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ZERO GRADE AND EDUCATION OF ROMA PUPILS



SPIŠSKÁ NOVÁ VES 2012

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INTRODUCTION

In contemporary society characterized by globalization processes and accompanied by a number of negative effects, it seems extremely important to seek and find the key strategies and approaches to mitigate their impact. In this context, the importance of education, both in relation to entire population, thus for so called new target groups, is crucial. In the last two decades of responding to the challenge in Slovakia - raising the educational level of the Roma ethnic group - a large number of experienced and committed professionals at the level of theory, research, and at the decisive power and various other helping professions have contributed.

Experts dealing with Roma issues agree in opinion, that one of the basic problems of the Roma ethnic group and the common "root cause" of many difficulties in their lives and in society as a whole, is their low level of education (and we agree with them). This fact also suggests that the key role in progressively improving the living standards of the Roma ethnic group will increase their level of education. Education also represents a higher recognition and respect of others within the human society. The objective of our publication is not about exploring the causes of a current state, nor finding the culprit. We provide readers with theoretical and empirical analysis of specific educational (compensation) tool – *zero grade in elementary school*, which in terms of the Slovak legislation, has been institutionalized for ten years already. Its main objective would be preparing of pupils who didn't reach sufficient school readiness and come from socially disadvantaged environment, for a successful education in elementary school. We offer a reader with comprehensive analysis of professional literature sources on zero-grade theme and analysis of ideas and approaches to the education of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment. We also provide opinions and views of staff, parents and experts, on the importance and effectiveness of zero grade within elementary schools in regards to the education of Roma pupils. This publication was elaborated within the implementation of the project *Roma Education Fund (REF) – Project Code: SLO 042 School for Everybody*, in order to examine the effectiveness of zero grade.

At this point, we would like to sincerely thank all of our respondents - school staff, parents and experts, whose cooperation was crucial in the process of creating this publication.

"Children, who learn together, learn to live together."

1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the introductory chapter, we will try to characterize the fundamental concepts relevant to the topic of our work. We were motivated by our findings that there have often been contradictory statements and discussions in the public (even professional), that have arisen from the lack of knowledge and orientation in specific topics, focused on education and particularly on the education of Roma children and pupils¹. Our aim is to familiarize readers with accurate and current information and legislative standards in the education of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (especially Roma children and pupils). While processing information, we used currently valid legislation, along with domestic and foreign literature. Clear definition of basic concepts will help readers to understand the publication and its scientific texts correctly.

1.1 Characteristics of the basic concepts

Elementary school: usually has nine years of attendance, with a possibility of establishing a zero grade. It is divided into first and second stage, in which the education process is carried out of individual follow-up educational programmes. Mandatory content for upbringing and education with a focus on gaining competences in schools is defined by *National educational programmes*.

a) *elementary education (ISCED 1)* – which pupil receives by completing the comprehensive educational programme designed for the first stage of elementary school, or a pupil with mental disability by completing the last grade of special elementary school.

¹ We will use the term “children in kindergarten“, “pupil from elementary and secondary school“ and “university student“

b) *lower secondary education (ISCED 2)* which pupil receives by successful completion of the comprehensive educational programme designed for the second stage of elementary school.²

Special elementary school: provides education based on the educational programme for pupils with mental disabilities. The educational programme for pupils with mental disability applies for the education process of pupils in elementary school, in special elementary school for children with mental disability and other schools for pupils with disabilities, in special classes within elementary schools, or as a part of an individual inclusion. Special elementary school provides education for pupils with mental disability, or mental disability in combination with other disabilities and is internally divided according to the degree of mental disability:

- a) variant A for pupils with mild mental disability,
- b) variant B for pupils with moderate mental disability,
- c) variant C for pupils with severe or profound degree of mental disability, or for pupils with mental disability, who also suffer from other disabilities, are owners of *The severely disabled person card* and are unable of being educated according to variant A or B.³

Zero grade in elementary school: is designed for children who reached six years of age by the 1st September, didn't reach sufficient school readiness, come from socially disadvantaged environment and in terms of their socially disadvantaged environment, there would be a very low probability for them to complete the educational programme of the first grade in elementary school⁴. Zero grade is a good starting point for children from socially and educationally deprived environment. The topic of zero grade will be discussed in other parts of this work in more details.

² <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=8>. 15-09-2011.

³ Following § 94 Section 2, Letter a) of the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act

⁴ Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act, § 19, Section 6.

Preparatory grade: is designed for pupils of special elementary schools, according to § 2 Letter k) of the Educational Act⁵, who reached six years of age by the 1st September, didn't reach an appropriate level of school readiness and there would be a very low probability for them to complete the first grade of elementary school. Completion of the preparatory grade is considered as the first year of compulsory school attendance. In our opinion, the establishment of preparatory grades within special elementary schools is a bad solution, because it only strengthens segregation tendencies in the school system within Slovakia. Preparatory-grade graduate continues to fulfil compulsory school attendance in special elementary school and this makes him eligible for obtaining potentially the highest possible education at ISCED 1 level (elementary education as of a pupil in the first stage of elementary school).

Reasoning:

- *zero grade* – for children from socially and educationally deprived environment in elementary schools.
- *preparatory grade* – for children with disabilities, developmental and behavioural disorders in special elementary schools.

Specialized class: is designed for pupils, who from the educational point of view need a compensation programme, or a development programme. It is also designed for pupils who were educated in schools with educational programmes for pupils with disabilities. Specialized class is set up with at least four pupils, but maximum of eight pupils from one grade or several grades. If the number of pupils is less than four, class is cancelled.⁶

According to the Decree of the Ministry of Education, specialized classes provide education for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment who after completing the zero grade have no precondition to successfully manage educational process of the first grade in elementary school. It also provides education for children, who have difficulties to manage learning successfully,

⁵ Child (pupil) with health disadvantage is a child (pupil) with a health disability, ill or physically weakened child (pupil), child (pupil) with developmental disorders or behavioral disorders.

⁶ Decree of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport of the Slovak Republic No. 320/2008 Coll. on Elementary school from July 23, 2008, § 13, Section 3.

or for those who according to conducted psychological assessment do not have sufficient ability to cope with the first-grade school curriculum. Specialized class does not belong to the system of special schools, so it doesn't need to have a special teacher. Establishment of specialized classes should be discussed with the *Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention*.

Reasoning:

Educational system in specialized classes consists of elementary school curriculum, with a reduced curriculum content. Evaluation is carried out according to methodological guidelines for the evaluation and classification of elementary school pupils, in relation to their ability and needs. Specialized classes have their educational system built according to curriculum for special elementary school and its pupils are evaluated based on the methodological guidelines for the evaluation and classification of pupils with mental disability.

Special classes in elementary school: Schools may, with an approval from its founder, establish a class designed for pupils with special educational needs.⁷ Special schools for children with mental disabilities can only accept pupils with disabilities and pupils with multiple disabilities, in combination with mental disorders. These pupils would have to pass a precise diagnostic examination, with a proven degree of mental disability. Special class of elementary school is not designed for pupils with normal intellect who come from socially disadvantaged environment and for pupils without mental disabilities.⁸

Transition class: In the school year 2008/2009, experimental verification of the project *Transition Classes in Elementary Schools*, with its continuation called *Specialised Classes within the First Stage of Elementary Schools*, was conducted on the selected elementary schools in the Slovak Republic. The

⁷ Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act, § 29, Section 9.

⁸ Following to § 2, 5 a 9 Public Note of the Ministry of Education No. 322/2008 Coll. on *Special Schools*.

gestor of this experimental verification was the *Research Institute for Child Psychology and Pathopsychology*.⁹ In our opinion, the experimental verification of so called transition classes was conducted as a result of official obligations arising from the *Slovak Republic National Council Act on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination (Antidiscrimination Act)*.¹⁰ Transition classes were part of the project PHARE “*Integration of Roma Children in Mainstream Elementary Schools*” and transition classes should eventually be one of the organizational forms of the education for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in special elementary schools. Transition classes included children in the age of compulsory education who were not diagnosed with mental retardation according to performed psychological examination. Despite not being mentally disadvantaged, their social background, lack of specific education, lack of precondition for a completion of the first-grade elementary school curriculum (as the result of not being part of the zero grade in elementary school, or preparatory class in special school), made them eligible for the transition class.¹¹ Transition classes were functionally meant to complement the missing link between the special elementary school and elementary school. They were supposed to represent a new phenomenon guaranteeing flexibility of the first-grade elementary education and at the same time guaranteeing the professional integration and transition of pupils from special pedagogical care into the mainstream educational system.

Remedial class: The term remedial class is currently (since 1.9.2008, after an adoption of the new Educational Act¹²) not being used, due to the current valid legislation. By this time, it was possible to set up specialized preparatory and remedial classes for pupils who for various reasons had temporarily reduced preconditions for the successful implementation of elementary school

⁹ <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=154>, 24. 9. 2011

¹⁰ [http://www.snslp.sk/rs/snslp_rs.nsf/0/CE591DEA3068370DC1256FF000224BF8?](http://www.snslp.sk/rs/snslp_rs.nsf/0/CE591DEA3068370DC1256FF000224BF8?OpenDocument)
OpenDocument, 07-09-2011

¹¹ ČECHOVÁ, D. – ČEREŠNÍKOVÁ M. – KONČOKOVÁ, E. – MAJZLANOVÁ, K. – PETRASOVÁ, A. 2006. Tranzitívna trieda. Príručka na prácu so žiakmi zo sociálne znevýhodneného prostredia. Projekt 2002/000.610-03 Integrácia rómskych detí do štandardných základných škôl. Bratislava. [*Transition Class. Guide on how to work with pupils from socially disadvantaged environment. Project 2002/000.610-03 “Integration of Roma Children in Mainstream Elementary schools”. Bratislava.*]

¹² Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act.

curriculum (even after the delay in compulsory school attendance). Standard first-grade elementary school curriculum was adopted by remedial classes, while only the range and complexity varied. Remedial class was designed for pupils who were mentally ready for the school attendance, but failed in any of the skills or abilities that are necessary for the successful school entry. Therefore, the remedial classes could not be considered as preparatory, because their curriculum was identical to the standard first-grade curriculum in elementary school. Mostly hyperactive children, children with attention-deficit disorder, or with language disability, were enrolled in remedial classes. Remedial classes operated usually from the first to third grade of elementary school. They were very often established primarily for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (especially Roma pupils).

Socialization: It is a complex lifelong process. The human individual comes into this world as a biological being, dependent on the care of his family, which provides the preparation for full-featured life of children within the society. During a long-term and diversified social interaction, through the various forms of social education, each individual changes into a person with all power and social competences, including the cultural norms and rules. An individual becomes a full member of society and incorporates into it.¹³ Jandourek¹⁴ distinguishes *elementary socialization* that takes place in the family during the childhood and adolescence.¹⁵ A child learns to cope with the biological impulses of his body. It is a period when learning is considered to be a largely emotional affair. *Secondary socialization takes place in small social groups. It influences adolescence and adult life as well. Tertiary socialization takes the rest of the human's life.* Ondrejko¹⁶ claims that socialization can be considered as highly positive process, where a person gradually adopts to the social system.

¹³ KOTEKOVÁ, R. – ŠIMOVÁ, E. – GECKOVÁ, A. 1998. Psychológia rodiny [Family Psychology] 1st edition. Michalovce : PeGaS s. r. o, 1998. p. 68 – 69. ISBN 80-967901-0-2.

¹⁴ JANDOUREK, J. 2008. *Príručka sociológie* [Sociology Guide]. Edition 1. Praha : Grada Publishing, 2008. p. 81 – 88. ISBN 978-80-247-2397-6.

¹⁵ Many other domestic or foreign authors deal with the issue of socialization, we recommend the following: J. P. Piaget, G. H. Mead, P. Ondrejko, M. Zelina.

¹⁶ ONDREJKOVIČ, P. 2003. *Základy sociológie mládeže* [Basic Youth Sociology] Nitra : FSV UKF, 2003. p. 120. ISBN 80-8050-658-2.

Socialization of individuals has its own characteristics and different levels. If an individual does not reach all levels of socialization, it doesn't mean that he is deficient. Sovák, in terms of special education and the rate of success, distinguishes four levels of socialization:¹⁷

1. *integration* – is the highest level of socialization when an individual is completely adapted into the society,
2. *adaptation* – is not a perfect level of socialization. An individual can participate in professional and social life, but only if there are certain measures taken (in work, school...),
3. *utility* – an individual may be included into society only with an immediate assistance and supervision of other people, which allows him to achieve certain social recognition, social usefulness and personal satisfaction; as with mentally disabled people,
4. *inferiority* – inability of any employment and social inclusion, as with severe physical and mental disabilities. Such person is in need of a life-long protection and assistance, mostly in specialized institutions.

Education: Generally, education can be considered as any kind of situation involving human subjects, where educational process takes place.¹⁸ Education takes place in certain educational environment, which is determined by physical conditions and participants, as well as by their psychosocial relations. *The educational process* is any activity, through which an entity (T) is instructing (teaching) and an entity (P) learns.¹⁹ In this context, the Slovak literature distinguishes between subject and object of the education (subject-teacher; object-student).

Efficiency (effectiveness) expresses any effect (any meaningful) of human activity, especially human labour. In common practice, we meet with terms

¹⁷ SOVÁK, M. Nárys speciální pedagogiky [*Special Pedagogy*] Praha : SPN, 1980.

¹⁸ PRŮCHA, J. – WALTEROVÁ, E. – MAREŠ, J. 1998. Pedagogický slovník [*Pedagogical Dictionary*]. Praha : Portál 1998. p. 60. ISBN 80-7178-252-1.

¹⁹ PRŮCHA, J. 2002. Moderní pedagogika. [*Modern Pedagogy*] Praha : Portál, 2002. p. 75. ISBN 80-7178-631-4.

such as: economic effectiveness, pedagogical effectiveness. Effectiveness is usually the main criterion for assessing success.

