>th</sup> grade in particular).

Other forms of discrimination may be seen as *community level* discrimination. One manifestation of this form of differentiated treatment is the poor physical state of many rural, residentially segregated (and majority Roma) schools. Although – as the case studies in Ulrich et al. (2009: 101-108) also indicate – this is not *always* the case, more frequently than not residentially segregated schools are administratively subordinated to a more centrally located, larger and newer (or renovated) school, catering to those who live more centrally (usually the non-Roma). Schools catering to a mainly Roma student body have been reported to be overcrowded, lacking proper sanitation, lighting, heat in the cold months and generally unhealthy, unattractive (see also OSI, 2007: 359-360). However, even when such schools have been renovated as part of some governmental programme, e.g. the successive PHARE projects focusing on access to education for disadvantaged groups, including Roma children and youths, the quality of teaching often remains low.

Another community level problem, directly leading to Roma students' marginalisation in education, is the so-called *white flight* in response to attempts at de-segregation within mixed schools (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 118). In schools where initially separate classes of non-Roma and Roma students were mixed to achieve a more balanced distribution of non-Roma and Roma children *in each class*, school principals reported that non-Roma children changed schools (where this was an option).

#### 1.4. National laws against discrimination

The main legal instrument aimed to tackle Roma children's and youths' academic careers, among others *through positive action*, is probably the *Strategy for the Improvement of the Condition of the Roma* (referred to in this text as the *Roma Strategy*), adopted in 2001. The general measures subsumed under the education section of the Roma Strategy include the following, among other measures (in the order of the deadlines proposed in the text of the Strategy, adopted by Parliament):

- the adoption of measures in order to ensure *a daily meal to all Roma children in primary and secondary education* (August 2001)
- measures necessary to promote teachers of Roma ethnicity to become part of schools' managerial teams (school managers – “directors” – and school inspectors) (November 2001)

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<sup>9</sup> Staff fluctuation is not an uncommon phenomenon among teachers in Romania, especially in the rural school where infrastructure is poor.

- presentation of a plan to stimulate participation in education and reduction in drop-out among Roma children (January 2002)
- presentation of measures ensuring Roma youths' access to places in institutions of post-secondary education (subsidised special places for Roma) (February 2002)
- presentation by Ministry of Education of a plan for supplementary preparation for Roma youth for admission into higher education (March 2002)
- presentation, in collaboration with Roma NGOs and communities, of *training programmes in intercultural education* for school mediators<sup>10</sup> and Roma teaching staff<sup>11</sup> (March 2002)
- the introduction of the topic of *prevention and fight against discrimination* in the core curriculum and a plan to organise, by county school inspectorates, courses for school recuperation (re-enrolment into school) for Roma (May 2002)

A series of ongoing general measures were also enlisted:

- an action plan for the recruitment of Roma in public administration, issued in collaboration by the Ministry of Education, Ministry of the Interior, Ministry of Defence and the Romanian Secret Service
- fortnightly meetings organised by schools for Roma parents, teachers and Roma community leaders
- a yearly report focusing on Roma children's academic situation (see Ministry of Public Information, 2001: 20-21).

Upon a closer look, several of these general measures are *written plans*, i.e. concepts for public policy in need of drafting as bills, then implementation. Apart from the free school meals, restricted to Roma children and positive action for the recruitment of Roma teachers as managers and decision-makers in public education, there is little in these measures that prompt to action. The central question, i.e. how the different plans and proposals for action receive legally binding status and get *implemented*, has remained marginal.

Addressing *school segregation* (along ethnic lines) is a relatively new concern of Romanian public institutions in the realm of education. The first document was Notification 29323 of April 20th 2004 of the Ministry of Education, defining segregation in education<sup>12</sup> and banning within school segregation (majority Roma groups or classes). In 2007, the Ministry of Education issued Order no. 1540 of July 19th 2007 defining with greater clarity and banning the segregation of Roma children in education and approving a methodology for the prevention and elimination of school segregation throughout the country (Kovacs, 2008: 215-216; Ulrich et al., 2009:93-94). However, as Ulrich et al. (2009: 120-122) point out, segregation has been eliminated only partially in the 45 schools included in the qualitative study of the PHARE projects' impact study. More saddening is the fact that residentially segregated schools, which tend to have a 100% Roma study body, have no plan or vision to attempt residential de-segregation in the medium or long run (Ulrich et al., 2009: 121). The monitoring of de-segregation attempts has also been reported as unsystematic and mostly quantitative (Ulrich et al., 2009: 121), even if the level of de-segregation is now a mandatory aspect of school inspectorates' annual reports (Kovacs, 2008: 216).

These pieces of legally binding documents (as those banning segregation have a status inferior to laws) work alongside the general legal framework regarding anti-discrimination. Romania adopted

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<sup>10</sup> For a detailed account of what the institution of the school mediator is and what school mediators are mandated to do, see the OSI report (2007: 383-386).

<sup>11</sup> But not, interestingly, for non-Roma staff teaching in mixed or majority Roma schools!

<sup>12</sup> Segregation is defined according to this legally binding document as “the physical separation of children of Roma ethnicity into groups / classes / buildings / schools / other facilities so that the percentage of Roma children of the entire student body in the school / classroom / group is disproportional with the percentage of school aged Roma children in the respective administrative-territorial unit.” (see Kovacs, 2008: 216).

its first legal provision banning a variety of forms and grounds for discrimination in 2000, transformed into bill in 2002, with a series of subsequent modifications (for a complete list of normative acts, see [antidiscriminare.ro](http://www.antidiscriminare.ro)). Ordinance no. 137/2000<sup>13</sup> stipulates that the principle of equality among citizens and the exclusion of privileges and discrimination<sup>14</sup> are guaranteed in the exercise of the right to education and professional development, among others (art. 1 para. 2). Moreover, the text of this normative act stipulates fines for a variety of discriminatory actions that hinder members of particular groups, including Roma defined either as an ethnic community or as a socially disadvantaged group, to *access* any form and level of public or private education (see Section III., art. 15). The purpose of the later Decision no. 1258/2004 was to approve the *National Action Plan for Combating Discrimination*, a collection of rather general priorities and actions as regards the implementation of the anti-discrimination legislation, but which failed to specify who, over what period of time, with what frequency, with what funds and with whose oversight had to carry out the enlisted actions. What appears most lacking is the fact that although the anti-discrimination legislation does stipulate punitive action against those who discriminate against certain persons, say, when these attempt to access institutions of education, neither the legislation on antidiscrimination, nor this National Action Plan define whose the burden of proof is in the process of investigation. Nor does the existing legal framework state how covert discrimination might be sanctioned, e.g. when Roma children are refused entry into particular schools due to their ethnicity, but without clearly stated justifications.

### **1.5. Actions aimed at fighting the marginalisation of Roma in education initiated by public and private bodies**

The Report by the OSI focusing on the access to education of Roma in Romania provides a complete list of programmes and projects aimed at enhancing Roma children's and youth's participation in education, particularly in secondary education (see OSI, 2007: 368-377). Of these, probably the most encompassing has been the succession of PHARE-sponsored governmental programmes entitled *Improving Access to Education for Disadvantaged Groups, with a Special Focus on Roma* in 2001, 2003 and 2005 (see OSI, 2007: 363-364; 371-375). Initiated in 2000 jointly by the Romanian Ministry of Education and the National Agency for Roma, the programme focused on access to education and Roma persons' identity papers (e.g. birth certificates, identity cards etc.). It was aimed in particular at the youngest age group of Roma (and other disadvantaged) students-to-be, i.e. kindergarten and primary school aged Roma children (and children with other forms of disadvantage). The goals were, among others, the following:

- the improvement of learning conditions for disadvantaged children in pre-school and the stimulation of their enrolment in kindergarten
- the stimulation of graduation from compulsory education and the improvement of disadvantaged children's success rates
- the stimulation of youths' enrolment into "Second Chance" programmes to complete elementary and lower secondary school at a higher age than average (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 16).

The priorities of the programme focused on the improvement of Roma (and other disadvantaged) children's learning experiences and the prolonging of time spent in school. It is for this reason that inclusive education and desegregation became priorities in the

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<sup>13</sup> Voted as bill in 2002 through Law no. 48/2002. For a complete list of normative acts modifying this piece of legislation, see <http://www.antidiscriminare.ro/gen/legislatie/>, bottom section.

<sup>14</sup> Discrimination, according to this piece of legislation, is defined as "any differentiation, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, social category, convictions, sex or sexual orientation, membership of a disadvantaged group or any other criterion which has as its goal or effect the restriction or withdrawal of the recognition, use or exercising [...] of fundamental human rights" (art. 2 para. 1).

implementation of this succession of PHARE-sponsored programmes. In addition, it was as part of these programmes that *parents'* participation in school life and older children's re-enrolment in school were attempted (see Ulrich et al., 2009: 16).

In addition to this encompassing succession of programmes targeting mainly Roma children and youth, the more enduring programmes in the educational sector, initiated and implemented by public institutions, are the following:

- The so-called “bun and milk” (Cornul si laptele) programme, a free meal programme for pre-school and elementary school students, launched in the 2002/2003 academic year. The OSI report estimated that between 2002 and 2004 one million children benefited from the programme and 1.5 million starting the 2005/2006 academic year<sup>15</sup> (see OSI, 2007: 368). This programme is universal rather than means-tested, but the bun (or biscuits) and milk (yoghurt) are a far cry from a daily (hot?) meal envisaged by the Roma Strategy (referred to as ‘symbolic’ in the REF report (2007: 48)).
- Reserved places in universities (1993), later in institutions of upper secondary education (after 2000) for Roma students (OSI, 2007: 368-369), a positive action measure for Roma ethnics specifically (see also REF, 2007: 47).

In addition to these measures, there have been a plethora of small term projects focusing on Roma students of all ages, levels and places of residence, implemented by Roma NGOs and a variety of other not-for-profit organisations, as well as institutions of local and central government (for more detail see OSI, 2007: 368-376).

