

# MY SCHOOLBOOK

NAME: Marek D.

YEAR: September 2010

## UNLOCK THEIR FUTURE

END SEGREGATION OF  
ROMANI CHILDREN IN  
SLOVAKIA'S SCHOOLS

**AMNESTY**  
INTERNATIONAL



Marek is a fictional Romani child living in Slovakia. His story is drawn from the experiences and testimony of real Romani children across Slovakia, who were interviewed and photographed by Amnesty International between February and April 2010.

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Tuesday, 27th August

My name is Marek. I live with my dad, my mum, my brother and two sisters in the Romani settlement on the outskirts of town. We don't have much, but my parents work hard, and they say that if I go to school I can do something worthwhile with my life.



The Romani population in Slovakia has been estimated at between 480,000 and 520,000 – less than 10 per cent of the country's total population. Roma in Slovakia are among the most deprived communities in Europe. They face racism and discrimination in accessing a range of rights; they often live in settlements or neighbourhoods that are physically isolated from other parts of the community, receive poor health care, and are excluded from employment.

Wednesday, 2nd October

Last week at school I had an argument with my schoolteacher. I think she doesn't like me and my friend, Anabela. We are the only Romani children in our class.

Today a psychologist came to school and wanted to speak to me. We sat in a room and she asked me to draw and do other exercises. She asked me things like what the capital of Slovakia is. I said Bratislava, I knew all the answers, but I didn't understand why they were asking all these things.

Thousands of Romani children in Slovakia are segregated in special schools or classes for pupils with "mild mental disabilities", or in Roma-only mainstream schools and classes. Romani children are often placed in special education after a one-off assessment using intelligence tests that fail to consider their cultural and linguistic differences or their socio-economic circumstances. The test results are often influenced by the prejudice of the person conducting them.

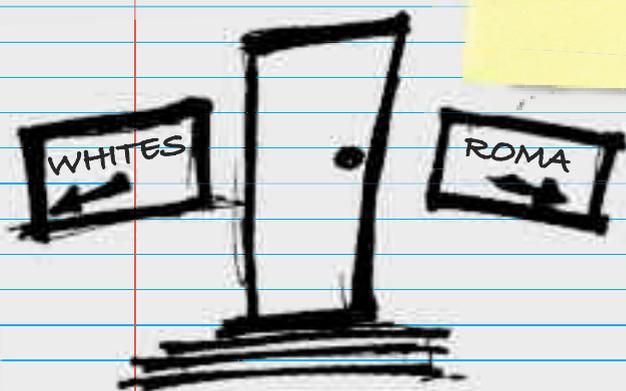


Monday, 27th November

Today at school I was sent to a new class. My Romani friends from the settlement go there, too. It's a special class for children who are "slow" learners, the teacher said, but my mum says it's really the "Gypsy" class. None of the white children at school go to this class.

I want to go back to the normal class. My mum complained but the headmistress said that I could not return to mainstream classes. I got good grades in my old class. I was one of the best students there.

According to a 2009 survey by the NGO Roma Education Fund, in regions with large Romani populations at least three out of four special school pupils are Roma; across the country as a whole, Roma represent 85 per cent of children attending special classes. Yet Roma comprise less than 10 per cent of Slovakia's total population.



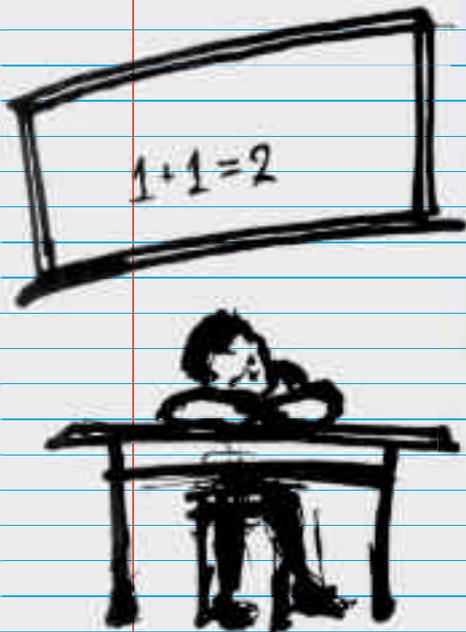
Monday, 15th January

My new class is really boring. I did the same lessons in second grade that I'm doing in grade six at special class. They teach you much less and more slowly here - if they teach anything at all. We don't even have English classes - but the white children study English.