Effectiveness of education: It is a cornerstone of the educational process. If education is not effective, pupil might find his knowledge not usable. It means that he would not gain any useful skills. How does it work in practice? We can generally say that pupil will be unusable when it comes to everyday work. To avoid such situations, it is necessary to map (measure) the current efficiency of education and propose corrective mechanisms. Effectiveness of education depends on the interaction between internal and external factors. The most important internal factors include: motivation (stimulates interest, increases attention and working ability, memory, etc.), prior knowledge, skills and experiences, personal characteristics and education method. The external factors are for example: family, school, group influences, and emotional atmosphere in the classroom, in the group...²⁰

An overall effectiveness of learning and education depends on the quality of educational process and represents a tool for improving the educational process and its expected results. It is therefore important to remember that learning efficiency is affected by many risks, faced by pupils and teachers (lack of trust in relationships, lack of trust in the educational system, stereotypes and prejudices against minorities).

Education quality: It can be perceived as a normative category, which may be evaluated by the indicators. The quality of educational processes, educational institutions and educational system is reflected (optimal) in their functioning results, or in the production processes of particular institution. Quality may also be imposed by certain requirements (such as educational standards) and can thus be objectively measured and evaluated...²¹

Education results – immediate changes affecting pupils (students), incurred by the action of specific curriculum content. Educational results can be detected,

²⁰ ČÁP, J. 1993. Psychologie výchovy a vyučování [*Educational Psychology and Teaching*]. Praha : Karolinum, 1993.

²¹ PRŮCHA, J. Moderní pedagogika. .[*Modern Pedagogy*] Praha : Portál, 1997. p. 366.

measured, assessed, or even diagnosed at the very beginning of their formation.

Forms:

- cognitive features (knowledge, intellectual changes of the individual),
- cognitive-motor performance (sensorimotor, communication, working skills),
- cognitive-affective features (interests, beliefs, cultural patterns, values, etc.).

Effects of education – consequences or results, evoked in educated population (or in society as a whole) by the effects of education. Education effects, unlike the results, have a long-term, sometimes even lifelong character and are reflected in the manner and degree of their utilization into professional and personal life.

Social effects of education can be defined as:

- changes caused by education in the social structure of society.
- education impact on the development of relations between social groups,
- education level impact on the family welfare,
- education impact on peoples' thinking and actions, their work initiative, interest in lifelong education and career,
- education impact on changes in material and non-material consumption.²²

An overall effectiveness of education depends on the quality of educational process. Effectiveness and quality are conditional and related one to another. Products of education, which appear to be effective, will be used as inputs of the new process, to ensure its improvement. Effectiveness is a tool used for improving the educational process, as well as being its expected result at the same time.

School integration: Represents upbringing and education of pupils with special educational needs in classrooms of schools and educational facilities

²² PRŮCHA, J. *Moderní pedagogika. [Modern Pedagogy]* Praha : Portál, 1997. p. 384.

designed for pupils without special educational needs. The Educational Act²³ also contains procedures and forms for the school integration of pupils with special educational needs (including Roma pupils), as well as the possibility of re-integration of pupils from special schools into mainstream schools. The term “school inclusion” used in certain sections of the Educational Act, is synonymous with the term “school integration”.

Individual upbringing and educational programme for pupils with special upbringing and educational needs: It is an important part of the school integration, which in cooperation with special school pedagogue, or a special educational counselling facility, is elaborated and continuously supplemented by the classroom teacher. We clearly recognize possibilities of utilization of teacher’s assistants, especially when it comes to designing of classroom environment, learning procedures, organization of educational-upbringing processes, elaboration of curriculums, providing special compensatory and teaching aids, personnel assistance.

Structure of the individual upbringing and educational programme designed for pupils with special upbringing and educational needs:

1. Current health condition, type and degree of disability, educational level of pupil, pupil’s personal characteristics.
2. Teaching plan and curriculum, or their modification. Pupils will be educated accordingly.
3. Special educational and technical equipment, modification of teaching materials used for the provision of pupil’s upbringing and education.
4. Characteristics and description of special educational service.
5. Long-term and short-term educational process goals, the method of evaluation and classification of pupil’s educational results.
6. Continuous assessment on the adjustment of textbooks that were recommended for the education of pupils with special upbringing and

²³ Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act, § 32.

educational needs, as a part of individual upbringing and educational programme.²⁴

Special upbringing and educational need: Is a requirement for modifying terms, content, forms, methods and approaches in education for pupils, arising from their health disability or from growing up in socially disadvantaged environment, an application of which is necessary for the development of skills and personality of pupils and to achieve a reasonable level of education and proper integration into the society.²⁵

Intact pupil: (from lat. *intactus*: untouched, unharmed, integral, untouchable). In the pedagogical theory and practice, we use the term “intact pupil” in the sense of ordinary pupil being a part of a regular class in elementary or secondary school. An opposite term of “intact pupil” is a pupil with special upbringing and educational needs.

Pupil with special upbringing and educational needs: is a pupil diagnosed with special educational needs by the Centre for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention, except children placed in special educational facilities (diagnostics centres, re-educational centres, medical and educational sanatorium) by decision. According to the Educational Act No. 245/2008, this category includes children and pupils:

- with health disability,
- with talent,
- raised in socially disadvantaged environment.

In our work, we will focus mainly on the category of socially disadvantaged children and pupils, where primarily Roma children and pupils belong.

²⁴ Úloha školského špeciálneho pedagóga v základnej škole. Informatívno-metodický materiál [*The role of special pedagogue in elementary school. Informative and methodical material*] approved by the Ministry of Education on 10. 9. 1999 No. 260/1999-44, valid from 1. 9. 1999.

²⁵ Following § 2, Letter i) of the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act

Pupil from socially disadvantaged environment: is a pupil living in conditions, which in terms of social, family, economic and cultural conditions insufficiently promotes the development of mental and emotional characteristics of a pupil. These conditions don't support his socialization and adequate incentives for the development of his personality (this topic will be discussed in separate chapter).²⁶

Roma: The term "Roma" raises a degree of uncertainty, particularly in relation to an official self-identification within the nationality (see the census of 2001²⁷ with the following data: 1,7 % of the population – Roma and the census conducted in 2012, when a proportion of population declaring themselves as the members of Roma population slightly increased: from 1,7 % – population of 83 000 in 2001 to 2 % – population of 130 000 in 2011) and in relation to the "unofficial statistics" (realistic estimation of Roma population living in Slovakia varies from 300 000 up to 450 000)²⁸. The Roma citizen is defined as citizen who is regarded as Roma by the majority of population. At the same time, the emphasis is on the internationally adopted conclusions and recommendations on the use of the word "Roma" (The World Roma Congress²⁹). Second issue is defining Roma people as members of the Roma minority. Professional and scientific discussions ambiguously define these concepts, categories and so it is difficult to achieve a "conceptual clarity" in a daily practice. The third level represents the requirement for accepting the current discussion of Roma, which reflects a desirable change in the status of the Roma population in Slovakia:

- in relation to traditional Roma culture, with many positive elements in the socio-cultural area, timeless contribution of Roma artists and other

²⁶ Act No.245/2008 Coll. of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act.

²⁷ *Census of 2001*. <http://portal.statistics.sk/showdoc.do?docid=5835>, 1. 9. 2011.

²⁸ It is important to point out the grammatical aspect of term "Roma - non-Roma". According to the Slovak Spelling Rules (p. 56), grammatically correct use should be: Roma (member of Roma ethnic group), non-Roma (member of different nationality, ethnic group than Roma ethnic group, for example Slovak, Hungarian, Russian...). In our work, we follow these criteria, for example: Roma pedagogic assistant - non-Roma pedagogic assistant, Roma pupil – non-Roma pupil.

²⁹ The first World Roma Congress was held in Orpington, near London on 8th to 12th of April 1971.

- personalities (traditions and other socio-cultural and normative elements of Roma culture, customary law, ethics, ritual folklore, traditional Roma crafts, category of spiritual and material values of Roma culture),
- in relation to the Roma national culture (ethnic revitalization, self-identification within the nationality, generating and constructing of the Roma ethnic group and other current issues in relation to changes),
 - in relation to marginalized Roma communities, which show signs of marginalization/social exclusion and multiple deprivation.

Roma pupil: We consider it extremely difficult to define a Roma pupil as a member of the Roma nationality, because even official statistic³⁰ report shows only the minimum number of pupils with Roma nationality (what we consider to be one of the obstacles in examining the education of Roma children). By the 15th September 2010, from a total number of 233 534 elementary school pupils (public, private, church schools), the number of Roma pupils was 1020, only 0,43% from the total number (see Table 1 for details). The district of Spišská Nová Ves reports only three pupils as being a part of Roma nationality (0.029%), which certainly doesn't represent the real situation. Therefore, many authors define Roma pupils by different indicators (genotype, residence), not to infringe the Law on the Protection of Personal Data³¹. In our work, we will define Roma pupils based on the reactions from their teachers and parents.

³⁰ Štatistické ročenky – základné školy. Ústav informácií a prognóz školstva v Bratislave [Statistical Yearbooks – elementary schools. Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education in Bratislava]. <http://www.uips.sk/statistiky/statisticka-rocenka>. 1. 9. 2011.

³¹ Act No. 428/2002 Coll. on Protection of Personal Data as amended.

Table 1 *Number of elementary school pupils of Roma nationality in Slovakia*
(source: ÚIPS SR)

Schools	Number of elementary school pupils of Roma nationality in Slovakia					
	by 15.9.2006	by 15.9.2007	by 15.9.2008	by 15.9.2009	by 15.9.2010	by 15.9.2011
state	2090	1907	634	1245	876	1477
private	31	91	10	185	5	8
church	90	139	120	127	139	126
total	2211	2137	764	1557	1020 *	1611**

* from the total number of 439 675 elementary schools pupils, the number of Roma pupils is 1020, which represents 0,23 %.

** from the total number of 434 477 elementary schools pupils, the number of Roma pupils is 1611, which represents 0,37 %.

Pedagogical assistant: According to the requirements of teachers, educators or vocational training masters, pedagogical assistant participates on the implementation of the school curriculum in kindergarten, elementary school, schools for children with talent, special schools, or educational programme for children and pupils of compulsory school attendance age. Assistant should provide formation of equal opportunities in upbringing and education, to overcome the architectural, information, language, health, social or cultural barriers. Pedagogical assistant may also work in secondary school, when it comes to ensuring the education of pupils with disabilities. According to the categories of pedagogical staff, for which pedagogical assistants carry out the assistance, pedagogical assistants are divided into sub-categories as follows:

- a) teacher's assistant,
- b) educator's assistant,
- c) assistant of vocational-training master.³²

Teacher's assistants help pupils (according to the Educational Act³³) to overcome barriers and obstacles resulting from their health disabilities. The position of teacher's assistant is possible to be established in classes, attended

³² Following the Act No.245/2008 Coll. of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act, § 16

³³ Following the Act No.245/2008 Coll. of the National Council of the Slovak Republic on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act, § 94 Section 1 and 9.

by more than five pupils from socially disadvantaged environment. Recommended number of pupils for one teacher's assistant is twenty. His work requires an implementation of educational and community activities.³⁴ The establishment of the position of teacher's assistant, in relation to the education of pupils from elementary or special schools with health barriers, is not derived from the number of pupils with disabilities in one classroom, or in a group, but according to severity of their disability.³⁵ Klein³⁶ was dealing with the topic of teacher's assistants. To illustrate this, Table 2 provides an overview of the number of teacher's assistants in elementary schools in Slovakia.

Table 2 *Number of teacher's assistants in Slovakia*

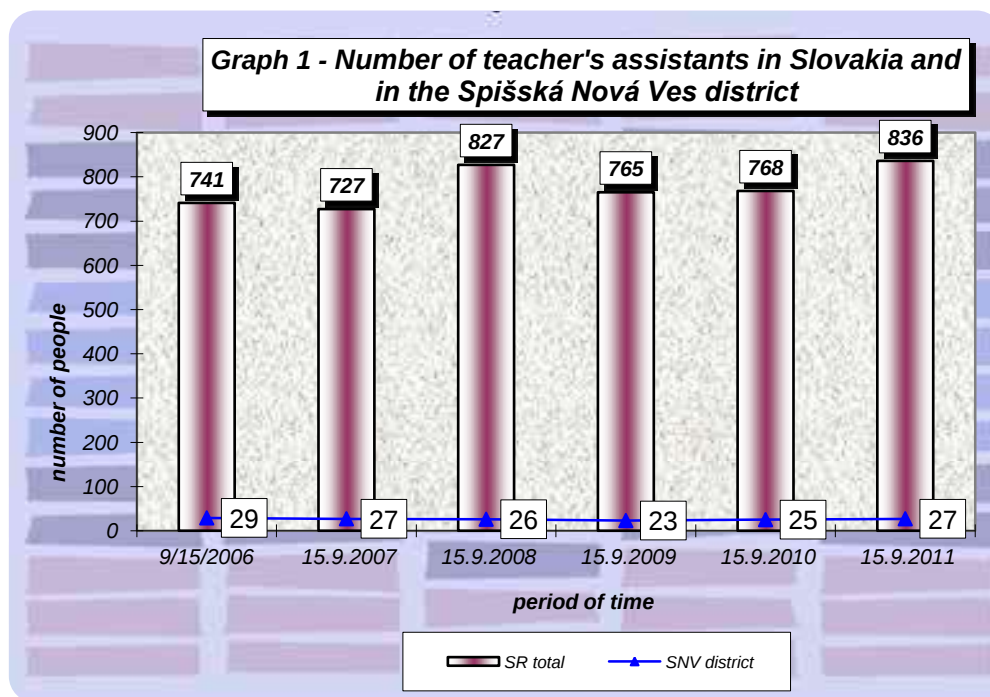
Elementary schools	Number of elementary school teacher's assistants in Slovakia											
	by 15.9.2006		by 15.9.2007		by 15.9.2008		by 15.9.2009		by 15.9.2010		by 15.9.2011	
	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>	<i>total</i>	<i>wo men</i>
state	711	583	694	589	791	680	711	617	717	629	782	685
private	7	7	11	9	7	7	6	1	14	12	10	9
church	23	20	22	19	29	26	38	35	37	34	44	39
total	741	610	727	617	827	713	765	653	768	675	836	733
Number of AU in SNV district	29	22	27	21	26	21	23	16	25	22	27	24

³⁴ Following the Decree of the Government No. 341/2004 Coll. on establishing the catalogues of working activities when performing public work and on their changes and amendments.