One ongoing programme targeting Roma students in upper secondary education, the particular target group of this project, is the Roma Education Fund-sponsored (REF) *Scholarships for Roma Students in High Schools*<sup>16</sup>, implemented by a consortium of NGOs and public institutions<sup>17</sup> between 2007 and 2011. Roma students enrolled in upper secondary school receive monthly (or quarterly) deposits in cash if they stay enrolled and receive passing grades in all subjects and mentoring by teaching staff or other professionals (REF, 2007: 52). It should be noted that this is probably the *only* programme addressed to Roma students in upper secondary education on the backdrop of Ministry-guaranteed ‘special’ places for Roma students in upper secondary school (see REF, 2007: 48). The objective of the scholarship programme – similar to the scholarship fund for Roma students in post-secondary education, financed by REF – has been to promote a merit-based system of educational support for Roma students going into upper secondary training, especially high schools (which, in Romania, are the preparatory phase for post-secondary education rather than vocational training) and to assist Roma students to advance in education and potentially form an emerging Roma elite within Romanian society. With the launching of the programme, a series of compromises were made, however. In order to fill all scholarship places and to compensate, in subsequent years, for drop-outs, Roma students in *vocational* (upper secondary) schools were also admitted and the merit-based system was partially maintained only. In its third year now, the scholarship is a mix of need- and merit-based cash transfers for a wide array of Roma students in upper secondary schools, vocational or not, throughout the country,

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<sup>15</sup> According to official statistical data, in the 2005/2006 academic year there were 867,000 children between ages 3-7 (kindergarten age) and another 926,000 between ages 7 and 11, i.e. elementary school age. It would seem, therefore, that the programme was unable to reach roughly 300,000 children by the 2005/2006 academic year, 3 years after its inception (see CNS/INS 2002, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007).

<sup>16</sup> Although it should be noted that Roma students enrolled in professional trainings, i.e. 2 years of upper secondary training, are also recipients of the scholarship, not just students enrolled in high school, i.e. 4 years of upper secondary education.

<sup>17</sup> This includes the Resource Centre for Roma Communities ([www.romacenter.ro](http://www.romacenter.ro)), the Romanian Ministry of Education and one other coordinating ministerial body, RWCT Romania ([www.alsdgc.ro](http://www.alsdgc.ro)), Ruhama Foundation ([www.ruhama.ro](http://www.ruhama.ro)) and Pakiv Romania Association ([http://pakiv.ro/?page\\_id=38](http://pakiv.ro/?page_id=38)).

coupled with mentoring. Due to the relaxation of eligibility criteria, the scholarship can be said to directly encourage *vocational training*, i.e. a route towards semi-skilled, mostly manual jobs rather than white-collar positions after graduation.

## 2. Project Background

### 2.1. Project initiation & its aims

RWCT Romania has had a wealth of experience working with Roma students of all ages throughout rural and urban Romania, their teachers and their parents. These groups have been ‘clients’ of the organisation for the past eight years. However, the different projects of RWCT Romania that focused on the development of curricula, learning techniques for students and classroom teaching strategies for instructors have focused less on exercises which might *directly* enhance participatory democratic skills, such as those necessitated by a citizens’ panel. Secondly, few projects so far have been able to create a venue where the direction of the exchange between the organisation and the beneficiaries of the project is from the latter towards the former: usually beneficiaries are recipients of information, skills and support from the organisation rather than vice versa. Yet this is crucial for the mission of the organisation, geared towards fostering democratic values through critical thinking skills, cooperative interaction, autonomy and creativity in education. Thirdly, few if any of the organisations’ previous projects have had the chance to make the voices of these groups heard in such a fashion in important decision-making fora as the European institutions. It is for all these reasons that this project seemed very attractive for RWCT Romania.

### 2.2. Aims of project activities

The aims of the project in the Romanian context are multiple. Firstly, the project wishes to create *local* venues for the different stakeholders – Roma high school students, their parents, their mentors, their non-Roma peers and teachers – to be able to express and debate their opinions and experiences regarding issues related to formal education of concern to them. This aim should be seen as instrumental for others in the project. In particular, the project wishes to create a context in which people, positioned very differently at local level as regards the formal education system, can come together and debate, practice the exercise of voicing opinions, crafting arguments and listening to and considering counterarguments. Thirdly, the project also wishes to gather these opinions, arguments and experiences in order to make these heard elsewhere, in higher fora, in the hopes that they will play a role in national and European-level decision-making in the realm of education policy. Fourthly – and as indicated in the above paragraph – the project aims to give the organisation and its key target groups an opportunity to explore new methodologies and techniques for developing key skills for effective participation in community life.

### 2.3. Our partners

The main partners in the project have been mentors of Roma high school students, the latter beneficiaries of the REF-sponsored merit-based scholarship, implemented by the RCRC (Resource Centre for Roma Communities). Mentors were given the opportunity through an open invitation sent out via email to take charge of organising CPs in their schools or their localities, on a paid basis. In addition, Roma high school and university students – beneficiaries of the scholarship – have also been partners, albeit in a less formal capacity. In a series of open discussions in the early phases of the project they shared personal experiences and instances of discrimination, a resource that proved to be a valuable starting point for picking the topics of CPs locally as well as offering case studies, vignettes and statements later used in initiating working group discussions in the different CPs. In essence, the Roma high school and university students were the starting point for all debates concerning issues in public education affecting this target group, their families, teachers, peers and local communities.

## 2.4. Timeframe of the project

The open discussions with Roma students and the training for mentors who wished to take on the organisation of CPs in their local communities were in early April 2010. Citizens' panels all took place in May or very early June so that the reporting process be finalised by early July 2010.

## 2.5. The main target group of the project

The disenfranchised group in the context of (formal) education identified in the project are Roma high school students and their parents. The forms of disenfranchisement this heterogeneous group is exposed to have been reviewed in section 1. General Background of this text. What makes this group particularly interesting in the context of the project is that they represent a population who, although quite opinionated and communicative about a variety of issues that concern them inside and outside of school, are very rarely consulted regarding issues that directly concern and affect them in the context of the classroom. Although (hoped and) cherished by REF and local non-profit organisations as the emerging Romanian Roma elite, they are rarely seen as a valuable resource for policy-making and have never been involved in decision-making locally, at county, national or European level.

## 2.6. The status quo concerning Roma high school students in the public education system

The status quo in which Roma students more widely and Roma high school students in particular find themselves in the context of formal education is partially described by the topics of the CPs in the different locations: discriminatory behaviour, especially along ethnic lines in educational settings; school drop-out; the problems arising from openly assuming one's ethnic identity as Roma in majority non-Roma educational settings; the (public) use of Romani, written or spoken. To be more exact, the status quo in all of the places where CPs took place may be described as formal educational settings where *Roma students face open and covert forms of prejudice* in the choice of schools and focus of schooling, the teaching process, grading, relationships with classmates and in their immediate local communities. This may be often associated with greater chances of *school drop-out* or poor school attendance, therefore poorer school results. Alternatively, where students do not consider the option of abandoning school, the *hiding of one's ethnic identity* is often attempted, sometimes preventively in a new class setting, e.g. in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. The issue of the *public use of Romani, spoken or written*, may be seen as another dimension of treating Roma ethnic identity in school situations as a taboo since language is often the strongest marker of ethnicity in this part of Europe (in addition to skin colour for Roma ethnics, in particular). It is to these issues that CPs' participants tried to find 'solutions', i.e. tried to identify ways in which to change the local status quos along these dimensions.

The wider context of this status quo is a particularly rigid, centralised and non-democratic decision-making process locally, in schools, and a detached, disorganised and sometimes insufficiently informed bureaucracy centrally. Therefore another dimension of the status quo regarding the target group is that they are completely absent from any form and level of decision-making that affects their learning, their formal educational environment and the content of their learning.

## 2.7. Factors shaping this status quo

In most CPs, irrespective of the topic for discussion, discrimination along ethnic lines, particularly against Roma students and adults, was brought up as the broader context in which all other problem phenomena are embedded in. Classroom prejudice, school drop-out, the hiding of

one's ethnic identity, the loss of spoken and written Romani etc. should all be seen as interlinked, sometimes causally. For instance prejudice against Roma pervasive in daily life translates into overt discriminatory behaviour in the classroom to which Roma students may be subjected to. In some cases, this may lead to poor school results and a heightened chance of school drop-out. In other cases, this may result in the denial of one's ethnicity. The disparagement of Roma in general implicitly propagates ignorance of and disregard for Roma culture and language, a factor that may be responsible for the loss of spoken and written Romani among many Roma ethnics in turn.

As participants in many CPs indicated, *ignorance of* and *lack of communication* about Roma, their daily lives and lived culture, their cultural heritage and language also fuel prejudices on the side of the majority population and self-imposed isolation and segregation on the side of many Roma youth and communities. Coupled with the undesirable images and consequences of poverty, often times lack of skills and education among Roma, the disenfranchisement of Roma students in public education should be seen as one expression of the process of marginalisation and often self-marginalisation that entire Roma communities face in their local communities, as well as nationally.

## **2.8. Actors crucial for forging solutions**

As many CPs' participants also conclude – many of whom are Roma students and Roma members of school staff! –, the solutions seem to have to arise from the Roma themselves. In cases where discrimination in schools was identified as a problem, it is Roma youth who should attend a series of out-of-school activities to develop artistic skills and socialise (into “better” youth?), it is Roma successful people who should come and talk to *Roma* students and it is success stories of Roma individuals that should be on air and written media, even if prejudice often comes from non-Roma individuals, e.g. teachers, students, employers etc. Where school drop-out was debated as a pervasive problem among Roma high school students, solutions also centred on students at risk of drop-out, their self-esteem, personal strength etc. Where the issue of ethnic identity in the school context and in public was debated, again Roma students were seen to be able to bring change: by being brave and admitting being Roma, by improving their self-esteem through various methods (e.g. counselling) etc. In short, change is seen to have to originate in Roma youths' attitudes, personal strength and initiative.

However, little was said by comparison regarding what the non-Roma population or non-Roma individuals should do to change the status quo affecting Roma (high school students). Yet it is our opinion that prejudice is the problem of those prejudiced and *they* – rather than those they are prejudiced against – should address their own ignorance, inappropriate attitude and discriminatory practices inside and outside the classroom. School drop-out should be prevented from the day Roma children arrive to their first class, prepared or unprepared for school, and Roma students' poor self-esteem or difficulties in admitting their ‘true’ ethnicity should be recognised and addressed in student-centred ways. In short, great results may be achieved by dedicated teachers and class masters<sup>18</sup> at micro level – as many participants in the CPs also indicate. In addition, more attention and greater dedication must be invested higher up the ladder into taking action against classroom and school level discrimination, school drop-out or the public assumption of ethnic identity. For instance nominally banning discriminatory behaviour in the classroom or bending grading and attendance rules to minimise school drop-out – which only

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<sup>18</sup> Class masters or lass counsellors refer in this text to ‘diriginte’, a teacher responsible for a given class for a period of usually 4 years (e.g. 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> grade, 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade etc.). This teacher does not only teach a specific subject to his/her class, but also has a weekly class for administrative and educational activities, organises parent-teacher meetings and performs a variety of other administrative duties for students in his/her class.

alters statistics, but does not mitigate the phenomenon – are *not* welcome actions to address these issues.