The teachers won't let us take any books home from school, either. My mother went to the school and told the teachers to give us homework but they say we don't know how to use books, that we will destroy them or not bring them back. I know how to use books and I want to learn.

The curriculum for special school in Slovakia focuses on the development of practical rather than academic skills. Children finishing special schools or classes are at least two years behind graduates of mainstream elementary schools. In many cases the gap can be even greater.

Romani parents are frequently unaware of the long-term impact on their children's future prospects when they send them to special schools or classes. They often feel that the prejudice their children face in mainstream schools, and the lack of support they receive there, mean that they would be better off receiving a lesser education in a friendlier environment.



Wednesday, 28th February

I don't understand why Romani children are separated from the white children at my school. They lock us in the corridors and sometimes they even lock us inside the classrooms.

We are not allowed to go to the canteen without a teacher, either. They put our tables outside of the canteen and we eat in the corridor. They keep us away from the white children, so that we can have nothing to do with them.



In some Slovak schools, Roma are separated from non-Roma not only in the classroom but in other aspects of school life, including the canteen at lunchtimes. Segregation even takes place in kindergartens. In some cases, the parents of Romani children must collect them early from school so that they do not encounter parents from the majority population.

# My friends



My old mixed class



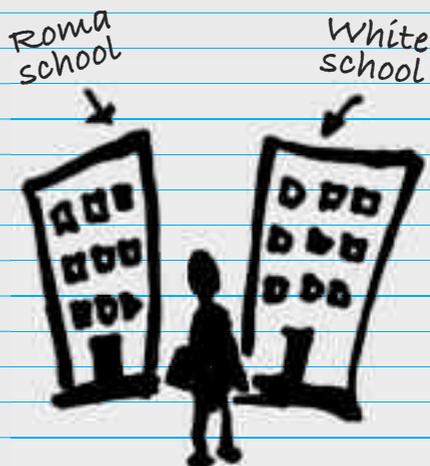
My new "gypsy" class



Tuesday, 19th April

Yesterday I met my cousin, Jerguš, who lives in the next village. He told me Romani children there go to a completely separate school. One school for whites and one for Roma... They call that the "Gypsy" school.

I don't see why we can't all go to school together. My dad says it was not always like this. When he went to school, Roma were together with the whites and he had many friends from the village.



By law, parents have the right to choose their child's school. In theory, this eliminates segregation in schools by allowing Romani children to enrol at any school. In practice, Romani children are often rejected by schools. The government is obliged under national law to ensure that freedom of school choice does not lead to indirect discrimination. But the tendency by non-Romani parents, under the same provision, to withdraw their children from schools with an increasing Roma intake can lead to de facto segregation.

Thursday, 8th May

I am now in the last year of elementary school in ninth grade. My older brother, who finished the special class last year, told me that after leaving special school you can only train to be something like a bricklayer, or a butcher or a domestic worker. But I don't want to be a bricklayer. I want to be an engineer.

Once children are assigned to special schools or classes, their route back to mainstream education is effectively shut off. Romani children are being denied the opportunity to learn and to progress; pupils finishing elementary school under a special curriculum receive lower graded certificates and so are eligible only for special secondary education. In 2006, only 3 per cent of Romani children reached secondary school, while only 8 per cent enrolled in secondary technical school.



Friday, 6th July

What they did to me was nasty... I got a scholarship of 100 crowns per month when I went to normal classes. I was one of the best pupils in the fourth grade. Now I know I have no future. If I could do something about it and turn the time back, I would. But it's too late.