³⁵ Guideline No. 19/2006-R of 15 June 2006 setting out the system of the breakdown of funds on wages and social insurance contributions for teacher's assistants for each regional school office and the procedure of its provision to the founders of elementary and special elementary schools.

³⁶ More in KLEIN, V. 2008. *Asistent učiteľa v procese primárneho vzdelávania rómskych žiakov*. [Teacher's assistant in the process of elementary education for Roma pupils] Nitra : UKF, 2008. 198 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-348-6 a KLEIN, V, 2007. *Edukácia rómskych žiakov prostredníctvom asistentov učiteľov a nultých ročníkov* [Education of Roma children by teacher's assistants and zero grade classes]. Ružomberok : The Catholic University, 2007. 115 p. ISBN 978-80-8084-176-8.

Graph 1 *Number of teacher's assistants in Slovakia and in the Spišská Nová Ves district*



Centre for Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention:³⁷

It provides a comprehensive psychological, special-educational, diagnostic, educational, counselling and preventive care for children, except children with disabilities, particularly to optimize their personal, educational and professional development, care about the development of their talent, elimination of psychological and behavioural disorders. In the partnership with families, schools and educational facilities, the Centre provides preventive educational and psychological care for children and their legal guardians, especially in cases of psychological behavioural disorders and in case of an occurrence of socio-pathological phenomena.

Special Pedagogical Counselling Centre:³⁸ Provides comprehensive special-pedagogical services, psychological, diagnostic, counselling, rehabilitation, prevention, methodological, educational and other professional activities and a

³⁷ Following § 132 Section. 1, 2 of the Act No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act.

³⁸ Following § 133 Section 1 of the Act No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act..

set of special pedagogical activities for children with disabilities, including children with developmental disabilities, in order to achieve an optimal development of their personality and social integration.

Inclusion: Integration of disabled pupils into regular mainstream school, where all required personal and technical predispositions are implemented and the school represents readiness of the class – collective to accept such a pupils. This means that pupils may not even be a part of this class, but schools are already prepared for such an alternative.

Social exclusion: The concept of social exclusion highlights dynamics and processes that cause deprivation, multidimensionality in disadvantaged environment, relationship aspects (such as social participation, integration). This applies more to groups (e.g. ethnic group) as to individuals, and refers rather to the failure of the society as a whole (social systems), than to the failure of an individual.

Large number of authors is dealing with the concept of social exclusion.³⁹ They agree on the fact that social exclusion is a consequence of an unequal access for individuals or groups to key resources of the society; is the exclusion of the possibility to participate in society and manifest itself in a number of dimensions that can be identified and characterized in the particular geographic area.⁴⁰

Marginalization: It represents the creation of relations of social inequality. It is not just about the poverty and economic deprivation, but it reflects an overall reduction in life chances and limiting opportunities in participating on decisions or choices that affect the decision making. It ultimately leads to an exclusion from participation in the normal course of social life (including education). There are two basic types of marginalization:

³⁹ For example Abrahamson, 1995; Atkinson, 1998, 2000; Berghman, 1995; Mareš, 2000, Džambazovič, 2002, 2004, 2005 and others.

⁴⁰ Most often, people are excluded from an access to employment, housing, social protection and education.

1. economic – is related to poverty, refers to the Roma community, people with disabilities, refugees, unemployed, homeless. It is always associated with the threat of social and cultural isolation.
2. symbolic – related to prejudice and stereotypes within the society and covers the following groups: ethnic and religious groups, sexual minorities. Some groups may be included in both categories and both marginalization types often overlap each other.⁴¹

Segregation: (differentiation, separation, isolation). Is an exclusion of a certain part of population because of the racial, religious and other reasons? The sociologist Elena Gallova Kriglerova⁴² from the Centre For the Research of Ethnicity and Culture (CVEK) particularly pointed out the segregation in education. Based on her opinion, the educational system in Slovakia is not open enough to educate different children (in terms of their social, racial, cultural background). Therefore, this problem doesn't apply only to Roma children. What is important is the perception of the Roma nationality in Slovakia. The research, according to sociologists show that Roma population is the most excluded one. Last but not the least; it is also about the perception of Roma children by their non-Roma peers or parents of non-Roma pupils.

Segregation is perceived as a condition of uneven deployment of minority groups in the area (housing), compared to the rest of the majority population.

Separation: Is a social separation of an individual from other people (or separation of the minority social group in relation to the majority social group), leading to the feeling of loneliness. In the literature, we also encounter the concept of social isolation – lack of contact with people, especially with those who are socially important for a person.

Adaptation (social adaptation): Is an interaction process taking place between the subject of adaptation (individual, social subject) and the

⁴¹ http://www.culture.gov.sk/pk/SIL_27_10_05/priloha_c3.htm. 15. 9. 2011.

⁴² <http://www.sme.sk/c/4817667/oravec-segregacia-vo-vzdelavani-romov-je-odrazom-segregacie-v-byvani.html#ixzz1V5LiACQJ>

environment, by which the subject of adaptation deals with new or changing factors of social environment and finally integrates into it.

Child's adaptation to the school environment

At the age of about three years, children begin to realize themselves, their personalities in the system of social relations within the family and surroundings. A child, for whom his family with their traditions means the whole world, suddenly gets into a totally different world, full of new people, things, rules and obligations, while entering the pre-school age. These are the situations which were not part of his/her world so far. Suddenly, the child gets into kindergarten, which should represent "his/her reference group", in which he/she should be gradually accepted. If the term "adaptation" is perceived as a process of adaptation to social environment with its standards and requirements, it is clear that a new environment, with different cultural and social background, will provide many new situations, which the child will have to cope with. The Roma child coming from socially disadvantaged environment will be disadvantaged in many cultural and social areas while joining the elementary school, when compared to other children from appropriately stimulating environment (majority family).⁴³

School maturity: Means achieving such a level of development, which allows a child to successfully acquire the school knowledge and skills.⁴⁴ Various terms are used in the literature, such as school maturity, readiness for school, school eligibility. It is a complex phenomenon, an achievement of such a child development level (physical, intellectual, emotional and social), which allows a child to acquire school knowledge and skills with relative success.

⁴³ Following: KLEIN, V. 2008. Sociálne znevýhodnené dieťa v materskej škole. Predškolská výchova: Celoštátny časopis pre rodičov, jasle a materské školy. [Social disadvantaged child in kindergarten. Pre-school education: The national magazine for parents, nurseries and kindergartens]. ISSN 0032-7220, year 62, no. 6 (2008), p. 1 – 12.

⁴⁴ ŘÍČAN – VÁGNEROVÁ a kol. 1991. *Detská klinická psychologie* [Clinical Child Psychology]. Praha : Avicenum, 1991.

Social maturity:⁴⁵ Relates to an adoption of school roles and mastering the simple social situations at school, expression of the need to socialize with peers and other people, ability to cooperate, ability to respect an authority of the teacher and bearing with separation from the mother and relatives.

Causes of school immaturity:

- defects in the development of somatic and health state,
- delayed mental development, reduced intelligence,
- uneven development and weakening of sub-functions and abilities,
- neurotic character development, neurotic symptoms and features,
- defects in the educational environment and in the process of raising the child.

The Roma children, living in socially disadvantageous environment, are classified as immature in massive percentage of cases, while their elementary school entry. According to some scientists, theoreticians and even practitioners, this has a number of reasons. Key factor is the inconsistency in the preparation process between the social environment and school expectations.

School readiness: While entering the school, children should meet the following criteria of school readiness:

1. physical age of six,
2. physical maturity,
3. mental maturity: cognitive, emotional, social and labour.

If a child doesn't meet several criteria of school readiness, he/she is considered as immature for joining the school. Synonymous with the term "school readiness" is the term "school eligibility".⁴⁶

⁴⁵ BAĎURÍKOVÁ, Z. 2006. Inkluzívna výchova a vzdelávanie detí predškolského veku. Partizánske. In Predškolská výchova. [Inclusive education for children of pre-school age. Partizanske. In Pre-school education]. ISSN 0032-7220, 2005/06, year LX, no. 4, p. 1 – 7.

⁴⁶ Details: KLEIN, V. 2008. Integrované predškolské vzdelávanie rómskych detí. In Predškolská výchova: celoštátny časopis pre rodičov, jasle a materské školy [Integrated pre-school education of Roma children. In Pre-school education: The national magazine for parents, nurseries and kindergartens]. ISSN 0032-7220, year 63, no. 1 (2008), p. 11 – 14.

Diagnostics: The Theory of Objective Procedures for identifying the status of certain phenomena and processes, their characteristics, reasons for these characteristics, deviations of characteristics.⁴⁷

Pedagogical diagnostics: Scientific discipline dealing with the diagnostics of subjects in educational environment (mainly in school environment). This discipline formulates the theory of educational diagnostics, diagnostic methods as well as the method for an interpretation of pedagogical diagnosis.⁴⁸

Psychological diagnostics: It is rather used to ascertain the condition and causes, as well as for suggesting a likely development prognosis of an individual.⁴⁹

Pedagogical and psychological diagnostics: It is perceived as learning and evaluating of an individual (groups) and his specific personality traits, with a focus on the prognosis and with the final outcome for optimization of development.⁵⁰ Most comparisons of the pedagogical diagnostics concepts with the pedagogical and psychological diagnostics concepts are declared particularly by the fact that they differ from one another only in relation to the pedagogical decision-making.

Special-pedagogical diagnostics: As well as the pedagogical diagnostics⁵¹, the special pedagogical diagnostics is a relatively young scientific discipline. "Its place in the system of special pedagogical sciences is determined by the methodology according to which the diagnostics performs the epistemic functions and therefore belongs to the methodology."⁵² To understand the

⁴⁷ PRŮCHA, J. 2006. Přehled pedagogiky: úvod do studia oboru. [*Pedagogical overview: An introduction to the field*] Praha : Portál, 2006. p. 132. ISBN 80-7178-944-5.

⁴⁸ PRŮCHA, J. – WALTEROVÁ, E. – MAREŠ, J. 2001. Pedagogický slovník. [*Pedagogical dictionary*] Praha : Portál, 2001. ISBN 80-7178-579-2.

⁴⁹ SPÁČILOVÁ, H. 2003. Pedagogická diagnostika v primární škole. [*Pedagogical diagnostics in elementary school*] Olomouc : UP, 2003. p. 8. ISBN 80-7178-544-X.

⁵⁰ HRABAL, V. 1989. Pedagogickopsychologická diagnostika žáka. [*Pedagogical and psychological diagnostics of a pupil*] Praha : SPN 1989.

⁵¹ ZELINKOVÁ, O. 2001. Pedagogická diagnostika a individuální vzdělávací programme. [*Pedagogical diagnostics and individual educational programme*] Praha : Portál, 2001. p. 16. ISBN 80-7178-544-X.

⁵² VAŠEK, Š. 1991. Speciálnopedagogická diagnostika. [*Special-pedagogical diagnostics*] Bratislava : 1991. p. 9. ISBN 80-08-00396-0.

characteristics of special pedagogical diagnostics, it is necessary to briefly mention that it has developed in the context of pedagogical diagnostics, which according to Zelinkova⁵³, has a long tradition in the Czech Republic ⁵⁴, dating back to the works of Jan Amos Komensky.⁵⁵ In our country, undisputed boom dates back to the early 20th century, especially in the work of Klima (1978) and Vajcik (1968). Gavora ranks among the well-known Slovak authors (1992, 1999, 2000).

ISCED: *The International Standard Classification of Education* is a scale elaborated by UNESCO in the early 70's in order serve as a tool for comparing, compiling and presenting statistical data on education within particular countries, as well as internationally. The assessment method was confirmed by the International Conference on Education in Geneva in 1975.⁵⁶

ISCED 0: National Educational Programme for pre-elementary education in kindergartens is the first stage of the two-level model of educational programmes.⁵⁷

ISCED 1: National Educational Programme for elementary education within the first stage of elementary school. The Elementary Education Programme (the first stage of elementary school) is designed to ensure a smooth transition from the pre-school education and family care to the school education, by stimulating cognitive curiosity of children, based on their own personal knowledge and experience.⁵⁸

⁵³ ZELINKOVÁ, O. 2001. *Pedagogická diagnostika a individuální vzdělávací programme [Pedagogical diagnostics and individual educational programme]* Praha : Portál, 2001. ISBN 80-7178-544-X.

⁵⁴ Based on our opinion, in Slovakia as well.

⁵⁵ For example: Informatórium školy materskej

⁵⁶ *International Standard Classification of Education*. (ISCED) 2011. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Geneva.

⁵⁷ <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=34>. 15. 9. 2011.

⁵⁸ *National Educational Programme for elementary education within the first stage of elementary school in Slovakia*. 2008. ISCED 1 – Elementary education. National Institute for Education. Bratislava.

ISCED and zero grades in elementary school: The biggest advantage of zero grades within elementary schools is the fact that zero grades are part of educational standards in the category ISCED 1. Therefore, schools may provide elementary education even in zero grades. The total weekly number of lessons within the zero grade in elementary school is twenty-two. Schools elaborate curriculum and syllabi for zero grades according to the needs and development possibilities of a particular group of pupils, based on the National Educational Programmes for pre-elementary and elementary education (ISCED 0 and ISCED 1).⁵⁹

ISCED and special elementary school: Pupils receive elementary education by completing the educational programme for pupils with mental disability. Completed level of education is represented by the report (certificate) with an additional clause (ISCED 1).⁶⁰ According to ISCED classification, the graduates from special elementary school (only within the educational programme for pupils with mild disability – variant A) receive maximum of education at the level of ISCED 1, which might be disadvantaging for them in their future social and professional life.

Poverty: In Slovakia, the term "poverty" is not legislatively recognized (although it is used in multiple strategic documents). An equivalent term used in practice is "material deprivation", i.e. the state when a citizen's income doesn't meet the subsistence minimum set by the regulation, which sets a minimum income limit for an individual or family members. Roma are over-represented among the poorest and are ranked worse than others in terms of any basic social indicators, including education, health, housing conditions and access to opportunities in the labour market within the civil society.⁶¹

⁵⁹ Following § 19 of the Act No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act.