### 3. Detailed Description of the Project

#### 3.0. General overview

Citizens' panels (CPs) were held in nine different locations (Agnita, Baia Mare, Band, Cluj Napoca, Cugir, Lechinta, Satu Mare, Tirgu Mures, Zalau) in eight counties in Romania's central and north-western regions (Alba, Bistrita-Nasaud, Cluj, Maramures, Mures, Salaj, Satu Mare, Sibiu), with the participation of a total of 53 (+ or – 16, the Zalau group of students) Roma high school and university students, 19 (+ or – 16)<sup>19</sup> non-Roma peers, 17 (but most likely 19) Roma and non-Roma parent and 57 instructors and other personnel, Roma and non Roma, from schools that Roma high school students attend<sup>20</sup>. In these nine locations, a total of 17 (two in each location except Tirgu Mures) working groups were formed. In addition, a number of local 'experts', 29 in total, concerned with education (especially school principals and psychologists, in Band the mayor) and other interested members of local communities attended these CPs (e.g. employees of local councils, Roma local political figures, members of NGOs, priests etc.). It should be noted that this outcome was the result of the number of Roma high school students' mentors who signed up to organise CPs as part of the IDEE project. Teams of two people had to be available to organise CPs in venues that were preferable the community schools and in total 17 persons responded to the invitation. Of these, 14 attended the training session in April 2010 (see Activities in section 3.1. below) and, after the withdrawal of two trained facilitators, we were able to organize nine CPs. In all CPs, there was at least one person who had been trained as a facilitator, and a member of the project team who participated in the CP either as a note-taker, or as a co-facilitator of discussions, or as an observer.

The themes of the CPs reflected local concerns of schools and local communities where Roma (high school) students were also present, although the topics for debate often reflected school-related experiences of a broader group of people, not just Roma high school students, even if to a significantly lesser extent. The topics were picked by the organiser-facilitators for each event. The points of departure of many of the CPs represented vignettes or debatable statements which members of working groups had to respond to, make recommendations etc. Many of these vignettes and statements concerning education arose from the open roundtable discussion with Roma high school and university students<sup>21</sup> from three Transylvanian counties, organised in early April 2010 in Cluj before the commencement of the training for mentors who'd organise CPs in their local communities in May and early June 2010. These stories formed the basis for articulating the topics that might be of concern to communities and (high) schools with Roma students in the places where CPs took place. These topics were refined and narrowed down by the organisers of CPs in a fashion that made them relevant for each local situation and, hence, appropriate for use in CPs.

#### 3.1. Main activities

The project has entailed the following so far:

1. **The administrative preparation of the project** (January-March 2010): it included identifying the partners who are crucial for the realisation of CPs in several locations; setting up the different activities for the project, in particular 1. the open roundtable discussion with Roma high school and university students for insights into education-

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<sup>19</sup> This ambiguity originates in the fact that the ethnicity of the 19 students in the Zalau CP was not mentioned in the reports.

<sup>20</sup> For a breakdown by CP, see Annex 2.

<sup>21</sup> These students were all recipients of a scholarship for Roma high school and university students, run by the RCRC since 2007.

- related issues and concerns of interest to them; 2. the training for would-be CP organiser-facilitators.
2. **The roundtable discussion with Roma high school and university students** (early April 2010), the aim of which was to identify issues and concerns that this group of disenfranchised youth faces in educational settings recurrently. The outcomes of this roundtable were a series of vignettes, case studies, statements and other prompts that proved highly valuable for the organiser-facilitators' training following the round table as well as in the initiation of discussions in working groups in CPs later on.
  3. **The training for CP organiser-facilitators** (early April 2010), the aim of which was to identify willing persons to take on the tasks associated with the making of a CP and to train them so that they can deliver good quality CPs. The two-day event led to the possibility of ten different CPs, of which only none happened later on.
  4. **The CPs** (May-June 2010) have been the main focus of the project, organised in nine locations on four broad issues, with particular local focus on each location. The structure of CPs followed generic pattern. The opening part, ranging between one and two hours, was dedicated to 'experts', who usually gave a talk. In one location, Satu Mare, there was a panel discussion as introduction, where experts sat with the other participants and engaged in dialogue with other experts and participants on the issue of school drop-out (the topic of the CP) rather than giving presentations. This section was followed by a break and then group work, of which there were mostly two (with the exception of Tirgu Mures, where there were insufficient persons for two working groups). After the debates in the working groups and another break, participants came together in a final plenary, led by the facilitators where 'conclusions' to the discussions were formulated. Conclusions should be understood as a heterogeneous group of things said while concluding the event, varying in the extent to which they achieved the goals set for the event (mostly not) (see section 4. Detailed Description of the Outcomes of CPs, below).
  5. Following the CPs, case studies were authored by the facilitators and project assistants, providing an account of each CP. This final case study is based on these.
  6. The national conference, lasting one day in November 2010, is the final event of the project happening in Romania. Its purpose is twofold. Firstly, it aims to be a venue for further discussion of potential educational policy *solutions* for the disenfranchised group in focus in this project, i.e. Roma high school students, among Roma students, their mentors and more senior educational public servants, e.g. school principals, inspectors and representatives of the Romanian Ministry of Education, Research and Innovation.

### 3.2. The target groups

As indicated in section 2.5. (above), the main target group of this project is Roma high school students and their parents, an educationally disenfranchised group in general, but with great potential to voice concerns, barriers faced in the educational process and – as the outcomes of the CPs indicate – to formulate clear solutions to these. What characterises them, particularly in majority Romanian (or Hungarian) schools, is either very good academic results, coupled with personal charisma and popularity among peers, or – more frequently than not – a perpetual struggle to stay in school for academic or a variety of other reasons, to receive as much professional attention and recognition from teachers as non-Roma peers, a constant negotiation of challenges arising from being an ethnic Roma, the balancing of Roma peer pressure and expectations with academic responsibilities, often not supported at home etc. In short, these youth are either brilliant students from poor socio-economic backgrounds, but striving high and achieving great results, or are openly discriminated Roma students whose educational careers are

burdened by a complex set of structural factors, experienced individually, with often isolating effects.

In addition, a secondary target group are the Roma scholarship beneficiaries' mentors, mostly teachers themselves and who were identified as partners in the project to take on the roles of organisers of and facilitators in the CPs locally (see also section 2.3. above) What they share is exposure to Roma high school students, to the different forms of disenfranchisement the latter face in the classroom and the complex burdens that many of these youth cope with in their daily lives, in and outside school. As mentors in the scholarship programme for Roma high school students, they have undergone a series of training sessions organised by the RCRC and some of them have also completed various trainings focusing on teaching skills and techniques. Although paid for the tasks associated with being Roma students' mentors, these individuals are among those who are more active in their profession, either because they are dedicated or because they are ambitious in their careers. Irrespective of their motives, the mentors who participate in the project have had a history of exposure to a series of alternative techniques for teaching and they are used to doing project-based, school-related activities with and for students. It should be noted that this is characteristic of a minority of teaching staff in Romanian high schools, whatever the academic focus of the schools.

### **3.3. Rationales of the activities**

Activities 2., 3. and 4. are discussed in this section. As described in section 3.1. above, activity 2. was an open roundtable discussion focusing on concerns and forms of disenfranchisement most of concern to the main target group, i.e. Roma high school students. The method of an open discussion, resembling a less structured and numerous focus group – over 20 high school and university students were present –, had the aim of revealing issues and problems in public education of concern to Roma students. The purpose was to hear from students themselves what they saw as crucial and most distressing issues in the public educational process that concerned them or, more broadly, students of their age in general. This activity was seen as justified by the ethos of the CPs to begin with, i.e. an attempt to create spaces where disenfranchised groups can articulate and debate instances and experiences of their disenfranchisement and, ideally, word and propose solutions to these. At the same time, the activity was seen as necessary to generate topics for CPs that were genuine in a sense that they were truly issues in the different locations where CPs were to be organised.

Activity 3, the training of CP organisers and facilitators, was a two-day event which was attended by 14 trainee facilitators, although 17 persons responded to the invitation to become organisers and facilitators of CPs in the IDEE project. The training had multiple components, including the simulation of a CP working group and a session focusing on finding appropriate CP topics and issues for working group discussions. The event was highly participatory and its primary aim was to equip the participating mentors to facilitate CPs in their schools or local communities.

Activity 4, the CPs, was the highlight of the project. These varied not only in terms of topics, but also as regards the techniques used to spark debate and discussion. Most CPs – with the exception of one – commenced with a series of 'expert' presentations concerning the topic of the CP. Experts – psychologists, members of NGOs, the mayor of the village, the school principal etc. – were asked to give a talk in which to present their professional or their institution's official perspective on the issue at hand, e.g. access to public education and discrimination in schools, segregation in schools, school drop-out, self-esteem and the importance of openly assuming one's ethnic identity, the use of Romani etc. Working groups relied on many different techniques to initiate discussion: some used vignettes and participants were asked to provide solutions to the predicament presented in the vignette; other working groups' debates were structured by a series

of questions; a third method was the structuring of the debate using a statement with which people had to agree or disagree and provide arguments. The role of the facilitators was to structure the debates and make sure that participants responded to the tasks proposed at the beginning of the working groups' discussions, achieved to greater or lesser extents. Concluding remarks in the plenary sessions rarely entailed debates and further discussion, unfortunately, and conclusions were generally less exact and concrete than conclusions formulated in working groups. This generic structure was welcomed by all organising teams of facilitators for its straight-forwardness and also because of time and personnel constraints: with two facilitators and one note-taker (not present in all cases), this fitted all contexts.

### **3.4. The CPs in the wider context of the project**

As indicated in the above section, the CPs were the central component of the IDEE project in Romania. All other activities, in particular the roundtable discussion with Roma high school and university students and the facilitators' training, were geared towards the organisation of successful CPs. One of the main reasons why we organized the CPs was to test the methodology and observe whether the participants had the skills to effectively participate in the discussions. On 5-6 November 2010, RWCT Romania is organizing a national conference, with 75 participants including youth, teachers, NGO representatives, policy-makers, representatives of the regional and national educational authorities. A large CP is planned for this event both as a demonstration of the method of discussion, and as a means of raising controversial issues related to education for disenfranchised groups for discussion at the national level.

## 4. Detailed Description of the *Outcome* of the Citizens' Panels

### 4.0. Contextualisation of the nine CPs

Although it has already been mentioned that in the Romanian project nine different CPs took place in nine different locations, justifications for breadth – several different CPs – rather than depth – for instance the organisation of multiple CPs with the same participants in the same location on a variety of topics or a single topic – have not yet been offered. The reasons why we chose to have multiple one-off CPs in different locations, with different sets of participants, are the following. Firstly, we wished to engage a substantial amount of individuals in the project:

- 150 Roma high school students (aged 17-19);
- 30 mentors of the high school students;
- 30 parents;
- 20 school principals;
- 6 school inspectors;
- Regional and national level policy-makers in *12 different counties*.