Somebody has to change what's happening to us, unlock these doors, unlock our future. Romani and white children should be together. Romani children should not be treated like they don't matter.



**The segregation of Roma in Slovak schools is a result of racial discrimination within the education system. It reflects prejudice and intolerance in Slovak society in general and is a factor in the perpetuation of such attitudes.**

Amnesty International has campaigned since 2007 for equality in education and an end to segregation for Romani children in Slovakia, and the authorities have taken some steps to address the problem. For example, the new Schools Act, passed in 2008, bans all forms of discrimination, particularly segregation. However, the Act does not clearly define segregation, nor does it include robust guidelines and measures to identify, monitor and enforce desegregation. Effective measures to implement the ban have yet to be put in place.

Slovakia cannot continue to deny its Romani children their right to dignity and equal treatment. The choices that the government makes now will affect the lives of thousands of Romani children. It can trap them in poverty and marginalize them for decades to come. Or it can ensure that they enjoy their right to an education free from discrimination in integrated mainstream schools, thereby preparing them to fully participate in and contribute to the life of Slovak and European society.

# WHAT CAN YOU DO ABOUT IT?

Join the campaign and help end segregation of Romani children in inferior education in Slovakia. The recommendations below call for measures that, if adopted, will strengthen and enforce the ban on segregation. This work is part of the "Making rights law" theme in Amnesty International's Demand Dignity Campaign, which aims to end human rights violations that drive and deepen global poverty.

Please tear off these postcards and send them to the Slovak Prime Minister and to the Minister of Education.

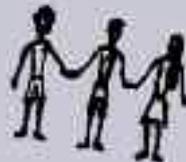
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**WWW.DEMANDDIGNITY.COM**

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Index: EUR 72/005/2010

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A photograph of a classroom with several students sitting at their desks, viewed from behind. The room has large windows on the left and a chalkboard in the background.

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DEMAND DIGNITY

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A photograph of an empty classroom with rows of wooden desks and chairs. The room is brightly lit, and the desks are arranged in a long line.

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**Dear Prime Minister,**

Thousands of Romani children across Slovakia remain segregated in special schools and classes and in Roma-only mainstream schools and classes offering inferior education.

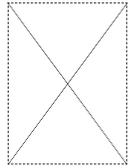
Recalling the new government's commitment to meet its international human rights obligations and end segregation on the basis of ethnic origin, I urge you to:

- Include legal and policy provisions that clearly define segregation, and provide adequate resources to the State School Inspectorate, including robust, detailed guidelines and procedures on how to identify, monitor and combat discrimination and segregation in practice;
- Begin the systematic collection of data on education, disaggregated on the basis of gender and ethnicity;
- Introduce a clear duty on all schools to desegregate and provide effective support for them to do so;
- Introduce adequate measures to support Roma and non-Roma who need extra classroom assistance, so that they can attain their fullest potential within mainstream schools.

Yours sincerely,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



**Iveta Radičová**  
**Prime Minister**  
**Úrad vlády Slovenskej republiky**  
**Námestie slobody 1**  
**813 70 Bratislava**  
**Slovakia**

*Image:* A Roma-only class at the Matice Slovenskej elementary school in Prešov, Slovakia, April 2010.  
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Amnesty International, International Secretariat, Peter Benenson House,  
1 Easton Street, London WC1X 0DW, UK. [www.amnesty.org](http://www.amnesty.org)

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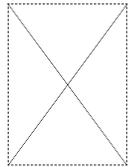
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Yours sincerely,

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_



**Eugen Jurzyca**  
**Minister of Education**  
**Ministerstvo školstva, vedy, výskumu a športu**  
**Stromová 1**  
**813 70 Bratislava**  
**Slovakia**

*Image:* Romani children are segregated at meal times in Krivany elementary school, Slovakia, eating their lunch in the corridor outside the cafeteria.  
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