⁶⁰ Following § 16 Section 3 Letter a) of the Act No.245/2008 Coll. on Education and Training

⁶¹ Chudoba Rómov a sociálna starostlivosť o nich v Slovenskej republike. [*World Bank Report on Poverty and Welfare of Roma in the Slovak Republic*], 2002. Bratislava: World Bank, Foundation S.P.A.C.E., INEKO, Open Society Institute, 2002. p. 74. ISBN 80-88991-14-5.

Poverty culture: Its main characteristics are: particularly high level of social dependence, chronic economic insecurity, debt, diseases, increased crime rates, pathology and its tolerance, feeling of marginality, helplessness, fatalism and orientation to the present, poor control of emotions and impulses, low level of education, significantly different reproductive behaviour compared to the majority of population, low participation level in activities within broader social institutions (church, civil society, local governments, social and cultural institutions) and others. The members of these groups handle life situations by behaving alternatively (often deviant behaviour). This kind of behaviour is culturally inherited and transferred on to the next generations and thus becomes a social norm. In the long term, this behaviour enhances the rate of deflection from the character and standards of the dominant society, strengthens the social and cultural barriers and there is a weakening, or even disappearance of social ties with the environment outside the particular community - strengthens the social exclusion of the community and its members.⁶²

Acceleration: accelerating the development of children (pupils) who come from socially disadvantageous environment (of marginalized Roma settlements) in order to allow faster progress in education and especially in the process of socialization, through an application of Acceleration and Incentive Programmes.

1.1.1 Acceleration Programme

Implementation of the Acceleration Programme in classes with a higher number of Roma pupils is regarded as an integral part of special-pedagogical diagnostics and re-diagnostics. This programme represents a part of the *REF project "School for everybody"* and has been applied in first grades within elementary schools since October 2011 ((ZŠ Spišská Nová Ves, Nejedlého ulica; ZŠ Markušovce; ZŠ Smižany, Komenského ulica). We will be able to evaluate the efficiency after the implementation of the project's final phase in June

⁶² *Legislative intent of the Act on Socially Excluded Communities*. 2011. Internal material MPSVaR. Bratislava.

2013, but we consider it necessary to acknowledge readers with this topic and share our experiences on the challenging work in zero (or even first) grades of elementary schools.

The Acceleration Programme is a professionally processed programme, designed for all first grade pupils of elementary schools who for various reasons have difficulties in acquiring reading, writing, math and language knowledge and skills, necessary for succeeding at school. It's designed to meet the needs of pupils in areas of their weaknesses. The programme is appropriate and necessary for performing the work of each pedagogue, or special pedagogue (even for parents to work with their children at home).

The methodology of Acceleration Programme is prepared to allow a sufficient choice of lessons while respecting the pupil's individuality and teachers' options and accepting the expert knowledge along with the reality of schools. It is designed not only for the first-grade elementary school pupils, but also for those who are lagging behind in the upper grades of elementary school. The methodology only indicates particular areas, as the Acceleration Programme can only be implemented by graduated pedagogues who have all the necessary qualifications. Thus set criteria were implemented for the pilot verification within the project "*School for everybody*" (pedagogical university degree, professional experience of at least 15 years – including work experiences with the education of Roma pupils).

The Acceleration Programme consists of a theoretical part (methodology) and practical part, contains worksheets that are designed, so that in case of any problems with pupils in some areas, it would be possible to photocopy them and thus enable pupils to repeat the exercise as many times as it is required to. Pupils can perform practicing at school, or even at home, in order to avoid stress situations caused by the fact that the exercise must be performed and completed immediately and therefore it's desirable that pupils might have several attempts for completing the exercise.

Acceleration Programme characteristics:

- is elaborated for each month of the particular school year,
- consists of two lessons per week, which include selected areas to be accelerated,

- in addition to the guidelines for teachers, it also includes worksheets for pupils.

Acceleration Programme outcomes:

The starting point for the elaboration of Acceleration Programme were the conclusions and recommendations of the expert special-pedagogical examinations conducted on fifty-nine first-grade pupils of three elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district. Standardized, but also modified psycho-diagnostic screening methods (test, questionnaires...) were used during the examination, with an assumption that the examined sample of first-grade pupils had completed the zero grade and special pedagogical tests designed for this particular age group would lead to further difficulties in the education. Therefore, as a part of the special-pedagogical diagnostics, we have focused our attention on the anticipated problem areas, which should be strengthened by the Acceleration.

Analysis of the special-pedagogical examinations of selected first-grade elementary school pupils

The following tables 3-6 represent the data on the results of special-pedagogical diagnostics of elementary school pupils from three selected elementary schools.

Table 3 *Results of special-pedagogical diagnostics of first-grade pupils in Green Elementary school (22/ 9 girls)*

Diagnosed area	Description	Number	%
Wasn't attending the zero grade		–	–
Retaking the first grade		–	–
Linguistic level	understanding of the standard language	22	100
	mispronunciation of sounds (dyslalia)	13	59,1
Cognitive area	in total	15	68,18
	orientation in time	5	22,7
Phonemic awareness	in total	16	72,72
	determining the first sounds in a word	10	45,45
	Word creation for designed sound	19	86,36
	identification of sounds designated in a series of words	11	50

Right-left orientation		11	50
Hearing perception	hearing differentiation	1	4,54
	hearing analysis and synthesis	12	54,54
Dynamic praxis		2	9,09
Visual perception	0%	1	4,54
	under 50 %	3	13,63
	under 60 %	3	13,63
	under 70 %	4	18,18
	under 80 %	4	18,18
	under 100 %	7	31,82
Graphomotorics		14	63,63
Mathematical thinking	in total	21	95,45
	differentiation of geometric forms	17	77,27
	orientation in numerical row -descending	12	54,54

Table 4 *Results of special-pedagogical diagnostics of first-grade pupils in Blue elementary school (21/11girls)*

Diagnosed area	Description	Number	%
Wasn't attending the zero grade		–	–
Retaking the first grade		–	–
Linguistic level	understanding of the standard language	11	52,38
	mispronunciation of sounds (dyslalia)	3	14,28
Cognitive area	in total	8	38,1
	orientation in time	–	–
Phonemic awareness	in total	1	4,76
	determining the first sounds in a word	1	4,76
	word creation for designed sound	2	9,52
	identification of sounds designated in a series of words	1	4,76
Right-left orientation		6	28,57
Hearing perception	hearing differentiation	1	4,76
	hearing analysis and synthesis	–	–
Dynamic praxis		–	–
Visual perception	0%	5	23,81
	under 50 %	4	19,05
	under 60 %	3	14,28
	under 70 %	6	28,57
	under 80 %	2	9,52
	under 100 %	1	4,76
Graphomotorics		5	23,81

Mathematical thinking	in total	9	42,86
	differentiation of geometric forms	5	23,81
	orientation in numerical row - descending	2	9,52

Table 5 *Results of special-pedagogical diagnostics of first-grade pupils in Red elementary school (16/7 girls)*

Diagnosed area	Description	Number	%
Wasn't attending the zero grade		1	6,25
Retaking the first grade		8	50
Linguistic level	understanding of the standard language	12	75
	mispronunciation of sounds (dyslalia)	2	12,5
Cognitive area	in total	10	62,5
	orientation in time	2	12,5
Phonemic awareness	in total	2	12,5
	determining the first sounds in a word	8	50
	word creation for designed sound	1	6,25
	identification of sounds designated in a series of words	1	6,25
Right-left orientation		10	62,5
Hearing perception	hearing differentiation	1	6,25
	hearing analysis and synthesis	1	6,25
Dynamic praxis		–	–
Visual perception	0%	1	6,25
	under 50 %	1	6,25
	under 60 %	1	6,25
	under 70 %	4	25
	under 80 %	7	34,75
	under 100 %	2	12,5
Graphomotorics		5	31,25
Mathematical thinking	in total	13	81,25
	differentiation of geometric forms	13	81,25
	orientation in numerical row - descending	10	62,5

Table 6 *Results of special-pedagogical diagnostics of first-grade pupils in three elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district (59/27 girls)*

Diagnosed area	Description	Number	%
Wasn't attending the zero grade		1	1,69
Retaking the first grade		8	13,56
Linguistic level	understanding of the standard language	45	76,27
	mispronunciation of sounds (dyslalia)	18	30,51
Cognitive area	in total	33	55,93
	orientation in time	7	11,86
Phonemic awareness	in total	19	32,2
	determining the first sounds in a word	19	32,2
	word creation for designed sound	22	37,29
	identification of sounds designated in a series of words	13	22,03
Right-left orientation		27	45,76
Hearing perception	hearing differentiation	3	5,08
	hearing analysis and synthesis	13	22,03
Dynamic praxis		2	40,68
Visual perception	0%	7	11,86
	under 50 %	8	13,56
	under 60 %	7	11,86
	under 70 %	14	23,73
	under 80 %	13	22,03
	under 100 %	10	16,95
Graphomotorics		24	40,68
Mathematical thinking	in total	43	72,88
	differentiation of geometric forms	35	59,32
	orientation in numerical row - descending	24	40,68

Tables 8 to 11 provide the detailed analysis of special-pedagogical diagnostics and the analysis of diagnosed areas. In this context, it is important to mention that 1.69% of first-grade pupils didn't attend the zero grade and 13.46% of pupils are retaking the first grade. The most problematic areas within the diagnostics are dynamic praxis 40.68%, phonematic awareness 32.2%, graphomotorics 40.68% and right-left orientation 45.76%. The Analyses of particular diagnosed areas shows that there are many problematic areas

regarding the individuals (pupils) and their school result will remain unsatisfactory, unless these areas get accelerated and stimulated.

Developing areas within the Acceleration Programme

In this part of our work, we will further characterize areas, in which according to many years of practical experience, we expect a significant weakening of pupils' skills and abilities. The selection of these areas has been repeatedly confirmed, even after an execution and evaluation of special-pedagogical diagnostics of first-grade pupils on three selected elementary schools. The diagnostics showed that students are facing problems particularly in these areas and therefore it makes it difficult for them to successfully progress within the elementary education.

Areas of support through the Acceleration Programme

- speech, language and communication
- right-left and spatial orientation,
- visual and hearing perception,
- motorics and graphomotor skills,
- mathematical skills.

Speech, language and communication

Professional knowledge in the field of education and psychology shows the real need for the development of social and communication skills to justify the following:

Methods

- attitude changing methods,
- situational methods – inscenation methods (role playing, games)
- exemplification methods (model problems, example problems, problems with behavioural models),
- assertive behaviour training methods,
- diagnostics of pupils at the end of the zero grade (after an application of stimulation programme)

Targets

- improve communication skills of pupils,
- strengthen memory skills,
- establish bases for semantic networks (semantic memory), which is a prerequisite for the development of logical thinking,
- develop and strengthen child's memory skills,
- develop basic thinking operations by developing listening ability, understanding of spoken words and formulating own statements,
- develop the ability to communicate in native language,
- develop the ability to communicate in Slovak language,
- develop self-expression ability and promote positive self-image

Right-left and spatial orientation

Right-left spatial orientation plays the key role in orientation and it is related to lateral features of an individual.

Methods

- orientation on activities, manipulation with objects,
- experimentation, observation, recognition, measurement, sorting, comparing,
- development of play-time activities, dramatization of fairy tales.

Targets

Pupils will gain awareness skills in spatial orientation. We are expecting an improvement in right-left orientation in math, geometry and other subjects.

Visual and hearing perception

Targeted development and re-education of visual perception, right-left orientation, spatial perception of children from the pre-school age to lower secondary education.

Methods

- development of play-time activities,

- auditory exercises. hearing and motion exercises, movement-hearing-visual exercises designed to develop sensory perception.

Targets

Visual perception: increase the level of development of visual perception and eliminate errors in distinguishing the letters or Arabic and Roman numerals. Hearing perception: improve the level of hearing perception, which is decisive in determining the phonetic structure of words and manipulation with the sounds in words, improving the analysis of human language into words, syllables and sounds and synthesis of syllables and sounds into words.

Motorics and graphomotor skills

Methods

- games,
- creative manipulation activities,
- worksheets,
- stimulation and exercising of hand's muscles coordination,
- creative manipulation activities designed to develop elementary graphic and manipulation skills of pupils.

Targets

Development of motor and graphomotor skills is designed for accelerating the process of psychomotor development and development of basic graphomotor skills. Stimulation of psychomotor development processes and the development of basic graphomotor skills, which encourage the child's readiness for acquiring motor skills, writing, gross and fine motor skills. Pupils will acquire basic literacy, an ability to manipulate with objects. Improving process of gross and fine motor skills, as well as sensory perception, will be acquired and developed by playing games.

Mathematical skills

Since the majority of Roma children don't speak literary language, the development of mathematical thinking of Roma children, directly related to

speaking, has therefore logically different character, content and totally different meaning than for non-Roma children.

Methods

- orientation activities, manipulation with objects,
- experimentation, observation, recognition, measurement, classification, comparison,
- development activates for supporting creativity, solving logical and mathematical puzzles, riddles, brain-teasers, tangrams and jigsaws,
- development of play-time activities, dramatization of fairy tales,
- implementation of propaedeutic of algorithms on real-life situations.

Targets

Improving the level of mathematical thinking, thereby increasing the level of precision, stamina, concentration, and functional use of critical thinking, logical reasoning, abstraction and generalization. Pupils will learn how to compare and classify objects according to their properties, count them, develop a basic idea about numbers, orientation in time, space, place, recognize numbers, learn how to organize, sum up and deduct.

Acceleration Programme allows the teachers, school and special counselling pedagogues, as well as parents, to intensively work with pupils and strengthen areas that are preventing them from succeeding at school. The results and evaluation of the Acceleration Programme's effectiveness will be introduced to the public after the verification will be completed in 2013.