Logistically it made sense to organise the CPs locally rather than transport people to one location. At the same time, however, we also wished to make CPs genuine spaces for debate and interaction and, for such a numerous group of participants, this was only possible if several small scale events took place instead of few (or just one) large CP. Thirdly, one of the aims of the project was to *train* mentors to facilitate citizens' panel-like events, which means we also wished to ensure transfer of knowledge – in particular about this new technique for participation and consultation in decision-making with disenfranchised groups, the citizens' panel – towards these individuals. It made sense to maximise the outcome of this transfer and so we encouraged through the invitation the participation of as many mentors' teams as possible, with the prospects of organising as many CPs locally as possible.

### 4.1. General information

In all cases, the inviting persons were also the ones who facilitated the plenary sessions and one of the working groups, therefore mentoring teaching staff and a school principal (Zalau). As indicated, in all locations there were at least two persons organising the event, who may have acted as inviting persons, persons responsible for logistics, working group facilitation and reporting. In many locations (e.g. Band, Cugir, Lechinta, Satu Mare, Tirgu Mures) there were three persons organising and carrying out the CPs. The third person, a RWCT representative, assisted with logistics, but also intervened in working group facilitation when the facilitator was not fulfilling his duty constructively (e.g. Lechinta).

CPs varied in terms of the number of participants they hosted. The most numerous CP was held in Zalau, with 37 people attending, while the CP in Tirgu Mures was the smallest, counting 14 persons, not including facilitators and the RWCT representative (see Annex 2 for a breakdown by location). In addition, CPs also varied in terms of the composition of participants. Band had the largest share of Roma students, both in absolute terms as well as in terms of percentage: 14 out of 25 participants were Roma students. In Tirgu Mures, too, Roma students accounted for the largest group of participants: 8 out of 14 participants were Roma high school and university students. In Agnita, where students were also by far the largest group of participants – 9 out of 21 participants –, however, only 2 were Roma. Many non-Roma students invited to the event were asked to come to represent as diverse a set of arguments and attitudes as possible. In total, between 53 and 69 Roma students and between 19 and 35 non-Roma students participated in the CPs across the board (recall that numbers are inexact because we don't know the ethnicities of the 16 participating students in Zalau). The total of 88 students, of whom at the most 69 Roma,

unfortunately does not satisfy our initial aim of reaching 150 Roma students. A recurrent feature of all CPs is the unfortunate lack of participation of parents – be they Roma or non-Roma. Although the project wished to involve around 30 parents, 17 or 19 participated in total, one of whom in a double capacity. Mentors were, however, very well represented: of the 57 Roma and non-Roma staff members who participated in the CPs, many were mentors (excluding facilitators). The facilitators too were mentors of Roma high school students, familiar with their concerns, experiences of disenfranchisement and other difficulties they encountered outside school.

The agendas of CPs were generally observed, although the introductory sessions – where experts took the floor – tended to be longer than expected. As a result, the CPs became prolonged and in some cases participants explicitly complained about the length of the event and of fatigue at the end.

#### **4.2. Preparation for the CPs**

The invitation of participants was in most cases through a mix of means. In Agnita, Lechinta and Satu Mare all participants were invited face-to-face, even if doubled by telephone calls as reminders. The organisers used a variety of methods to invite participants: students tended to be talked to in the school and invited face-to-face; their parents were either telephoned or invited to take part indirectly, through their children (in Band). If not face-to-face, experts were invited through two means, usually contacted via email or telephone, then also invited formally in a letter. In Cluj, the organiser sent out letters to all participants, adults and students alike and later telephoned as a reminder. In very few cases (around 10 in total) were these invitations declined, possibly indicating people's lack of interest in the event, the inviting person's authority and/or persuasiveness or reflecting biases in selection. We have little information about the relationships that organising persons have with the participants, but the fact that in most cases successful or charismatic students attended the CPs illustrate the fact that organisers might have chosen people they have good relationships with.

Participation for the entire duration of the event was not universally ensured. In Band, for instance, several students and parents had to leave after the working group sessions due to lack of transportation services later in the day. In Agnita, Baia Mare, Band, Cugir and Lechinta, experts only stayed during the plenary session or only for their own presentations. In spite of this, CP reports all indicate that the expert presentations were welcomed by participants, indicated by the level of attention and, as in the case of Lechinta, engagement with the expert speakers. There were mainly four means through which participants' presence was to be ensured for the entire duration of the CPs. Firstly, organisers ensured the participation of experts who were appreciated or well regarded locally: in Band, the pro-Roma Romanian mayor dominated the expert presentations; in Lechinta, representatives of the Roma party attended the plenary session and engaged in discussions with student participants; members of the Local Council were invited to speak in Agnita. Secondly, the RWCT team provided refreshments and snacks for all CPs, available to participants throughout the entire duration of the event. Coupled with breaks, these were very welcomed in particular where the CPs took place after school hours. A third means was the timing of the event: in some cases, the CPs partially overlapped with classes, as in the case of Agnita, Baia Mare, Band, Lechinta, Tirgu Mures and Satu Mures. In Cluj and Cugir, the CPs were held in the afternoon, after classes, continuing until the evening. Another means was the handing out of certificates for participation. In Cluj, for instance, participants indicated they wished to receive such certificates when initially contacted by the organising person. The fact that some people invited themselves to the event (as in Lechinta) indicates that the nature of the event might have been attractive in itself for people to stay to the end.

With greater or lesser success, organisers aimed to maximise differences among participants and ensure as much variation in opinion, background and personal experience as possible. However, the outcomes were not always reflective of this effort. The gender balance tended to be skewed towards girls and women, most visibly in Baia Mare, where only 3 of the 15 individuals present (including facilitators) were male<sup>22</sup>. The primary criteria for the selection of participants were the following:

\* a mix of stakeholders: this mix universally included Roma high school students, in some cases (Agnita, Cluj, Cugir, Satu Mare) non-Roma students (a majority in Cugir), Roma parents, a variety of school staff (usually teachers teaching ethnically mixed classes, but also Romani teachers, the Roma school mediator, psychologists, often times the school principals as experts etc.), other public sector employees (e.g. proximity policy in Cluj, Cugir and Satu Mare, Local Council representatives as in Agnita and Baia Mare, for instance), members of Churches (Zalau) and members of NGOs or political parties (in Band, Tirgu Mures, Zalau and Lechinta, respectively).

\* opposing perspectives: in Agnita, where the topic was equal access to education and prejudices against Roma, organisers invited openly prejudiced non-Roma students; in Cluj, where the CP focused on education and self-esteem of Roma students, organisers invited an equal share of Roma and non-Roma students from different schools. However, in many cases the debates indicated a high rate of agreement among participants, indicating an underlying consensus in opinions. This was most visible in Agnita, where Roma students and parents were substantially outnumbered by non-Roma participants (3 to 19), and in Lechinta, where many adults in the CP were clearly promoting the value of Romani and where, as a result, the debate was between Roma students and their non-Roma, Romani teachers or advocates of Romani.

\* ethnicity: in some cases, ethnicity was a selection criterion, in particular in the constitution of student sub-groups (Cluj, Cugir).

\* age: although there is limited information about this, the age range of participants was substantial in many cases (in Baia Mare and Band, for instance, this variation spanned from 15 to 46 and from 14 to 53, respectively).

\* level of education: there was a clear and recurrent distinction among the *adults* participating in the CPs. Adults with higher education were exclusively school staff and experts, while parents tended to lack or have little education. Given that most CPs took place in schools, where teachers were “at home”, while parents not, the educational differences coupled with mismatches in authority and familiarity with the location led to marked differences in readiness to participate.

In all cases, participants were told about the *topic* of the CPs and that it would be a participatory event in advance. They were told little about the presence and identity of experts in advance, about the rules of the CPs, about the particular techniques used for debating etc. (exception is Tirgu Mures, where participants received the agenda and structure of the CP in advance). In Agnita and Baia Mare, for instance, students received instructions before the CP regarding their tasks. Experts received more information in some cases, e.g. the agenda of the day, directions regarding what they were expected to talk about and how (in many cases, they were asked to present their *official* stand on the topic of the CP), than other participants. In no location was there a post-CP meeting with participants to discuss the exercise, participants’ opinions of the event and potential steps that might be taken to improve the situation debated.

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<sup>22</sup> It should be noted that apart from Lechinta, all inviting persons were women. In Lechinta, where one of the inviting persons was male, men outnumbered women. With the exception of Band, Lechinta and Satu Mare, where one of the facilitators was male, all facilitators were female. The gender of organisers might be responsible for the tweaked gender ratio among participants, therefore.

### 4.3. The participants

As highlighted in an earlier section, very few invitees declined participation or never showed up: in Lechinta poorly performing Roma students never came; in Cluj a team of Roma participants from nearby town Gherla didn't make it and the absence of the police officer invited was also noticed; in Agnita one invitee refused participation upon receiving the invitation. Considering that over 190 individuals came to the nine CPs, the ten or so persons who did not eventually attend is remarkably little.

As indicated in section 4.2. above, participants in all nine locations differed along criteria such as sex, age, ethnicity, level of education, but the groups of participants distinguishable along these lines were *internally quite homogeneous*. For instance in Cugir, *all* high school students were 12<sup>th</sup> graders, likely from the same class. In Band, Baia Mare and Tirgu Mures all student participants were Roma and with one exception came from impoverished and disintegrated households. All parents attending were Roma and with little education. In Lechinta, virtually all expert discussants were very much in support of the use of written and spoken Romani by Roma, although most of them not of Roma ethnicity, and therefore tended to represent a robust point of view against Roma participants. Furthermore, many Roma students who came to CPs, irrespective of location, were not only beneficiaries of scholarships, but were often well-liked, driven students with outstanding academic results even in majority Romanian classes (especially in Cluj, Lechinta and Tirgu Mures). In the three locations where school drop-out was discussed, former students who had dropped out were not invited and/or did not come. In other words, many of the Roma students participating were atypical for Roma students in upper secondary education in Romania. In spite of these aspects, debates did emerge, opposing views were formulated. At the same time, in many cases underlying consensuses were noticeable.

The dynamic among participants very much depended on the division into working groups. Mixed student-adults working groups were in: Band (where students and adults were equal in numbers in working groups), Lechinta, Tirgu Mures (there was only one working group, but students outnumbered adult speakers) and Satu Mare (students were outnumbered by experts). Working groups where students and adults had separate discussions were in Agnita, Baia Mare, Cluj, Cugir and Zalau. When comparing the dynamics in the working group discussions, it is difficult to conclude that these two different modes of organising the working groups enhanced the participation of, say, students in different ways. Who dominated discussions and who were most dominant in working group debates depended very much on who the facilitators were and who encouraged most to speak and the exposure of participants to such exercises. Thus, in Zalau, the working group led by the school principal was the least relaxed, spontaneous, discussion-prone: her authority might have been a substantial barrier for participants to feel at ease to discuss the topics. In Band the two working groups managed to create a space where *everyone* expressed their opinions. In one working group, three older Roma students and some of the teachers were most vocal. Least talkative was a younger Roma students and the Roma parents attending. In Lechinta, the discussion seems to have been dominated by Roma students and their parents in one working group, who tended to all agree regarding the topic discussed, the advantages and disadvantages of using Romani. It should be noted, however, that participants were brief in their remarks, students more likely to give socially desirable answers, while parents more opinionated where they were not dominated by better educated school staff. In the other working group in Lechinta, the facilitator's dominance was tempered by the RWCT representative, after which the Romani language teacher seemed to receive quite a lot of speaking time partially because she was offering information valued by Roma parents and students. In Tirgu Mures, no group of participants dominated the debate although students grew more talkative as the event progressed. Some students were shy talkers and had to be repeatedly invited to express their perspectives, as in Band. In Satu Mare, the power relations between adults

(teachers and the psychologist) and students were visible in the dynamic of the debate: students tended to be more reluctant to share experiences and debate in the presence of highly vocal staff members even after the facilitator imposed restrictions on the speaking time of adults. One way of coping with this is ensuring the numeric superiority of students and the framing of questions they find easier to respond to (e.g. less conceptual questions and greater focus on experiences, anecdotes etc.).

In the CPs where students and adults were separated, the dynamics of discussions also depended on the skills of the facilitators and the speaking skills of the participants. In Agnita, the student group was dominated by two non-Roma students who were civically active and clearly had practice and were comfortable in group debate settings. At the same time, however, one of the Roma students (one might recall that they were in minority in Agnita!) was crucial to keep the debate going and linking opinions, perspectives, points of view. By comparison, the adults' group was less imbalanced in terms of voices heard, but – as in her CPs where adults were separated from students – they were also less disciplined in their discussions. In Cluj, the adults' group was most lively in the arguments and perspectives shared. There were clear-cut lines of disagreement, although the atmosphere was positive. The students' working group was dominated by two Roma students and was less polemical than that of the adults. What is interesting in the Baia Mare CP is that working group debates were simulated in the plenary session after the commencement of the event. When the participants split up into working groups the result was that even younger Roma students – elsewhere less talkative – were proactive members of their working group, participating fully. This might be the by-product of the small size of working groups here also. In Cugir, working groups were particularly conflict-free, probably because those invited shared many views regarding the CP's topic, discrimination as a result of anti-Roma sentiments. Experts here were more passive than, say, in Lechinta – where facilitators were more challenging and aiming to spark debate and discussion – and as a result working groups converged in ideas, opinions and experiences rather than disagreed. The Zalau CP's students' working group provides a good example of how a strong facilitator, talkative, challenging and in control, can cover many aspects of a multifaceted topic. However, the trade off is that participants feel led and lose control over the direction of the discussion and its aims. The recommendations of this working group are illustrative: many are programmatic, too general (in a sense that it is unclear *who* should do the things listed as solutions, *when* and with what expectations of success) and don't really reflect students' personal experiences or original ideas of solutions. This working group resembled more of a learning environment for participants rather than a debate where participants had the chance to make their voices and opinions heard and discuss them.

In all cases, facilitators were mindful of the agenda and especially timing, although several expert presentations – even if followed with great interest – were longer than initially planned. As mentioned in the above paragraph, facilitators differed greatly in the roles they assumed: some were influential in conducting the debate as they wished (Zalau student working group), others were domineering and were replaced (Lechinta), elsewhere facilitators opted not to intervene in the heat of the debate (in Baia Mare, Band, Tirgu Mures) and let it develop by the participants etc. The *quality* of facilitation also differed if the indicators is the extent to which working groups managed to achieve results at the end: in Band, for instance, the two working groups clearly achieved very different outcomes, as did the ones in Lechinta and Zalau: some had clearly defined solutions, the others some rough, unstructured ideas about how to go about the issues at hand.

Experts were very welcome everywhere and their presentations were followed with a lot of interest. Participants found out new information and in some cases had the chance to engage local public figures in debates (Lechinta, for instance), subject to critique and counter with

personal experience. Interestingly, however, in the working group discussions expert presentations were not cited or referred back to. Experts themselves gave in to the flow of discussions in the working groups they participated in and the working group issues often lent themselves to slightly different arguments and concerns among the participants than the core ideas of the expert talks.

#### 4.4. Results of the CPs

Discussion procedures in working groups differed slightly across the board (for details regarding introductory plenary sessions, see section 3.4. above). Facilitators opted for different ways of *starting* the debates and then *keeping the discussion going*. Techniques to initiate debate may be categorised as follows. Firstly, presenting brief stories of, say, school drop-out and then posing a variety of concrete and/or abstract questions for participants to answer (e.g. what would you do? What would you recommend the person in the story to do?) was one technique (e.g. in Band, Satu Mare and Tirgu Mures). Another means, but which seemed to prevent the formation of genuine, spontaneous discussion, was the organisation of the discussion along a series of more or less conceptual questions (e.g. How would you define discrimination? What is the school's role in encouraging taking ownership of one's ethnic identity?) as it happened in one of the working groups in Zalau, both in Cugir and Cluj (although the facilitators' lack of discipline in these latter two locations resulted in more organic debates, led by the participants, not the facilitators as in the case of Zalau). A third technique to spark debate was statements to agree or disagree with and a series of conceptual questions arising from words in the statement (e.g. equal access to education, discrimination in education, segregation etc.) as in Agnita, Baia Mare and Lechinta.

Controversy and ideas challenging emerging consensus was the only technique used by one of the facilitators to keep the discussion going (e.g. the case of the student working group in Zalau) if one does not consider the very structured sharing of ideas to exact questions in the other working group in Zalau, mostly void of spontaneous debate. Working group discussions usually improved as participants became more used to the group and more ideas, experiences and thoughts were shared. As in the case of the Agnita students' working group, some participants usually took on the role of pushing the discussion further, sometimes summarising arguments when exploiting silences, taking on the role of the facilitator (e.g. a Roma student in Lechinta and another in Agnita).

What was universally encouraged was the so-called narrative circle structure of the discussion: in *all* working groups participants were encouraged to share personal experience, irrespective of the task they had (e.g. making recommendations to the fictional character in the vignette, decide to be for or against a statement etc.). As participants were each invited to talk, one after the other, at the commencement of the working groups, these really looked like circles (as participants often set in circles to all see one another) in which people shared opinion, recommendation and – increasingly more – personal experience.

The four great topics that the nine different CPs focused on are the following:

- *discrimination against Roma* and equal access to education (Agnita and Cugir)
- *school drop-out* (and school segregation) (Baia Mare, Band and Satu Mare)
- *self-esteem* and *taking ownership of ethnic identity* (Cluj, Tirgu Mures and Zalau)
- pros and cons of *using Romani* (Lechinta) (for an exact list, see Annex 3. below).

The spin of the topic differed, however, from location to location also depending on the technique used to start debates in the working groups (see section 4.2. above). Please note that

due to lack of space, only two sets of CPs are discussed at length here: discrimination against Roma and school drop-out<sup>23</sup>.

*Topic: Discrimination against Roma*

The issue of discrimination against Roma in Agnita was introduced in the plenary session by an exercise: participants had to write down instances of ethnically fuelled discrimination in school settings. Following this, experts gave their talks. In Cugir, the topic was introduced by a vignette illustrating discriminatory behaviour among classmates, followed by expert talks. In the Agnita working groups (students and adults separate), participants in both working groups had two issues to debate: 1. equal access to education and Roma students' difficulty in integrating into majority Romanian classes (using students' narratives as starting points); 2. discrimination and the role of the school in preventing discriminatory behaviour (using statements to agree or disagree with as initiators of debate). In Cugir, four main questions directed the discussions in the working groups (students' and adults'): Does discrimination result from education? Who encourages discrimination and why? What part does school play in the phenomenon? Can the situation be changed and how?

Working group discussions, however, partly departed from the questions set to be answered. Among the adults in Agnita, factors hindering equal access to education were brought into discussion (lack of pre-school education among Roma children; classmates' bullying Roma children for their ethnicity etc.), as well as opinions of the *reality* (incidence) of ethnically motivated discrimination (some Roma denied it, others argued it is unknown how frequently it occurred etc.). School staff also pointed out the detrimental effect of forcing 9<sup>th</sup> grade Roma students to openly reveal their ethnicity in the classroom given that the hiding of one's Roma origin is one way of coping with fears of humiliation and bullying by colleagues and teachers. The importance of *self-esteem* from an early age was also discussed in Cugir by adults in the context of Roma assimilation into mainstream Romanian culture. This was coupled with discussions about the different types of Roma communities: traditional Caldarari Roma people preserve their particular Roma lifestyle and language, but a majority of Cugir Roma assimilate. Poverty and lack of appreciation of education among Roma was also discussed in Cugir as a source of prejudice against them. Interestingly, in Agnita there was much consensus that cases of discrimination must be reported to authorities. In Cugir, there was much talk about *why* Roma are left behind, remain on the margins of education and everything else: many of these arguments resembled justifications and carried resentment. In both Agnita and Cugir, the working groups were concluded by proposing *solutions* to be carried further by different levels of school governance (although it is unclear solutions *to what*):

- ~ taking ownership of one's Roma identity publicly, from an early age (Agnita)
- ~ students' councils should debate the great importance of taking ownership of ethnic identity (recall that the topic of the day was equal access to education and classroom discrimination!) (Agnita, Cugir)
- ~ art-oriented after-school activities for Roma students (Cugir)
- ~ parents' association: debates on ethnically motivated discrimination (Agnita)
- ~ school management: counselling for Roma and non-Roma parents; recipient of complains of discriminatory behaviour; monitor of discriminatory behaviour;
- ~ media coverage of successful Roma (Cugir)
- ~ Agnita welfare office: receive complaints about employment-related discriminatory behaviour; counselling for persons subject to labour market discrimination.

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<sup>23</sup> These two topics of the four were chosen because the former groups – Agnita and Cugir – illustrate very different fates for a similar topic. The second group (school drop-out) was chosen over the third (ownership of ethnic identity) because the latter CPs were, in fact, less homogeneous in terms of topic and are, therefore, more difficult to compare.

~ completely free kindergarten for Roma, universally seen as impoverished (Cugir).  
It is interesting to note that adults' working groups – many of whom are teachers and other staff rather than, say, Roma parents – did not identify *teachers* as sources of discriminatory behaviour and bullying, yet students clearly stated in their examples in the early plenary session that this too was a problem.