1.1.2 Inclusive education

- method of education in mainstream schools, based on the right of every child for a quality education, putting emphasis on elimination of educational barriers that prevent from an equal access to education,
- automatic child's right for attending mainstream elementary school, education of all children together,

- ensuring equal opportunities for all pupils in order to acquire effective educational services, required supplementary aids and support services in age appropriate classes, to prepare students for productive lives as full members of the society.⁶³

Basic principles of inclusive education of Roma children and pupils

The principle of inclusion, solidarity, equal treatment (non-discrimination), complexity, individual approach, motivation, meriting and the principle of cooperation. Every child is unique and has special interests and educational needs that have to be taken into an account. The mainstream educational system has to consider *inclusive orientation* as an effective way of eliminating the discriminatory attitudes, creating supportive communities, building an inclusive society and achieving education for all.⁶⁴ According to some authors, the principles of *inclusive education* are insufficiently implemented into the current pedagogical practice. Inclusive approach can be defined as "the unconditional acceptance of special needs of all children". Its objective is to perceive heterogeneity as normality.⁶⁵ In regards to upbringing and education in schools, it means that children are not supposed to be divided into those with special needs and those without them. One of the visions is to achieve maximum enrichment of an individual within the society, based on interculturality and heterogeneity, i.e. the diversity of cultural, linguistic and social environment.⁶⁶ In practice, we are concerned with the unconditional acceptance of children by their teachers and children among themselves in order to develop the value of inclusion (acceptance, social orientation, empathy). Inclusive education is therefore an attempt for finding the optimum education of children with disabilities, disruption and threats

⁶³ Nationwide study *Inclusive Education*. 1995. City University in New Yorku, National Center on Educational Restructuring and Inclusion. New York.

⁶⁴ ARMSTRONG, F. Inclusive education. In MCCulloch, G. – Crook, D. (ed.): *The Routledge International Encyclopedia of Education*. London and New York : Routledge, 2008. ISBN 0-415-27747-7.

⁶⁵ LEONHARDT, A. – LECHTA, V. a kol. *Inkluzívna pedagogika ako odbor, princíp a politikum, verzus jej realizácia* [*Inclusive education as a discipline, principle and politics, versus its implementation*]. Efeta, 17, 2007, n. 2, p. 2 – 5.

⁶⁶ SCHMIDTOVÁ, M. *Nový smer v pedagogike – integratívna pedagogika*. [New approach in pedagogy – integrative pedagogy] Efeta, 17, 2007, n. 1, p. 2 – 3.

(including Roma children from socially disadvantageous environment), in terms of mainstream schools and school facilities.

Relevant documents defining the term inclusive education come from UNESCO,⁶⁷ the Council of Europe and the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education. The concept of inclusive education is considered to be broader and more complete, compared to the concept of integrated education. While integration focuses primarily on physical integration of handicapped children into mainstream classes, inclusion is designated onto the fulfilment of the fundamental right for accessing education of the highest quality which contains the value aspect and respects the principles of justice (fairness) and equal opportunities, while approaching people with special upbringing and educational needs. Inclusive education can only be understood in complexity and integrity, where various stages (from pre-school care up to further education) complement and overlap each other and where knowledge, power and value aspect of educational standards are balanced. In relation to individuals with special needs, or to other individuals (different from the majority on the basis of random characters). More important than the physical integration is mutual understanding, building respect, mutual recognition and development of social contacts, including the creation of inclusive environment throughout the society. Fully inclusive education is regarded as a target point for the future, to which society should be approaching by the means of progressive formation of human resources, material conditions and institutional background.⁶⁸ It is necessary to develop specific models for the inclusion of different situations and target groups and to develop the general model for inclusive schools in the future. This applies particularly to several target groups, whose specificities should be considered preferably when creating inclusive school environment: Roma, especially those living in marginalized area of social exclusion, people with disabilities, members of ethnic minorities, foreigners and migrants.⁶⁹ In relation to children from

⁶⁷ Policy Guidelines on the Inclusion in Education, 2009.

⁶⁸ Conclusions from the meeting of the working group on the issue of inclusive education, established within the Slovak Government Council for Human Rights, National Minorities and Gender Equality on 14 June 2011, the Government Office.

⁶⁹ <https://lt.justice.gov.sk/Material/MaterialHome.aspx?instEID=1&matEID=4043&lang=EID=1>. 24. 2. 2012.

marginalized Roma communities, it is necessary to improve their diagnostics while assigning them to special schools. They should be educated in special schools according to their objectively qualified need, but on the other hand, they should also be able to enrol themselves into the mainstream classes at any point of their educational career, with a potential to proceed to the higher educational level. Regarding these children, the system has to be improved and more innovative, in order to enable their full social inclusion and integration into the labour market.⁷⁰

The implementation of inclusive education is based on these international conventions and documents:

1. *The conclusions of the conference in Salamanca* (June 7 - 10, 1994) where ninety-two countries and twenty-five international organizations were represented. They all agreed on Action Programmes for the support of inclusive education for all pupils with special educational needs.⁷¹
2. *The Lisbon strategy* (European Council of 23th and 24th March 2000 in Lisbon), which among other things, committed the European countries to ensure the availability of quality education for social (minority groups, long-term unemployed, graduates, seniors) or physically handicapped and the elimination of discrimination.⁷²
3. *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities* provides the rights for disabled persons to be inclusively educated, so particular states are committed to transform their educational system in order to fully comply with conditions necessary for the implementation of inclusive education. On March 9, 2010, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the proposal of the Government to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.⁷³

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education.* http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF. 14. 5. 2012.

⁷² *The Lisbon Strategy.* http://circa.europa.eu/irc/opoce/fact_sheets/info/data/policies/lisbon/article_7207_sk.htm. 14. 5. 2012.

⁷³ *United Nations Convention on the rights of persons with disabilities.* <http://www.zpmpvsr.sk/dokum/dohovorOSN.pdf>. 14. 5. 2012.

4. *UNESCO – Political guidelines for the inclusion of education* in relation to 48th International Conference on Education, entitled *Inclusive education: The Way Forward*. UNESCO defines inclusive education as the process of responding to the diversity of needs of all pupils, through increasing their participation in education. “*To perceive education from inclusive perspective assumes that the system failure will be considered as a problem instead of individual failure.*” (UNESCO, 2009).⁷⁴
5. *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* no. 460/1992 Coll., II. Head of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, Economic section, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 42, which guarantees the right for education to everyone. The concept of inclusive education is a state commitment, which derives from the International Human Rights Agreements. Inclusive education is not to be confused with mechanical desegregation or integration of different groups of pupils.
6. *Membership of the Slovak Republic in the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education* (Government Resolution No. 682 of November 2nd, 2011), allowing us to be part of an international professional platform supporting the development of inclusive education.⁷⁵ The core philosophy of the agency is the inclusion of pupils with special pedagogical needs into mainstream education.
7. *Conclusions of the International Conference: Assumptions on inclusive education in Slovakia* (8. 11. 2011 Bratislava), representing commitment of the Slovak Republic to prevent all forms of discrimination, with special focus on selected target groups, especially Roma children with disabilities, children from minorities, children from socially disadvantaged environment, as well as foreign children.⁷⁶

Several Slovak authors are dealing with the issue of inclusive education (Zelina, Gábor, Porubský...). We agree the most with the approach of Horňák

⁷⁴ http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Dialogue/48th_ICE/Press_Kit/Interview_Clementina_Eng13Nov.pdf. 14. 5. 2012.

⁷⁵ *Government negotiations of* November 2, 2011. [http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Rok-Sub1378?listName=RokovanieSubory&prefixFile=rs_](http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/Rok-Sub1378?listName=RokovanieSubory&prefixFile=rs_.). 14. 5. 2012.

⁷⁶ *International conference on inclusive education*. 2011. <http://www.governance.sk/index.php?id=1826>. 14. 5. 2012.

who states that: “... the idea of inclusive education is essential, but to some extent, it is a certain type of fashion trend in pedagogy, as it was with integrative education after 1989. Excessive zeal, along with unpreparedness for the integration of pupils with special upbringing and educational needs, often caused an opposite effect. Therefore, we should learn from mistakes committed in past and approach inclusive education slowly and cautiously.”⁷⁷ We also agree with his proposals in the area of inclusive education of socially disadvantaged pupils (listed selectively):

- Mandatory three-year pre-school education for all children.
- Taking the specificities of pupils from marginalized Roma communities into account more intensively.
- The introduction of all-day educational system in elementary schools.
- Specific training of teachers and teacher’s assistants of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment.
- Developing specific school inclusion models for different target groups.⁷⁸

1.2 Overview of legislative standards in Slovakia (in relation to the education of Roma pupils)

To improve the public awareness, this section presents the current legal standards and concepts relevant to the topic of our work.

1. *Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations on November 20, 1989* ⁷⁹, imposes an obligation of the state and local governments to create conditions for equal opportunities in access of children to education, with particular emphasis on those groups that are disadvantaged due to social and cultural specifics

⁷⁷ HORŇÁK, L. 2010. Rómovia a inkluzívna pedagogika. [Roma and inclusive pedagogy] In Lechta, V. (ed.): *Transdisciplinárne aspekty inkluzívnej pedagogiky*. [Transdisciplinary aspects of inclusive education] Yearbook of the magazine Efeta, pub. EMITplus s. r. o., 2010, p. 207 – 215. ISBN 978-80-970623-2-3.

⁷⁸ HORŇÁK, L. 2012. Špecifiká inkluzívnej edukácie u rómskych žiakov zo sociálne znevýhodňujúceho prostredia [Specifics on inclusive education of Roma pupils from socially disadvantageous environment. Smolenice] – in the press.

⁷⁹ Published in the Collection of Acts of ČSFR under No. 104/1991.

2. *Medium-term Concept of the Development of Roma National minority in the Slovak Republic* SOLIDARITY – INTEGRITY – INCLUSION 2008 – 2013, approved by the Government of the Slovak Republic on November 6, 2008 which outlines the process of policy-making in relation to solving the problems of Roma and their social integration and coexistence with the majority society. The "Roma problem" is defined as a multi-dimensional range of issues which have to be addressed comprehensively and directly. One of the possible effective ways of how to deal with the current situation is to identify and name causation, by precisely defining the current social (and educational) issues and situations, particularly in relation to marginalized Roma communities.
3. *Decade of Roma Inclusion for the period 2005 - 2015 and the Roma Education Fund* (Government Resolution no. 28/2005), whose fundamental principle is the political commitment of governments to fight the poverty, exclusion and discrimination of Roma within the regional framework. The main objective of the Decade is to accelerate progress in improving the living conditions of Roma by including them into decision-making process and to review such progress in transparent and quantifiable way. It actively seeks stimulating ideas and provides technical expertise and guidance for the preparation and implementation of the proposals. The main objective of the REF is to support systemic change in education policy of Roma population, by using the experience and knowledge of the local NGO projects. REF is a grant foundation connecting and supporting the programmes and projects aimed at improving the "Roma" education.⁸⁰
4. Resolution of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 206/2008 The Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Students including the Development of Secondary and Higher Education.
5. Special measures of the Slovak Ministry of Education to prepare a sufficient number of pedagogues teaching in Roma language (role No. 29 of the Government Resolution No. 278/2003), approved by the Ministry of Education under: CD-2004-7613/14980-1: 097 of June 28, 2004.

⁸⁰ <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/romsky-vzdelavaci-fond>. 1. 9. 2011.

6. *Draft Concept of Upbringing and Education of Nationality Minorities*, approved by the Government Resolution No. 100/2007 of December 19, 2007. The purpose of this Concept is creating favourable conditions for equal education for all citizens of the Slovak Republic and national minorities (with emphasis on the Roma).
7. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination, amending and supplementing certain other acts. In the so-called “Antidiscrimination Act“, the emphasis is on the respect for the principles of equal treatment, which consists in the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion or belief, race, nationality or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, colour, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or others.
8. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education regulates upbringing and education of children, including special conditions for education of children from socially disadvantaged environment, the position of teacher’s assistant as a part of pedagogical staff to overcome language, health and social barriers of a child in the educational process and classifies zero grades in elementary schools.
9. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 597/2003 Coll. on Financing of Elementary and Secondary Schools and School Facilities provides financing of upbringing and educational processes, operation, reconstruction and modernization of school facilities and its equipment. It also regulates financing of kindergartens, including a special legal regime of funding, in relation to children from socially disadvantageous environment and allowances, to partially cover all educational costs for children the year prior to the beginning of compulsory school attendance.
10. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 544/2010 Coll. on *Subsidies within the Purview of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic* regulates subsidies in order to promote education of children threatened by the social exclusion and to promote their eating habits as well.

11. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 317/2009 Coll. on *Pedagogical Staff and Specialists* regulates the system of continual education of pedagogical staff, self-education and creative activities of pedagogical employees and specialists, including those working with Roma pupils.
12. Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 596/2003 Coll. of November 5, 2003, on the State Administration in Schools and School Administration and on amending and supplementing certain legislation as amended by later regulation.
13. Regulation of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 422/2009 Coll. of October 2009, *stating the Scope of Direct Education Activity and Direct Training Activity of Pedagogical Employees* (including pedagogical assistants working with Roma pupils).
14. Regulation of the Government of the Slovak Republic No. 630/2008 Coll., of December 10, 2008, which establishes the *details of the breakdown of the financial means* from the state budget for schools and school facilities as amended by later regulation, which also sets an amount of financial means per zero grade pupil.
15. Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 649/2008 Coll., of December 17, 2008, on the Purpose of using the allowance for students from socially disadvantaged environment, according to which the allowances aimed at improving the conditions for the education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, with the possibility of their use for payments of costs, including wages of teacher's assistants dedicated for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, are determined.
16. Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 325/2008 Coll. on School facilities of Education consulting and Prevention (of August 6, 2008). The Decree defines the scope of centres of pedagogical-psychological counselling and prevention and centres of special-pedagogical counselling in the process of assessment of school readiness and subsequent enrolment of pupils into zero grades.
17. Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 323/2008 Coll. of August 6, 2008, on *Special Educational Facilities*. This

- Decree provides the details on the organization of the educational process in special educational facilities, individual re-education programmes, forms and methods of education, applied in the process of re-education, educational groups, diagnostic groups, and so on.
18. Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No 322/2008 Coll. of August 6, 2008, on *special schools*. This Decree provides details about the organization, internal differentiation and length of upbringing and educational in special schools, regulates enrolment procedures of children and pupils within these schools, provides the details on upbringing and education, assessment and classification of pupils' school results and behaviour of pupils and on the number of children and pupils in classes of special schools.
 19. Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No 320/2008 Coll. of July 23, 2008, on elementary schools. This Decree regulates the organization of elementary school, compulsory school attendance, organization and provision of upbringing and educational activities in school (even in zero grade), including the integration of pupils with special educational needs within, or even outside the schools, pupils with talent and evaluation and classification rules.
 20. Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 306/2008 Coll. of July 23, 2008, on kindergartens. This Regulation provides details on the organization and provision of upbringing and educational activates in kindergartens. According to this Regulation, children from socially disadvantageous environment are assigned into classes with other children. When particular class consists only of children from socially disadvantageous environment, maximum of sixteen children can be enrolled in such class.
 21. METHODOICAL INSTRUCTIONS of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 32/2011 on the assessment of pupils with mild mental disability ISCED-1.
 22. METHODOICAL INSTRUCTIONS of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 32/2011 on the assessment of pupils with moderate mental disability ISCED-1.