The Agnita students' working group (majority non-Roma students, some openly prejudiced) discussed *sources* of discrimination first and non-Roma students justified why they (others too?) discriminate against Roma in general. To this, the Roma students responded with personal experiences, highlighting they were well liked, but both of them had concealed their ethnicity and were hardworking students. In Cugir, Roma students' narratives tended to reveal lack of awareness and refusal of personally experienced ethnically motivated discrimination, along with a lack of clear understanding of the concept of discrimination. At the same time, Roma students described a variety of aspects preventing Roma youth in general from attending school properly: many of these were presented as criticisms and things that needed changing. It feels like these Roma students wished to distinguish between themselves, eager to succeed and be viewed differently from the bulk of the Roma, and the latter: full of personal problems, unsuccessful, poor etc., in short something to be ashamed for. Note that unlike in the adults' working group in Agnita, there was no discussion of equal access to education, its reality (or not), the importance of this principle etc. Also, as among adults, there was little talk about *teachers* as sources of discriminatory behaviour in both Agnita and Cugir. Solutions to mitigate discrimination were forward looking and centred around student-focused activities:

- ~ punishing parents for not sending their children to school (Cugir)
- ~ talks by famous / successful Roma (presumably who are not poor, aggressive, uneducated etc.) (Agnita)
- ~ media material & school exhibition about Roma, available on the school website (Agnita, Cugir)
- ~ special edition of the school magazine focusing on student experiences of discrimination (Agnita)
- ~ reporting of discriminatory behaviour to school management (unclear, though, by whom and to whom exactly) (Agnita)
- ~ raising awareness in teachers and teachers' involvement in making school attractive where Roma parents fail to do so (Agnita).

It must be said that the Roma students-dominated working group in Cugir seemed to radiate much anger and contempt for Roma parents who were mostly blamed for their children's very poor school attendance and results, probably hence the punitive solution of withdrawing social assistance and other family allowances if children did not go to school. This is likely a symptom of the conflicting situation that aspiring Roma youth might find themselves in: they are Roma, but work very hard to not be like the majority of Roma, yet the bad impressions of the latter precede them, making it harder for them to *be perceived as* equals to majority Romanians.

A feature of the working group discussions was the collective building of an argument rather than the debating of opposing views. This is most clearly identifiable in the Cugir students' working group: once a Roma student started sharing his/her way of dealing with being Roma in school, others too shared similar stories. When another student brought into discussion parents' roles in preventing children from attending school, other students continued the line of examples with other factors (e.g. patriarchal family structures, the lack of value among parents of education's value etc.). As also highlighted earlier, many working group discussions tacitly revealed an underlying consensus on the issue 'debated'. The fact that *all* students seemed to share the idea that education is essential in making ethnically motivated discrimination disappear also illustrates this conclusion: there was more agreement than disagreement among participants.

The participating Roma students' profile and Cugir Romas' particular situation (strong assimilation process) might be responsible for this.

The plenary sessions were mostly void of debate. In Agnita, there was no spontaneous debate even if some participants did express disagreement with others' opinions or proposed solutions. After the spokespersons of each working group enlisted the solutions proposed, the facilitators closed the discussion and the event came to an end. Similarly, in Cugir the plenary lacked discussion and a further debating of the topics from the working groups. Here, the dialogue in the plenary was dominated by the school principal and the Local Authorities' social worker. Other participants and students in particular remained silent. As such, the conclusions of both CPs lost the ardent involvement that characterised the working group discussions. The solutions with which the plenary sessions ended were general, lost in concreteness and were also a shorter list than those of the working groups' conclusions. The plenary sessions were appropriate conclusions to the event, but not in line with the expectations of the project, namely that the final plenary sessions create an opportunity for the further debating of solutions proposed. Participants and facilitators might have been too tired for a second round of debate and the way in which the agenda was set out indicated that working groups are spaces for debate, but not the plenary sessions.

*Topic: School drop-out*

In Baia Mare, Band and Satu Mare, the generic topic for debate was *school drop-out*, in particular among Roma students. In Baia Mare, school drop-out was introduced as a direct outcome of segregation and the two issues were brought into discussion together. In Baia Mare, the plenary session commenced with two expert talks focusing on segregation (not at all about school drop-out). The presentations about segregation led to ardent discussions in the plenary session between experts and participants, in particular the leader of the Roma youth organisation. In addition, the facilitator of the event also grouped participants into small groups and had them discuss a statement about the positive aspects of segregating Roma children into different schools. It was in a polemic mode that the participants split for break and then working group discussions. In Band, three substantial expert presentations were followed by a break and then splitting into working groups. There was virtually no debate in the plenary as participants listened with great interest what the school principal and mayor had to say about the local Roma community and school drop-out in general. In Satu Mare a panel discussion opened the CP: eight speakers – students, the police officer, and the mentors – shared their opinions regarding reasons for school drop-out, factor shaping the context in which drop-out occurs, initiatives for preventing/reducing drop-out etc.

The working group discussions were initiated through different means. In Baia Mare, a vignette was presented with questions related to segregation, discrimination and means through which stakeholders might be involved. All in all, a very ambitious agenda to be completed. In Band, both working groups had a vignette centring on a father whose child abandons school. The participants had a clear task: to recommend the father what to do based on their own opinions and experiences, exposure to school drop-out. In Satu Mare, relying on two real cases of school drop-out, participants were asked to reflect on four questions: what should be done, who should take action and how and, finally, what would participants do in a similar situation. In Baia Mare the students' working group stuck to the topic and many participants tried to identify persons or institutions where instances of discrimination, leading to drop-out, could be reported. There was some disbelief expressed regarding the positive role of the school: one Roma student indicated that often times it is the school which may have a stake in permitting drop-outs, especially of Roma students. The issue of prejudice was marginally discussed and that it is hard to change 'mentalities'. The solution proposed was to keep stakeholders informed, likely not a very fruitful 'solution'. The questions posed at the beginning of the working group were only partially

answered. The adults' working group in Baia Mare reflected significantly more on the issue of segregation: its root causes (poverty, political manipulation of public opinion – an idea from one of the expert presentations, non-Roma parents' pressure on schools not to accept Roma students etc.). Although there was an underlying consensus that segregation is bad and should be prevented, some participants did highlight the merits of ethnic segregation in schools. Solutions that were proposed to prevent segregation were these:

- ~ awareness raising campaigns in the media
- ~ reporting of segregation to community leaders and local authorities;
- ~ more substantial community development projects, acting on multiple factors at the same time – poor living conditions, lack of hygiene and health problems;
- ~ empowering Roma so that they can identify their own problems and attempt action.

In Band, working groups brought together students and adults. In one working group, the discussion closely followed the task set: to make recommendations to the father whose child had abandoned school. There was much debate initially about who should do what: the parent, the class master, fellow students. Increasingly, however, adults and students brought into discussion *reasons* for dropping out and some students highlighted that parents themselves could be an important factor leading up to the decision to abandon school. Poor parent-child relationships were frequently cited as sources of internal conflict that could lead to drop-out in the medium run. While teachers and other adults saw entourage as a potential problem for students, more mature students revealed that friends can often be better sources for support for students than parents or teachers. Better communication seemed to be a leitmotiv of the discussion, led increasingly more by a few Roma high school students. In the second working group, barriers to attending school were cited (financial, lack of professional opportunities, the profile of the Band high school etc.). As indicated earlier, this working group was less guided by the task – proposing solutions to the vignette – and people used the venue to express their own difficulties, predicaments as parents and students. This working group came up with no solutions to the problem in the vignette.

In Satu Mare – as the questions focused on stakeholders who could be involved in preventing school drop-out among Roma high school students – there was much discussion about personal strength and commitment to learning, even when having to defy parents. This working group also talked much about factors preventing students from going to school – lack of hygiene in contexts of deep poverty and parents' lack of support for learning – as in the case of Cugir's students' working group. Here too some of the solutions proposed focused on *parents* with *young* children: parental education; community work in return for social assistance transfers, better monitoring of children from impoverished family backgrounds, more inclusive classroom practices. The second working group seemed to converge around the idea of better communication between class master and parents, key to knowing what the child is actually doing in school and at home. Lack of financial means was seen as a barrier by a few participants, who saw a decent standard of living as a precondition for successfully completing school. The monitoring of families – as in the first working group – was also seen as a solution to prevent school drop-out. Interestingly, both working groups in Satu Mare combined personal experience with advice and concrete solutions, identifying persons immediate to students as key stakeholders in preventing school drop-out. Interestingly, parents were seen as contributing factors to school drop-out as well, as in Band. It should be noted that one parent only participated in the CP in Satu Mare.

Solutions proposed for preventing school drop-out among Roma students and especially Roma high school students were the following:

- ~ the education and monitoring of (Roma?) families (by the Child Protection Agency?) (Satu Mare)

- ~ improved communication between parents and class masters and between class masters and school principals (Band, Satu Mare) – although it is unclear about what exactly (one might infer school results, academic trajectories etc.)
- ~ better communication between parents and their children (Band, Satu Mare)
- ~ extra-curricular activities and a multifunctional student centre within the school for school-related activities, learning and play (Band, Satu Mare)
- ~ greater support by classmates (non-Roma? Roma?) (Band, Satu Mare)
- ~ education to boost self-esteem and trust in oneself, sex education to prevent pregnancies (Band, Satu Mare)
- ~ providing financial aid to impoverished families in due time or free transport in villages (Band, Satu Mare)
- ~ appropriate choice of high school (Band)
- ~ changing students' entourage (Band).

Unlike the plenary sessions in Agnita and Cugir, in Baia Mare, Band and to a lesser extent Satu Mare the final session proved a welcoming venue for further discussion and debate. In the latter case, adults dominated the discussions and students were more subdued than in Band or Baia Mare, by comparison. Still, in all these cases the final sessions proved continuations of debates and lively discussions of the working groups, a model to be carried forward. In Band in particular, the reunited working groups listed the solutions proposed in each working group and debated each, individually, thus arriving at a series of final solutions to be taken away from the event. In Baia Mare, a similarly lively and positive atmosphere dominated the final session, which participants used to further share experiences, opinions etc. Much momentum was retained towards the end of the event. In Satu Mare, as in Band, proposed solutions in the working groups were individually debated and discussed, leading to a set of final solutions, which – unlike in Agnita and Cugir – retained detail, clarity and realism. As far as these solutions are concerned, in both Satu Mare and Cugir, where non-Roma adults dominated the discussions in working groups and plenary sessions, the solutions to school drop-out and school-level discrimination as a result of prejudice against Roma counted a few punitive measures: in Satu Mare and Cugir it was suggested that social assistance transfers should only be granted to adults who do community work in exchange (incidentally, a rule enforced across Romanian localities already, even if the granting of social assistance is often discretionary, not systematic and coverage is far from universal for all eligible individuals) (see Chapter 5., Rat, 2008) and in Satu Mare the fining of parents who fail to send their kids to school was proposed, a provision of the national draft law on education which was criticised in Cugir.

The Satu Mare CP indicates an outcome to be avoided in CPs in the future: the outnumbering of key target groups – Roma high school students and their parents – by non-Roma adults whose authority within the school or local authority is also substantial. The result – as indicated above – is a list of solutions which in truth doesn't make the disenfranchised group's situation any better: for instance fining families who complain they cannot afford sending their kids to school is worsening a situation which necessitates improvement. The Satu Mare case is also a good illustration of poor participant choice: no Roma adult with authority – expert, staff – participated in the CP, engendering a doubly disadvantageous situation for the students: not only was there a disparity of power between students and teachers, but this was worsened by the fact that over half the students were Roma, while adults were *all* Romanian.

#### **4.5. The atmosphere of the CPs**

Universally, people left plenary sessions in a good mood. There was no resentment expressed by any of the participants even if in some locations people complained about the length of the event. Many participants appreciated the aims of the CPs, many valued the layout and the prime

role of exchange of experiences, opinions and solutions drafting and – probably the best indicator of the level of success of this technique of participation – many participants saw *communication among stakeholders, group meetings and debate* solutions to recurring concerns of Roma high school students in public education. In other words, the model of the CP seemed to be recognised in itself a valuable tool to improve the situation of disenfranchised groups in formal education locally.

Very few genuine conflicts appeared during the CPs. There was one incident where one participant in one of the Satu Mare working groups made a disrespectful comment towards another participant, criticising the multitude of her personal examples. The facilitator intervened and solved the conflict by steering the debate in a different direction. Although in general adults' working groups appeared less disciplined than students' working groups (rules were less adhered to), there are no reports of conflicts among participants. In many cases participants' politeness and critique of *arguments* rather than participants was highlighted. Considering that students were more likely to provide socially desirable responses and comments than their adult peers, it is likely that the positive atmosphere was involuntarily guarded by participants. In other words, it is likely that potential discussions and debates were simply avoided by participants for a variety of reasons: lack of drive / anxiety / lack of skill to drive an argument through or defend an argument without indignation; the inability to critique others' arguments without making it personal (and therefore bend rules); the positive tone of the event, which participants might have not wanted changed; an underlying consensus which made debating simply redundant; the desire to share experiences, which are not necessarily contradictory with others' stories and experiences etc. Irrespective of these reasons, however, it must be said that CPs in the Romanian context – especially working group discussions – were spaces where people *shared* personal experiences, opinions, convictions, rather than sites for *debate*.

The Cluj CP's facilitator asked participants at the end to write down their thoughts on the event. This is the range of responses given:

*"It was a useful activity because it made me think about what we can do to change the mentality of the people who still discriminate."*

*"Interesting, but I can't foresee the effect, what results we shall see."*

*"This was my first participation in this kind of activity and I found it interesting although it was not exactly what I expected. I found the second part, i.e. workgroups very useful."*

*"There was too much emphasis on discrimination of the Roma people when in fact many non-governmental organizations run projects benefitting Roma people and focusing on integration."*

*"Aiming to achieve too much!"*

What people said they took away from the event were the following:

*"I cannot say that I have learned something that I didn't already know but I found some answers to key issues."*

*"I was impressed by the solutions given by the students because they took into consideration various aspects, including some that were beyond our topic of discussion in the case study."*

*"I had a chance to meet very special Roma parents and students; they were intelligent, communicative and open people."*

#### 4.6. Summary of the results of the CPs

The improvement of the educational success of the main target group – Roma high school students –, based on the discussions in the working groups in the different locations, depends very much on local efforts. Universally, *class masters* were seen as key figures in shaping the academic trajectories of Roma high school students and students in general, in particular when parents are not supportive of their children’s learning or school drop-out occurs as a result of various pressures at home (parental pressure to do paid work or choose different career options than desired; partners’ pressure to have children and be a stay-at-home mother; peer pressure to drop out etc.). Secondly – and as highlighted earlier too – communication among the different adults around Roma high school students should also be seen as key: communication between class master and parents; between parents and the school management; between class masters and school management. In general, many participants felt that the school and the students’ home environments were rather separated; void of systematic communication and that better communication could be of key importance in preventing school drop-out, the negative outcomes of ethnically motivated prejudice and discriminatory behaviour etc. A third means to improve the academic experience and outcomes of Roma high school students was a different use of the school by students *and* parents. It was interesting to note the multitude of extra-curricular events proposed by students and adult participants: successful Roma guest speakers; school-based activities to foster artistic talent among Roma; a multipurpose student centre within the school serving as social space, learning space etc.; school magazine issues focusing on student’s debates of issues of concern to them (e.g. discrimination, drop-out etc.). Events for parents were also proposed by participants: attendance of parents of various meetings and debates, parent education etc.

Unfortunately, what remained unclear when these propositions were made was *whose* initiatives these should be and how to reward those who initiate such events. One would think that the school should become more welcoming and staff should take on responsibilities associated with involving students beyond classes into a variety of events for them and their parents. Given that many Roma students come from impoverished backgrounds, their families suffering from a multitude of disadvantages (financial difficulties, illiteracy, mental health problems, higher levels of morbidity than in fellow students’ families etc.), one would see justification in *schools* being the initiators of greater involvement with students and their families.

In some cases, higher authorities than the school management were also seen as key actors in bringing about some change in the educational careers of Roma (high school) students, but it was unclear how these institutions might be involved or convinced to take action. In Cugir, a completely free kindergarten for Roma children was proposed, either the task of the Local Authority or a not-for-profit organisation which could subsidise such an expensive service. However, how these might be involved or convinced to take action remained an avoided topic. In Baia Mare and other locations, too, there were propositions to report instances of labour market discrimination and other discriminatory behaviour to local fora or to the school management. What these institutions should do further was not discussed. How one should make complaints was also not discussed in detail, leaving the nitty-gritty – but crucial – aspects a question mark. There was virtually no discussion of higher levels of (school) governance: all the topics debated in CPs were seen as *individually experienced* and solutions being found at micro level: the notion of *systemic* problems, e.g. poverty or segregation as a problem for all and arising from macro-level problems, say the lack of productivity of the Romanian economy or the lack of skills of many Roma parents, did not appear in any of the CPs. Therefore the role of macro-level institutions was also marginalised in discussions.

## 5. Summary and Outlook

### 5.1. Main developments for the target groups

Probably the greatest value that the CPs had for Roma high school students were those arising from having had the opportunity to speak out in a context where adults usually superior in authority had to listen and engage with them as *equals*. To be more exact, Roma students were given the opportunity to be as important sources of opinions and solutions as their teachers, parents, school principals etc. in a context where they were elevated to the status of genuine *equals* with these adults regarding issues of great concern to them. Secondly, it appeared to be of great value to students that they were casted in the role of the ‘expert’ of their own problems, something which – as it also transpires from many working groups’ discussions – rarely happens. Parents make decisions regarding their children’s academic careers or, where they don’t, they often don’t get involved at all in their children’s educational careers. Teachers and other school staff often act as ‘experts’ for students based on their own experience, convictions and expertise, but rarely consult students regarding what they might need, want etc. It was valuable to have these students in a place where parents, teachers and other staff had to listen to them as equals and acknowledge the value of their import for concerns of the school, the school management, of parents – in short those considered to be of adults in general. Thirdly, the exercise of expressing opinions, formulating arguments and considering counterarguments in a venue with clearly defined rules appeared to be in itself of value: many students grew talkative as the working group discussions progressed and grew more active and imaginative in finding solutions, i.e. responding to the tasks of the working groups. One might argue that the CPs served as learning environments for the accumulation of new skills.

The developments for the benefit of the target group depend very much on the extent to which decision-makers who participated at the CP are able / willing to carry forward at least some of the solutions proposed.

### 5.2. What should be the next step on the local level?

RWCT Romania’s aims in this and future projects is to create environments and contexts in future where disenfranchised groups in the public education system can improve their argumentative and critical thinking skills, as was the case in the CPs. The conference later in the project, too, is to focus on activities that provide opportunities for improving argumentative communication skills among Roma high school students, beneficiaries of the RCRC-administered scholarship. These spaces are meant to permit students to practice skills such as coherent argumentation, the wording of these arguments in a group setting, the critical assessment of others’ counterarguments and the formulation of further responses to these.

### 5.3. Recommendations

*To the project management:*

#### *a. Logistics*

Participants’ familiarity with and relationship to the inviting persons is of key importance for both participation in the CPs and the quality of participants’ participation during the discussions. In Lechinta, where the inviting persons were a former school inspector and his elementary teacher wife, poorer performing students didn’t honour the invitations. In Zalau, where one of the inviting persons was the school principal, a record number of 37 persons attended, yet the working group led by the principal was void of spontaneous and organic discussion among the participants. In Band, parents with parental responsibilities at home delegated the latter and participated, although indicated the sacrifice. It is very likely that the authority that inviting

persons command ensures participation, but in an unequal power balance situation, which is ethically problematic. One does not want participants to feel constrained to participate and inviting persons should be aware of this possibility and avoid cases where people come because they fear repercussions for their children or themselves.

The location of the CPs raises similar problems for participation and active engagement during the CPs' working groups: for many participants – especially educationally disenfranchised groups and their families, most likely also former disenfranchised students – the school itself might be a problem for their academic trajectories. Organising CPs in schools, therefore, not only risks strengthening power disparities among different groups of participants (primarily non-Roma school staff on the one hand and Roma students and parents on the other), but also risks creating an *a priori* handicap for the quality of the CPs as students and parents might feel too conscientious and up tight to genuinely share during the discussions. More neutral spaces – new to everyone – might be chosen in future to avoid this.

#### *b. Organisation of CPs*

Although expert presentations were very valued, they tended to absorb quite some time in the opening plenary session. The problem with this is that participants invested much energy and time into listening to what experts had to say and by the time concluding plenary sessions were taking place, many participants were fatigued. Therefore a better balance between the three main parts of CPs should be maintained: the accent should fall on working group discussions and plenary session debates as these are the central purpose of CPs rather than having participants listen to what experts have to say. One way to do this is to allocate space for short presentations – 10 minutes at the most. If organisers wish to involve participants into these, expert presentations may be asked to present aspects that might challenge the audience: statistics, controversies proved to be a good methods to spark questions and debate among participants.

If opening plenary sessions are kept shorter, it is possible to have lively discussions among participants in the plenary sessions, as well as keep CPs under 4 hours. Some CPs in the Romanian context exceeded this duration and participants complained. We believe that a 4 hour event is long enough to complete all tasks and not tire participants and facilitators.

Potential power relations among participants – as also indicated in the *Logistics* section above – can have undesired effects on CPs in multiple ways. As already indicated, there is an ethical concern in the invitation process when individuals with great authority organise and facilitate CPs: participants may feel constrained to participate, something to be avoided at all cost. School principals or inspectors – as in Zalau and Lechinta – should be excluded from organising and facilitating CPs due to the authority they command and which likely hampers discussion.