23. GUIDELINE of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 10/2008-R of August 28, 2008, laying down the procedures for the reimbursement of travel expenses of elementary school pupils and pupils with special educational needs.
24. GUIDELINE of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 16/2008-R of December 18, 2008, setting out the system of the breakdown of funds and wages and social insurance contributions for teacher's assistants of pupils with disabilities, or for talented pupils.
25. *Pedagogical and organizational guidelines of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic for the school year 2011/2012*, which specify approaches of schools and educational facilities, including the education of Roma children (even in zero grades).

1.2.1 Pedagogical-organizational guidelines of the Ministry of Education for the school years 2011/2012 and 2012/2013

We consider pedagogical-organizational guidelines for the school year 2011/2012 particularly important when it comes to addressing the delay of compulsory education of socially disadvantaged (mostly Roma) pupils.

If a child has not reached sufficient school capacity by the age of six and comes from socially disadvantaged environment, the school director (according to these guidelines), based on the recommendation of the Centre for Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling and Prevention, and decides to include such pupil into the zero grade of elementary school. Delay of school attendance may be recommended only in serious and legitimate cases and has to be approved by the paediatrician (poor school readiness is not a sufficient reason for the delay in school attendance). School director may decide about the delay of school attendance or about the child's inclusion into zero grade according to recommendations from kindergarten. Insufficient upbringing and educational premises in kindergartens are not considered as valid reasons for

the child's inclusion into zero grade⁸¹. In order to decide, director needs to obtain a request from the child's legal representative. After an approval from the legal guardian, director will issue a decision on the delay of school attendance for the child who will further attend kindergarten. He may also issue a decision to accept a pupil who will be a part of the zero grade. Such children begin their compulsory school attendance.

In regards to the national minorities and socially disadvantaged environment, the Ministry of Education recommends to:

- apply prohibition of any forms of discrimination and segregation in schools and school facilities,
- eliminate problems of pupils from marginalized groups, which hinders their acceptance into mainstream schools and school facilities,
- enrol these pupils into mainstream classes,
- create suitable conditions for their education in schools and classrooms, along with the majority population,
- ensure cooperation in the research of the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre on the status of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment within the educational system in Slovakia, with the focus on segregation.

In schools where children and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment are educated, the Ministry of Education recommends to take measures to improve their attendance, behaviour and educational results. Schools should provide suitable conditions for such children and also use experimentally validated educational documents to assist in planning of teaching the Roma language and literature based on the educational programme (pedagogical documents: the Roma language curriculum for 1st to 4th grade of elementary school, Roma language curriculum for secondary vocational schools and grammar schools, targeted standard of Roma language

⁸¹ Author's note: Despite the current legislation, according to the author's experience, the unavailability of kindergartens (especially in rural areas) for many Roma children remains a major factor affecting their school readiness and their need for the completion of zero grade.

education for secondary vocational and grammar schools, curriculum for the school subject – Roma realia).⁸²

Pedagogical and organizational guidelines of the Ministry of Education for the school year 2012/2013⁸³ emphasize the need for changing the strongly segregating Slovak school system into an integrative (inclusive) school system, particularly when it comes to the education of Roma children. Following objectives (listed selectively) are set out as a part of the sections on the national minorities, socially disadvantaged environment, foreigners and discrimination:

1. Apply prohibition of any forms of discrimination and segregation within schools and school facilities. Eliminate undesirable phenomena such as spatial, organizational, physical and symbolic exclusion or segregation of Roma children, because of their ethnicity (often in combination with the social disadvantage) from other pupils. Consistently solve the problems of children and pupils from marginalized environment, which hinder their adoption process into mainstream schools and school facilities and the subsequent educational process; create favourable conditions for their education in schools and classrooms, along with the majority population.
2. Provide and perform tasks arising from the revised Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015 for the years 2011 – 2015 mainly:
 - address the participation of children from socially disadvantaged environment on the pre-school education of children aged four to six,
 - support kindergartens in implementing the programmes focused on improving the cooperation with Roma parents and engaging of teacher's assistants in kindergartens,
 - control enrolment procedures of pupils into special schools,
 - ensure the implementation of psychological diagnostics of children before the start of their compulsory school attendance only in the Centre of Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention (hereinafter "CPPPaP"),

⁸² http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/RegionalneSkolstvo/POP/POP_2011_2012.pdf. 15. 9. 2011.

⁸³ http://www.minedu.sk/data/USERDATA/RegionalneSkolstvo/POP/POP_2012-2013.pdf. 27. 6. 2012

- promote the use of Roma language as a part of the pre-school and elementary education (first stage) and identify the interest of Roma parents (while registering to elementary and secondary school) in teaching the Roma language.
3. The Roma educational, information, documentation, counselling and consultation centre (ROCEPO) with a nationwide coverage provides professional and methodological assistance for schools and school facilities in the field of upbringing and educational of Roma children a children from socially disadvantaged environment (hereinafter “SDE”).
 4. Schools provide collaboration in the research of the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre (hereinafter “MPC”) on status of a child and pupil from socially disadvantaged environment in the educational system of the Slovak Republic, with a focus on inclusive education.
 5. As a part of the national project *“Through Educating Pedagogical Staff to the Inclusion of Roma Communities*, the MPC will start to apply pedagogical model of an all-day educational system on two hundred selected schools.
 6. In schools which educate children and pupils from SDE - in partnership with the founders, authorities of Labour, Social Affairs and Family offices and community centres, to adopt such measures that would improve attendance, behaviour and educational results of children; provide suitable individual conditions for upbringing and educational.
 7. Intensify counselling and educational activities for educational staff and for legal guardians of children and pupils from SDE,
 8. Consider the Roma language as an important criteria for the hiring process of teacher’s assistants in schools with a high number of children and pupils from marginalized communities.
 9. In schools with a high number of pupils from marginalized communities, inform the parents about possibilities of teaching the Roma language and literature.

While enrolling children within the first grade of elementary school, the participation of a psychologist, special pedagogue, kindergarten teacher and teacher’s assistant is recommended, with an emphasis on increasing the cooperation with counselling facilities, especially while enrolling children into

the zero grades. Pupils will be included into specialized classes only for a certain period of time, while the compensation and development programme will be implemented. School facilities for educational counselling and prevention should pay an extra attention to children from disadvantaged environment, particularly to children from marginalized communities. If elaborated examination reveals that a child has not reached the school readiness because of SDE, does not attend kindergarten and is not expected to achieve school readiness during the delay of the school attendance by targeted procedures (regular attendance at kindergarten, stimulating and developing programmes), it would be more beneficial for such child to get enrolled in the zero grade, or use other forms of education. It is recommended to monitor children with the delay of the compulsory school attendance and to perform control psychological assessments before their training starts.

If all mentioned recommendations will be followed strictly, an overall situation in establishing an inclusive environment within schools can change positively. In order to meet these recommendations, a great effort from all the participants is required.

1.3 Analysis of selected view and concepts on the system of education of Roma pupils in Slovakia

In this part of our publication, we will familiarize readers with some of the major concepts and ideas of foreign organizations about highly segregated educational system of Roma pupils in Slovakia.

1.3.1 Medium-term development concept of the Roma minority in the Slovak Republic

Medium-term Concept of the Development of Roma National minority in the Slovak Republic SOLIDARITY – INTEGRITY – INCLUSION 2008 – 2013 is an important conceptual material in the education of Roma population, approved by the Government at its 89th meeting on March 26, 2008, based on the

Government Programme and approved by the Government Resolution No. 660 of July 31, 2006.⁸⁴ This concept is focused mainly on the systematic solution of the Roma education.

The educational level of Roma population has been long below the national average, which especially applies for the members of marginalized Roma communities. The current educational system in Slovakia continues to be strongly mono-cultural and unfriendly in approach to ethnic minorities and vulnerable groups and remains significantly unsuccessful in activating and motivating pupils coming from such conditions. The problems include: ethnic segregation in schools, high proportion of Roma in special schools, but also a large number of pupils in classes generally. One of the major indicators of poor integration of Roma children into the society is their little participation on pre-school education, incomplete elementary education, low participation at colleges and universities.

Based on the proposed concept of education of Roma children and pupils, including the development of secondary and university education (Ministry of Education, 2008), the Government of the Slovak Republic proposes the state administration authorities, public administration authorities and NGOs, to fully focus their attention on the strategic plans and proposed measures for the period of 2008 – 2015.

Strategic goals in upbringing and education

- in cooperation with the particular Ministry, reform the educational process management in Slovakia, so that local social and cultural conditions will remain respected, while preparing and implementing the school curriculum focused on increasing of educational level of the Roma community.
- stabilize and professionalize the position of teacher's assistant for children from socially disadvantaged environment as educational and pedagogical staff – specialist.
- prepare proposals and measures aimed at opening new accredited university courses focusing on Roma language and cultural studies (Institute of Roma studies at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care of UKF Nitra in

⁸⁴ <http://romovia.vlada.gov.sk/index.php?ID=5048>, 29. 5. 2010.

cooperation with the Faculty of Philosophy of the University in Prešov, the Faculty of Education at Comenius University in Bratislava (FEDU CU), the Faculty of Education of Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, the Faculty of Education of the Catholic University in Ružomberok and others).

- legislative support for the implementation of the curriculum transformation, through which schools would have better opportunities to participate on the elaboration of school curriculum with regards to the educational needs of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment.
- legislatively define the term “child/pupil from socially disadvantaged environment“, and in cooperation with the particular Ministry, define pupils from socially disadvantaged environment as pupils with special (individual) upbringing and educational needs.
- reform the school system in order to focus on the individuality of educated individuals with special upbringing and educational needs.
- create the possibility of education on ethnic principle for children and pupils of the Roma ethnic minority.

Proposed measures in the area of upbringing and education (selectively):

In kindergartens

- legislatively solve the normative financing of teacher’s assistants in kindergartens located in municipalities with a high number of Roma children.

In elementary schools

- maintain and develop the system of zero grades in elementary schools for six year old children who are not being school eligible (justification: the system of zero grades has been established successfully); develop the content and educational system in zero grades in order to stimulate the development of personalities, cognitive functions, socialization and to compensate the deficit of the pre-school preparation; after completing the zero grade, determine another educational method for pupils who were examined on their achieved level of school readiness by the means of psychological methods.
- include teacher’s assistant for more than seven socially disadvantaged pupils into the normative (this measure will improve the educational process and

creates space for the development of cooperation between schools and families; teacher's assistants from local communities will gain versatility within the educational process),

- define the difference between teacher's assistant for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment and assistant for disabled pupils,
- *in the field of secondary education*, expand the work scope of teacher's assistant for secondary schools as well.

1.3.2 Decade of Roma Inclusion for the years 2005-2015 and the REF (Government Resolution No. 28/2005)

*The Decade of Roma Inclusion*⁸⁵ as a framework document defines the priority areas. It is followed by the National Action Plan of the Slovak Republic regarding the Decade of Roma Inclusion, which outlines individual areas up to the level of measurement indicators. *The Medium-term Concept of the Development of the Roma National Minority in the Slovak Republic 2007 – 2015* is the current document involving all the strategies and recommendations, including the Decade. All analysed documents recommend the findings within particular areas and will serve as valuable information resources for the achievement of project's objective. The Decade was adopted by eight European countries (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Macedonia, Romania, Serbia and Montenegro, Slovakia).

International steering committee (responsible for planning the Decade) set the following priority areas:

- education,
- housing,
- employment,
- healthcare.

and following common themes:

- poverty,

⁸⁵ <http://www.romadecade.org/files/downloads/Decade%20Documents/SK%20Action%20Plan%20-%20Slovak.pdf>. 1. 9. 2011.

- discrimination,
- gender issues.

In the topic context of our work, we've chosen those parts of the Decade, which are related to the education of Roma children and are linked to the Concept for the Integrated Education of Roma Children and Youth (2004). The Action Plan recommends focusing on (selectively):

- improving the educational results of Roma,
- improving the school readiness and upbringing of Roma children,
- promote the education of Roma pupils in secondary schools,
- lower the percentage of Roma children attending special elementary schools and facilities,
- promote lifelong education of Roma.

One of the conditions for the integration of Roma into the society is to change negative attitudes within the majority population, which might be achieved by the systematic modification of educational content. The human development, with an emphasis on marginalized Roma community, is conducted on three basic levels within the work scope of the Ministry of Education:

- preparation of teacher, teacher's assistant, educator, etc. as one of the key elements for performing of changes,
- elaboration of books, methodological guides for teachers, providing teaching materials and other materials necessary for the educational process,
- Curricular transformation of unilateral orientation to physical education in order to transmit as much of learning content towards the formal education as possible. Formal education aims at the holistic development of pupil's personality, while accepting his individual peculiarities and needs, as well as focusing on the development of the core competencies.

Establishment of the *Roma Education fund (REF)* is considered as the complementary activity within the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Its main purpose is to provide financial assistance to all participating countries in order to implement action plans in the "education priority". The founder is the World Bank. Some activities within the Slovak National Action Plan in the education priority will be co-financed by the Fund.