Other power relations, however, are at least as problematic for CPs as the one outlined above. In several cases – outlined in section 4.4. – adult non-Roma, well educated participants, many of whom school staff, strongly outnumbered Roma adults, who rarely had education and within school authority to match that of the participating school staff's. Directions of discussions, solutions proposed and in general opinions shared indicated the resulting biases quite well (prime examples are Satu Mare, Cugir, Lechinta). There is another concern, too. Such power imbalances were likely felt by participants with lesser authority and status – especially Roma parents – and potential discomfort must be avoided in future. The best solution might not be separation into different working groups, but a more cautious selection of groups of participants: Roma parents should outnumber non-Roma teachers because the latter are vocal irrespective of circumstance.

In mixed students-adults working groups, students – especially if Roma and the bulk of adults non-Roma and professionals – also encountered situations of power disparity: in Satu Mare and

Lechinta, for instance, it was clear that non-Roma adults had the chance to dominate the discussion and influenced where the talks were going. One way to avoid this is by separating students from adults. However – as the Band working groups suggest – another way to do this is by inviting vocal (Roma) students and repeatedly encouraging them to speak even if denying the right to intervene to adult participants facilitation style can be a solution in such mixed groups. The share of (Roma) students another means to temper adult dominance in working group and plenary sessions' discussions.

*c. Outcomes of CPs*

A recurrent finding of this case study is that many working group discussions were not debates, but a series of converging ideas, perspectives, experiences that people shared. This has been seen as an outcome of the underlying consensus that participants shared in spite of the criteria of difference relied upon during recruitment. The fact that people converged around ideas, shared similar – rather than opposing – experiences might indicate something else, however. Namely that people did not wish to *debate*, turn arguments upside down and challenge others' opinions. Rather, they might have wished to share, agree and reinforce others' opinions, experiences, perspectives. This should be recognised by the project management, who assumed *a priori* that 1. participants will wish to debate; 2. participants will have the skills to debate. However, the Romanian CPs recurrently show that participants did not wish to debate, but rather share: there was significantly more nodding in working groups than signs of disagreement. Whether due to lack of debating *skills* – which many students, let alone their parents and many of their teachers, don't have – or other reasons, the point is that one cannot evaluate the success of CPs using the degree of disagreement and debate as indicator because the use of such an indicator is premised on the assumption that everyone will want to debate and knows how to do it. As some of the closing remarks of Cluj participants – included in section 4.5. – also indicate, people valued the experience of being together and listening to people they might not (want to) encounter in other situations, rather than the debate itself. The *sharing* and *consensus* among participants – which makes them feel at ease – should also be seen as desirable outcomes of CPs, not just the quality of the *debate*.

The instances where solutions to the topics debated lacked or were few and overly general were the ones where the tasks were too many: the students' working group in Baia Mare is a good example of this as is the adults' working group in Zalau. In both cases the facilitators failed to lead the debate through the different questions that needed answers and – as a result – the discussion was thin or overly general and without a final outcome. Although many questions (and, therefore, implicitly many tasks) may be one way to conduct working group debates and can lead to fruitful discussion (as was the case of the students' working group in Zalau), more often than not sets of questions are confusing and lead to no final result, i.e. a solution to a problem or potential actions to be taken etc. Facilitators should, therefore, try to stick to one or two central tasks rather than a multitude of issues in order to be able to guarantee solutions at the end of the discussions.

There were numerous and original, creative solutions proposed in many CPs. However, the CPs have no mechanism to ensure that something comes of these debates. Coupled with the fact that plenary sessions' conclusions and solutions tend to be more lacklustre and general, therefore less clear, less concrete and less inspiring, the plenary sessions should be rethought in ways that 1. can ensure that working groups' solutions are preserved as initially formulated and thought of; 2. invite to action. The ways to do this is by trying to organise the plenary session as a review of solutions found and a more structured debating of each solution individually and then granting it a priority mark. Plenary sessions should be attended by people who can initiate action and pass solutions on to those concerned. For example, if class counsellors are seen as key actors in

preventing drop-out and classroom discrimination, someone who can communicate with class counsellors in an effective fashion should attend plenary sessions, e.g. the school principal.

## Annex 1.

### The Romanian Public Education System

The structure of the Romanian system of (public) education is defined in the Law of Education no. 84 of 1995 and a series of modifying acts of Parliament. In its current form, the law states that mandatory education is 10 grades for youth not older than 18 (see article 6.). Public education is provided in Romanian and other languages: those of national minorities and other, internationally widely used languages (see article 8). Romanian, however, is a mandatory subject for *all* pupils in the public education system.

The Romanian system of public education is structured as follows:

0. pre-school education includes four different levels, from ‘small’ group to ‘preparatory’ group;
1. primary schools includes grades 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup>;
2. lower secondary school includes grades 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> as well as professional training and the lower grades of high school (grades 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup>);
3. upper secondary school includes the completion year and the higher grades of high school (grades 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> or 13<sup>th</sup>, e.g. in teacher training);
4. post-secondary training includes 2 year, non-tertiary degrees (e.g. *postliceala*)
5. higher education includes all university and post-university degrees (i.e. undergraduate and post-graduate degrees).

The progress of students from one level of education to the next can be marked by different changes in the organisation of teaching. Children need to be signed up to kindergarten by their parents or guardians. Once signed up, children stay signed up at that institution until parents withdraw their child, irrespective of attendance. Similarly, children need to be signed up for first grade in a school which is more often than not a distinct entity, both administratively and physically. In fifth grade, children may switch schools when entering lower secondary education either due to preferences, or because their school only offers primary education (the case mostly in remote rural settlements). Enrolment into fifth grade may also depend on an exam at the school of choice and may take many forms depending on the focus of the school in higher grades. Although lower secondary education continues after 8<sup>th</sup> grade, the Romanian public education system imposes a nationally standardised examination on pupils at the end of their 8<sup>th</sup> grade in school. One’s average on this examination, in 3 subjects (or 4 if one studies in a national minority’s language), is the main criterion for getting into 9<sup>th</sup> grade. High school – be it theoretical, military, order and public safety, arts, sport, theological or technical – starts in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. It is notable therefore that the education system splits in 9<sup>th</sup> grade – not 11<sup>th</sup>, as one would expect given the years of mandatory education – into different academic trajectories. It is after 8<sup>th</sup> grade that pupils may choose professional training, a secondary degree that ends with the completion of 10<sup>th</sup> – i.e. mandatory – education and for which the nationally standardised examination at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade need not be passed. In essence, the latter is the future ‘blue-collar worker’s’ route into the labour market, while high school degrees are usually preparation years for post-secondary and tertiary education and – supposedly – future ‘white-collar’ jobs. In other words, pupils may switch schools once again before the inception of 9<sup>th</sup> grade and 11<sup>th</sup> grade as – theoretically – the completion of professional training does not preclude the continuation of education into upper secondary school (although this progression from lower to upper secondary education, if coming from professional training, is made rather difficult by the application procedure, see article 25.).

The main inconsistency in the Romanian public education system, therefore, is the 3-subject exam at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which channels students towards the co-called progressive route

(high school, preparation for post-secondary education) or professional training (which ends after 10<sup>th</sup> grade). To transfer from professional training (after 10<sup>th</sup> grade) to the progressive route (high school), one must do an extra year to catch up (11<sup>th</sup> grade). This inconsistency is also reinforced by the fact that pupils choose their further academic trajectory not after the 10 grades of mandatory education, i.e. at the end of 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but at the end of 8<sup>th</sup> grade, as indicated above. Therefore, even if the law mandates 10 years of education for all youth, in reality a likely cut-off point is 8<sup>th</sup> grade even if the failing of the exam then does not prevent one from continuing: only professional training is practically available. And, as was suggested earlier, to reach 8<sup>th</sup> grade pupils may undergo a succession of education venue changes, especially if residing in the countryside<sup>24</sup>: these are all likely points of ‘student shedding’ in the public education system as the choice of schools can be limited for a number of students, especially in the countryside.

Age	Class / group	ISCED	Educational levels				Qualification levels
> 19		6 – 2 <sup>nd</sup> Stage Tertiary	University education				5
		5 – 1 <sup>st</sup> Stage Tertiary					4
		4 – Post-secondary non-tertiary	Pre-university education Post-secondary education ( <i>postliceala</i> ) Non-university, tertiary education				3
18	13 <sup>th</sup>	3 – (Upper) secondary	Theoretical high school			Technological high school	3
17	12 <sup>th</sup>					Completion year	
16	11 <sup>th</sup>		Art, sport, theological high school	Technological high school	2		
15	10 <sup>th</sup>	2 – Lower secondary	Theoretical education	Military, order and public safety, art, sport, theological education	Technological education	Professional training ( <i>Scoala de arte si meserii</i> )	1
14	9 <sup>th</sup>						
13	8 <sup>th</sup>		Comprehensive education				
12	7 <sup>th</sup>						
11	6 <sup>th</sup>						
10	5 <sup>th</sup>						
9	4 <sup>th</sup>		1 – Primary				
8	3 <sup>rd</sup>						
7	2 <sup>nd</sup>						
6	1 <sup>st</sup>						
5		0 Pre-primary					
4							
3							

Source: Ministry of Education, 2010. Accessed from <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/articles/c215/> and for ISCED categories, UNESCO, 1997. Accessed from [http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/doc/isced\\_1997.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/information/nfsunesco/doc/isced_1997.htm).

<sup>24</sup> For accounts of school change in 5th grade in schools with Roma students, see Ulrich et al. (2009).

**Annex 2.**  
**Breakdown of Participant Groups by CP**

Locality	Roma students	Non-Roma students	Roma parents	Non-Roma parents	Roma staff	Non-Roma staff	Experts	TOTAL
Agnita	2	7	2	-	-	7	3	21
Baia Mare	6	-	1	-	3	1	2	13
Band	14	-	6	-	1	-	4	25
Cluj Napoca	4	5	2	-	-	6	2	19
Cugir	5	2	-	-	1	7	5	20
Lechinta	8	-	2	-	4	2	3	19
Satu Mare	6	5	1	-	-	4	7	23
Tirgu Mures	8	-	2	-	1	1	2	14
Zalau <sup>25</sup>	16		1		1	18	1	37
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>88</b>		<b>17</b>		<b>11</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>191</b>

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<sup>25</sup> In Zalau, the ethnicity of participants was not given. As a result we don't know how many Roma and non-Roma students participated, nor do we know whether the participating parent was Roma or not.

**Annex 3. Themes of the nine Citizens' Panels (May-June 2010)**

Agnita – “All different, all equal in accessing education and social integration”

Baia Mare – “Segregation & School Drop-out”

Band – “School drop-out: causes, effects, solutions”

Cluj – “Education can increase self-esteem, improve attendance and school performance for Roma students”

Cugir – “Discrimination in schools due to prejudices against Roma people”

Lechinta – “Proficiency in and use of the Romania language – advantages and disadvantages”

Satu Mare – “School drop-out”

Tirgu Mures – “Assuming the Roma identity”

Zalau – “Taking Ownership of Ethnic Identity”

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