In addition to the conceptual materials, an important role in regards to the education of Roma is carried out by two major state institutions:

- *Inter-Ministerial Committee for Roma Community Affairs at the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities*⁸⁶,
- *Expert group of the Ministry of Education for the education of Roma*.⁸⁷

REF negatively evaluates the existing preparatory classes in special schools for children with mild mental retardation, having a simplified curriculum and is more likely to serve as the beginning of practice in special education.⁸⁸

According to the publication *Advancing education of Roma in Slovakia 2011*⁸⁹, in the section *Strategic direction of future REF activities, where strategic directions of future REF activities in Slovakia in the field of education are outlined (listed selectively)*:

- Promoting the sustainable redeployment of Roma children who have been incorrectly placed in special schools and classes back into the mainstream education, primarily by supporting of local pilot projects with the potential for its expansion onto the regional and national level.
- Prevention from an incorrect placement of Roma children within the special education, through some of the measures, including the provision of understandable information to parents about the consequences of special education for the further education and employment possibilities of their children; to provide integrated pre-school education and out-of-school support during the first years of elementary education. Zero grade project activities will probably not be supported, since experiences with zero grades show that they've contributed to segregated education. Dividing of the first grade within elementary schools into two separate grades makes it really disadvantageous for these children in regards to their peers who attended the pre-school education.

According to above mentioned, it seems that REF opinions on zero grades in Slovakia are rather negative, sceptical. REF organization recently supported

⁸⁶ <http://romovia.vlada.gov.sk/index.php?ID=3614>. 6. 6. 2008.

⁸⁷ <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=36>. 6. 6. 2008.

⁸⁸ <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/romsky-vzdelavaci-fond-0>. 24. 6. 2011.

⁸⁹ *ibid.*

projects (related to the topic of our study), designed to provide an integrated pre-school education in the Prešov Region within the eastern Slovakia. The project *SLO 008 Let's go to school together – the Concept of Integrated Education of Roma Pupils in Slovakia*, was carried out from July 2008 until December 2008 and was led by the Ministry of Education, which coordinated activities of several other implementing partners from the state administration and others as well. Independent external evaluation of the project SLO 008 showed that the project was beneficial for all participating children, helped to increase the participation within the pre-school education and improved the attendance of children who had already been registered into the pre-school education. REF also represents a governing body within the project *A Good Start - Dobrý štart* financed by the EU in the amount of 1,9 million EUR under the open call for project proposals from 2009, designed for the pilot project of *Pan-European coordination of Roma integration methods – Roma inclusion*. The project was implemented from June 2010 until April 2012 in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia, where the project activities combined experiences of the Roma Education Fund and its partners in pre-school education and in the transition process onto the elementary education.⁹⁰

1.3.3 Amnesty International, UNDP and the education of Roma children in Slovakia

AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL, International secretariat, Peter Benenson House in London published the publication: *Still separate, still unequal (violation of the right to education of Roma children in Slovakia)*, where the education process of Roma children is criticized.⁹¹ In our opinion, evaluation of this organization is too tendentious, not being objective and based only on one-sided information without knowing the real global conditions of education of Roma children in Slovakia. The publication rated some of the "most problematic" locations in

⁹⁰ <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/romsky-vzdelavaci-fond-0>. 24. 6. 2011.

⁹¹ AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. 2007. *Slovensko: Stále segregovaní, stále v nerovnom postavení. (Porušovanie práva na vzdelanie rómskych detí na Slovensku)*. International Secretariat Peter Benenson House v Londýne [Still separate, still unequal (Violation of the right to education of Roma children in Slovakia)] International Secretariat Peter Benenson House in London (al index EUR 72/001/2007). without ISBN.

Slovakia (Letanovce Jarovnice, Svinia, Markušovce and Trebišov), without comparing them with other positively evolving locations, which we consider not to be objective, or even taken out of the context. On the other hand, we must admit that a lot of knowledge and information points to problems and deficiencies in the process of education of Roma children. One of the most criticized is an assessment of Roma housing and its dangerous conditions, denial of the right for education of Roma children taking place within the system of segregated schools, denying linguistic and cultural rights and the lack of access of Roma children to the pre-school education. The authors have relatively positive opinion on the introduction of teacher's assistant as a profession, along with the zero grades of elementary schools. They particularly criticize the lack of qualified teacher's assistants (Roma), their lack of financial security, their short-term employment policy and the lack of education and training for teachers and teacher's assistants in the field of culture, language, history and religion of Roma.⁹²

On May 28, 2008, the Amnesty International in its annual report for 2007 assessed the situation regarding human rights in more than 150 countries. According to this report, major part of the Roma population is a part of vicious circle of poverty and displacement. "Roma pupils are often unreasonably placed into segregated schools where they are separated from the majority population and they are often placed in specialized classes or special schools for mentally handicapped children. Continuous segregation of Roma children within the educational system violates their right to education without being discriminated, because the government has failed to provide an adequate education of Roma. "⁹³

UNDP Programmes (United Nations Development Programme) on Roma

The Roma issue in Slovakia raises concern even in the International organization within the UN (United Nations Development Programme - UNDP),

⁹² AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL. 2007. Slovensko: Stále segregovaní, stále v nerovnom postavení. (Porušovanie práva na vzdelanie rómskych detí na Slovensku). [*Still separate, still unequal (violation of the right to education of Roma children in Slovakia)*] International Secretariat Peter Benenson House in London (al index EUR 72/001/2007). p. 31. without ISBN.

⁹³ <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&q=Spr%C3%A1va+Amnesty+International+&btnG=HC4%BEada%C5%A5+v+Google&meta=>). 29. 5. 2010.

which has a long-term interest in participating on the preparation of various projects on the issues of marginalized Roma communities. One of the projects was the call for review of the National Action Plans of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015, aiming to take an advantage of this international initiative for more effective and faster integration of marginalized Roma communities into the society and should contribute to more transparent and clearer assessment of priorities within the Decade. UNDP priority is to significantly improve the living conditions of Roma households.⁹⁴ Survey results and analysis of living conditions of Roma households serve as a prerequisite for the establishment of effective national policy on the integration of vulnerable groups in general, particularly Roma into the society. They focus on poverty and its causes, employment and unemployment, social support and integration support of Roma children within the school system of Slovakia.

1.3.4 Legislative intent of the Act on Socially Excluded Communities

In the next part of our work, we will analyse the fundamental problem areas in the field of education of Roma children and pupils. We will selectively list the most basic ones and in this context, we will also analyse the draft Law on *Socially Excluded Communities* prepared by the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family, with an emphasis on relevant topics to our scientific study – how to proceed in finding effective tools in the education of Roma and improving an overall process of an effective socialization of the Roma minority in Slovakia.

Based on the knowledge from the literature and from our own experiences, we tried to define the problematic areas in the system of education, in relation to the Roma minority. Those are mainly the following areas:

- Residents from socially excluded communities have the worst educational level (particularly applies to children from segregated settlements).

⁹⁴ <http://www.europeandcis.undp.org/.../D81C0CB0-F203-1EE9-B419EE8ABDD358BD>. 29. 5. 2010.

- Existing tools and programmes do not generate sufficient scope for the substantial improvement of education of children from socially excluded communities. In spite of previously implemented legislative changes and partial systematization of verified instruments (teacher's assistant, zero grades), the school failure rate of pupils from socially excluded communities is not decreasing.
- The existing legal system doesn't create suitable conditions to overcome social and cultural barriers existing in the school system for children from socially excluded communities. Insufficient education is the major barrier for these children. Despite the demonstrated need for the pre-school education of at least four year old children from socially excluded communities, there is no effective legislation to ensure better conditions for an access of socially excluded citizens to these services.
- In elementary and secondary education, low school attainment of pupils coming from socially excluded communities is an on-going concern.
- The area of special education and an excessive enrolment of children from socially excluded communities into special schools is one of the most serious and most debated issue related to the education of socially excluded children. The current legislation regarding the assessment of school readiness and financing of special schools is pretty much unsatisfactory and creates conditions for an excessive inclusion of children from socially excluded communities into special schools.
- Despite the existence of several tools designed to remove the economic barriers of an access to all levels of education, this issue still remains important in analysing the reasons of low educational level of children from socially excluded communities.
- The current legal system does not create sufficient conditions for quality education and methodological guidance of teaching staff working in the specific field of education of children from socially excluded communities.
- Low educational level is one of the major indicators of poverty and social exclusion and is directly related to high unemployment rate and employability. Residents of socially excluded communities belong to the social group with the lowest educational level, which directly affects their

quality of life, their position within the society and the level of life chances in general.

- The current educational level and structure of the population living in socially excluded communities is the result of specific actions that have been implemented within the educational system. However, this system is not designed for educating children with different social and cultural capital.
- Low participation of children in pre-school education. Despite the key role of the pre-school education of children from socially disadvantaged environment, information on the number of these children in kindergartens is absent. The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education (UIPŠ) does not detect the number of children from socially disadvantaged environment in kindergartens, or the mother tongue of these children. According to available data, it is possible to estimate that the participation of children from socially excluded communities in comparison with the dominant population is of about half.
- The low success rate of pupils from socially excluded communities in the system of elementary and secondary education is reflected both in terminating of compulsory education before the ninth year of elementary school, as well as bringing together children from socially excluded communities in those types of schools that are less promising in terms of length of education and level of education attained. Residents of socially excluded communities have the worst educational structure of the Slovak population, dominated by the elementary education. Socially excluded communities have the highest proportion of population without the completed elementary education.
- Excessive admission of children from socially disadvantaged environment into the system of special education. The area of special education and excessive admission of children from socially excluded communities into special schools is one of the most important and most debated issues related to the education of children from socially disadvantaged environment/socially excluded communities. Numbers of tools have been introduced regarding the integration of children into elementary schools over the last few years. However, they were not systematic and have brought only

partial improvements. Incorrect admission of children into special schools reduces their chances for a successful lifelong economic realization.

The data on the educational level of the population living in socially excluded communities were gathered by the extensive, representative statistical survey of UNDP.⁹⁵ This survey also showed the worst educational structure of the population in segregated communities, with the highest percentage of not completed elementary education. The study also documented a significant increase in special school attendance of the younger generation (12 %), compared to the generation with already completed education (3.9 %). One of the major findings of the REF study (2009) on the participation of Roma children in schools was that the proportion of pupils in specialized classes of elementary schools is the highest (85.8 %), while mainstream classes of elementary schools include only 35.2 % of Roma pupils. In classes of special elementary schools, this proportion represents about 59.4 %. While the nationwide Slovakian proportion of higher than elementary education exceeded 90 %, elementary education still dominates in environment defined as socially excluded.⁹⁶ Incomplete elementary education represents a significant proportion as well.

Based on these reasons, it will be necessary to quickly introduce such measures that would contribute to addressing the alarming situation in the field of education of Roma children and pupils.

Following measures will be required (listed selectively):⁹⁷

I. In the area of pre-school education:

- Increasing participation of children from socially excluded communities on the pre-school education, starting from the age of four and increase the

⁹⁵ FILADELFIOVÁ, J. – ŠKOBLA, D. – GERBERY, D., 2006. *The report on the living conditions of Roma households*, which is based on socio-graphic mapping of Roma communities and is based on comparing of Roma households (living in segregated, separated or dispersed settlements) and geographically close population. The research covers a wide range of areas from housing, households, migration, health, education, economic activity, social assistance and poverty, as well as household incomes and expenditures.

⁹⁶ HOJSÍK, M. F., 2010. *External evaluation of projects funded by the Roma Education Fund in Slovakia*, focusing on the prevention and elimination of segregation of Roma children in special education. Bratislava.

⁹⁷ *The legislative intent on the socially excluded communities*. 2011. Internal materials of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. Bratislava.

capacity of public kindergartens located near the socially excluded communities.

- Introduction of grant mechanism in order to support the establishment and operation of non-state kindergartens or other facilities that provide early care programmes in socially excluded communities.
- The obligation of municipalities with a certain percentage of people from socially excluded communities (children from socially excluded communities), to ensure the implementation of pre-school education, or another programmes oriented on the pre-school education of children from socially excluded communities.
- The obligation of kindergartens to accept a child from socially excluded community within the pre-school education two years ahead of joining the compulsory education.
- Complimentary kindergarten attendance for children from socially excluded communities.
- Subsidy for the support of the child's eating habits in kindergarten (applies for children from socially excluded communities).
- Subsidy designed to promote the education of children from socially excluded communities in kindergarten (by the means of special subsidies, whose recipient would be a particular facility that the child attends, such as educational aids, basic interior furnishing, or other needs to provide education in kindergarten).
- Ensuring the presence of teacher's assistant within the pre-school education process of children from socially excluded communities.

II. In the area of improving the performance of pupils from socially excluded communities in the system of elementary education:

- *Establish allowance programme* for pupils from socially excluded communities. The introduction of sub-category of children and pupils from socially excluded communities into the existing legislation will create space for elaborating specific measures and activities for these children. These activities and measures will be focused on their better adaptation and

success in the school environment and will improve their upbringing and educational process.

- *Promote the profession of pedagogical assistant.* Available data show a significant decrease in the number of teacher's assistants after 2008, which is related to performed changes in the financing. Financing the education of children from socially disadvantaged environment is currently based on the allowance for the education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, which elementary and special elementary schools receive according to the number of pupils and the amount determined annually by the Ministry of Education (In 2009 and 2010 the amount was set to EUR 90 per pupil from socially disadvantaged environment). The current legislation⁹⁸ sets five possible ways of using the allowance: hiring teacher's assistants, equipping of specialized class with the didactic technology, pupils participating in activities (trips, excursions, courses, school trips, etc.), education of pupils in specialized classes and the elimination of pediculosis. The analysis on using the allowance for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, elaborated by the Ministry of Education in 2010, revealed that almost half of the mentioned financial resources were used for the running costs, primarily for furnishing and equipping of classes. This usage had only minimal contribution to an overall success in the school system of children from socially disadvantaged environment. School founders use these allowances primarily on technical equipping of schools and classes.

III. In the area of special education:

- Improving the process of admission of pupils into the system of special education and eliminate the causes of improper placement of children into this system.
- The introduction of compulsory re-diagnostics of pupils from socially excluded communities in special schools.
- Introducing the position of specialist in Centres of Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention for children from socially excluded communities.

⁹⁸ Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 649/2008 Coll. on the Purpose of using the allowance for students from socially disadvantaged environment as amended.

It is necessary to form the position of specialist who will be focused on working with families of children from socially excluded communities. The specialist should pay his attention to issues related to the education of children from socially excluded communities, data collection, evaluation of the effectiveness of adopted measures, examining the effectiveness of applied methodology etc.⁹⁹

IV. Education of pedagogical staff:

- Education of pedagogical staff in working with children from socially excluded communities as a part of their supplementary education is one of the measures that can help children in succeeding at school. It is necessary to provide teachers working in the specific environment in schools with high numbers of pupils from the environment of socially excluded communities with enhanced methodological support.
- Currently, the Ministry of Education, in cooperation with the Methodology and Pedagogy Centre in Bratislava, prepares the National project (co-financed by the ESF) *“By education of pedagogical staff to inclusion of marginalized Roma communities”*, which aims to enable all the pedagogical staff working in schools with high numbers of pupils from socially excluded environment to take part on educational activities within the supplementary educational system, which are focused on working with socially excluded children, socially disadvantaged children, or with those who have special educational needs. Project activities have been carried out since September 2011.

1.3.5 Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the integration of Roma up to 2020¹⁰⁰

The Office of the Plenipotentiary of the Slovak Republic Government for Roma Communities submitted the Strategy of the Slovak Republic for Roma Inclusion (as the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies) up to 2020. The new strategy provides a large space dedicated to (among other things) the

⁹⁹ *The legislative intent on the socially excluded communities. 2011. Internal materials of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic. Bratislava.*

¹⁰⁰ Government Resolution No. 1/2012 of 11 January, 2012

issue of education of Roma children and pupils. In relation to the object of the study within our scientific publication, it is important to emphasize that the strategy provides positive evaluation of the teacher's assistant's profession in classes with a high number of Roma pupils and provides a positive feedback on the zero grade institute. The minimum number of pupils in zero grade classes is eight, maximum is sixteen. For each student included in zero grades, a school receives 200 % of the standard normative. For many teachers, this is an important and meaningful tool designed for pupils from socially disadvantageous environment, to catch up in social and cognitive areas with other children growing up in a normal environment, so that they can ultimately become a part of the "mainstream education". Zero-grade educational programme is designed by dividing the first grade curriculum into two separate school years and thus enables to slow down the pace of learning. Zero-grade pupils therefore usually form a homogeneous class even while attending the first grade and continue together as a class throughout the entire elementary school. Zero-grade pupils are eligible for receiving support in the form of food subsidies, utilities and motivation allowances for the child's regular school attendance.¹⁰¹ According to the Strategy, zero grades should contribute to the improvement of motivation, school results and attendance of Roma pupils within the elementary education and should also ensure that 100 % of all school-age children would receive ISCED 2, which is an essential indicator of the success and efficiency of the education of Roma children in zero grades.¹⁰² The measure No. 2.4 corresponds to this task: "Support of an all-day educational system in elementary schools, elaborate an all-day educational system methodology and its verification in practice."¹⁰³ This issue is the subject of the National Project No. 26130130051 of the European Social Fund *Through Educating Pedagogical Staff to the Inclusion of the MRC* whose main objective is to create and implement a pedagogical model of an all-day educational system (hereinafter referred to as "AES") on two-hundred elementary schools in Slovakia during the period of 2012-2015. This project is implemented by the Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Bratislava.

¹⁰¹ Government Resolution No. 1/2012 of 11 January, 2012, p. 27.

¹⁰² *ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰³ *ibid.*, p. 82.

Significant part within the project will be devoted to the implementation of an all-day educational system in zero grades of elementary schools.

1.4 Negative tendencies in the Slovak Republic's school system

In our opinion, there are conflicts in the current legislation of the Slovak Republic, adopted by the National Council of the Slovak Republic and affecting the solution of discriminatory phenomena in schools and society. As an example, we can mention the conflicts related to the Antidiscrimination Act¹⁰⁴, in Article XV, § 32b, where the special elementary school are introduced. The Centres of Special-Pedagogical Counselling are very often established near the special schools, primarily to which they provide their services and thus other schools receive their services afterwards. It often occurs that the director of the Centre of Special-Pedagogical Counseling is the director of a special elementary school at the same time (the same person). He diagnoses a child, suggests his admission into special school and at the same time, the director decides to accept this child into special school. Such an approach ensures a sufficient number of Roma pupils and enough money for the special elementary school, which in segregated conditions, is mostly attended by Roma pupils only. In some areas of the Eastern Slovakia, it is often up to 100 % of Roma attending special schools, which does not contribute to improving the quality of inclusive pedagogy within schools. The school legislation within the Act No. 596/2003 Coll. on *School State Administration and School Self-Government as amended by § 8* imposes the creation of school districts in case of children's registration into the first grade of primary school, which is discriminatory towards the parents, because only they have the right to decide on school selection for their children. In this context, Roma children are concentrated in schools according to districts, set by the founders of schools and school facilities (public administration officials). One of the methods for eliminating the weaknesses is

¹⁰⁴ Act of the National Council of the SR No. 365 of May 20, 2004 *on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination* amending and supplementing certain other acts (Antidiscrimination Act).

a compliance of the school legislation with the Antidiscrimination Act. Currently, we also consider some of the statements and attitudes of our politicians as highly negative and intolerant, such as Jan Slota's insulting statements towards the national minorities and towards the citizens of a different sexual orientation ("faggots, dirt..."). They also send wrong signals to young people, violate the basic principles of humanism, democracy, violate the Antidiscrimination Act and do not respect the basic human rights and freedoms. These statements and approaches were expressed by the chairman of the political party, currently a former Member of Parliament. How will our society and our educational system under these circumstances be able to implement the principles of inclusive education into everyday life?

We agree with some of the opinions of Milan Fico¹⁰⁵ who said that the field of upbringing and education of children is undoubtedly a public domain and also falls within the area of publicly defined interest, and therefore falls within the protection of the Antidiscrimination Act. A modern democratic society agree that is not desirable to distinguish and judge people based on certain attributes that we cannot control, and these include the ethnicity. It is in the future interest of the State that Roma children should not be discriminated within the educational system and ethnicity should not play any role in the admission process of children into special schools. Elimination of Roma children from the standard educational system, segregation of Roma classes and their exclusion from the economic processes within our society are severe factors causing major difficulties in the lives of Roma people. In describing the situation of overrepresentation of Roma children in special education, Fico expressed his opinion according to a representative survey (*School as Ghetto*), which mapped the current situation in the education in special elementary schools, in specialized classes of elementary schools and in secondary practical schools¹⁰⁶. However, we cannot agree with some of the

¹⁰⁵ FICO, M. 2010. *Equal opportunities as a target agenda in regards to Roma children (in the context of placing Roma children into special schools)*. 2010. *Best practices in non-discrimination and in promoting of diversity in labour relations*. Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, Bratislava. 2010. p. 69 – 78. ISBN 978-80-89016-50-1.

¹⁰⁶ FRIEDMAN, E. – GALLOVÁ, KRIGLEROVÁ, E. – KUBÁNOVÁ, M. – SLOSIARIK, M. 2009. *School As Ghetto (Systematic overrepresentation of Roma in special education in Slovakia)*. Roma Education Fund. Bratislava, 2009. ISBN 978-963-9832-09-1.

author's statements. For example, on page 73 Fico (whose profession is sociologist) states: "... the only way to get a secondary school diploma for a pupil who has been diagnosed with mental disability is an individual integration into mainstream schools. " According to the current Slovak legislation, individually integrated pupils with mental disability progress in education according to the curriculum designed for special schools with a possibility of achieving ISCED 1 level, but with no possibility of achieving a complete secondary education (ISCED 3). Also his other statements are not in compliance with the Educational Act No. 245/2008, because since September 1, 2008, it is not legislatively possible to establish preparatory classes for children with mild mental disabilities onto special elementary schools and Roma children without mental or physical disability could never be involved in such classes.

We have also noticed deficiencies in the use of specialized terminology by M. Fico (e.g. zero, or preparatory classes; incorrectly: "pedagogical-psychological counselling "versus correct: "centers of pedagogical-psychological counseling and prevention"on pages 69 to 78).¹⁰⁷

Possible discriminatory and segregation practices within the educational system are mentioned in other publications as well: *"Discrimination in Education – how to defend and (De) Segregation of Roma Pupils in Slovak Educational System: Questions and Answers"*.

The publication (manual?) *"Discrimination in Education – how to defend"*, issued by the Slovak Governance Institute (SGI), is an example of the shallow (incorrect) approach to such difficult topic (Roma education).¹⁰⁸ This so-called "manual" has elementary deficiencies, such as using the wrong terminology ("inclusion into specialized classes" – correct: "admission into specialized classes"; "separate classes"– correct: "specialized classes"...), content deficiencies, unclear formulations, statements without verifying the real situation. Based on the content, it is clear that the authors do not know the

¹⁰⁷ FICO, M. 2010. *Equal opportunities as a target agenda in regards to Roma children (in the context of placing Roma children into special schools)*. 2010. Best practices in non-discrimination and in promoting of diversity in labour relations. Slovak National Centre for Human Rights, Bratislava. 2010. p. 69 – 78. ISBN 978-80-89016-50-1

¹⁰⁸ ALEXANDER, J. – HODÁL, P. *"Discrimination in Education – how to defend"* , the Slovak Governance Institute (SGI). Bratislava. unknown year. without ISBN.

real situation, do not even have the elementary knowledge and we assume that they have never worked within our educational system. We feel sorry for the financial resources used for this purpose (it would surely be better to use those finances to support the education of Roma children at particular school).

In the publication *(De) Segregation of Roma Pupils in Slovak Educational System: Questions and Answers* some authors pay attention to the issue of zero grades. Miroslava Hapalová, Peter Dráľ¹⁰⁹ stated that despite the generally positive assessment of zero grades from the professional public and pedagogues, the effectiveness of zero grades and their impact on the school attainment (as well as on the further educational career of children) have not been yet assessed. Disputableness of an integration aspect within zero grades arises mainly from the perspective of the further integration of children into classrooms after their completion of zero grade. Zero-grade educational programme is designed by dividing the first grade curriculum into two separate school years and thus enables to slow down the pace of learning. Zero-grade pupils therefore usually form a homogeneous class even while attending the first grade and continue together as a class throughout the entire elementary school. The legislation allows such practice, as the issue of continuing education for zero-grade children is described rather vaguely and one of the legitimate possibilities is the admission of children in so-called specialized classes. Petrasová¹¹⁰ states that there is a lack of evidence on zero grades' contribution for an easier integration of pupils, or vice versa, further enhancement of their segregation. Are the pupils who attended the zero grade more successful in school education compared to their peers who did not undergo this form of compensatory education? Pauliniová and Tichý¹¹¹ are asking whether the zero grade is a useful measure. What impact does a long existence of special schools have? What are missing are an evaluation of projects' impacts and the use of ethnic data. The Roma pupils' desegregation

¹⁰⁹ Rafael, V. (edit.). 2011. *(De)Segregation of Roma Pupils in Slovak Educational System: Questions and Answers*. Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti – Open Society Foundation, 2011. p. 75 –77. ISBN 978-80-970143-7-7.

¹¹⁰ Rafael, V. (edit.). 2011. *(De)Segregation of Roma Pupils in Slovak Educational System: Questions and Answers*. Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti – Open Society Foundation, 2011. p. 75 – 77, p. 102. ISBN 978-80-970143-7-7.

¹¹¹ Ibid., p. 169.

programme should therefore include not only setting up and adoption of measures, but also the introduction of the assessment system for implemented measures by the means of existing structures (e.g. the State School Inspection).

1.5 Level of care for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in elementary schools in Slovakia

In this part of our work, we will analyse the status and level of care for elementary school pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, with an emphasis on the Roma pupils.¹¹² We based our analysis on the reports of the State School Inspection of the Slovak Republic, which conducted 829 inspections in kindergartens, elementary and secondary schools during the school year 2010/2011, aimed to determine the status and level of educational management, process and upbringing and educational conditions listed below:

Positive findings

- incorporation of human rights education within the school educational programmes and further pedagogical documentation related to the organization and management of school,
- focusing on the conceptual plans of schools on the humanization of upbringing and education,
- accepting regional conditions, demographic situation in the region, traditions and accepting of actual real requirements of pedagogical, parental and pupils community in setting the upbringing and educational goals,
- creating equal conditions for upbringing and education needs according to individual upbringing and educational programmes,
- establishing zero grades,
- educating pupils with special upbringing and education needs according to individual upbringing and educational programmes,
- involvement of pupils, including pupils with health disabilities, in out-of-school activities,

¹¹² KADLEČÍKOVÁ, Z. – ONDRAŠOVÁ, K. 2012. *Úroveň starostlivosti o žiakov zo sociálne znevýhodňujúceho prostredia*. [The level of care for children from socially disadvantaged environment]. Internal material. Ministry of Education. Bratislava.

- in schools with a higher number of students from SDE - elaboration of development projects aimed at socializing and improving upbringing and educational results in cooperation with the ROCEP

Negative findings

- unimplemented diagnostics of pupils from SDE by the expert staff of the PPCPC,
- overall decline in the number of pupils from the majority of population.

The State School Inspection also paid attention to evaluation of the level of content, form and efficiency of education provided to Roma pupils in comparison with the non-Roma population in Slovakia in 2011. At 176 assessed ES, they recorded 943 (2.59 %) pupils from SDE, from the total number of 36,345 pupils of which 584 attended the first stage (zero grade including), and 359 attended the second stage and the school club was attended by 121 students. The pupils from SDE were educated in zero grades, regular and special classes and in a specialized class. The school directors ensured individual upbringing and educational conditions for 17,3 % of pupils and one elementary school even introduced the all-day educational system. For 24,7 % of pupils within the framework of adjustments to the organization of upbringing and education, the schools presented the help of teacher's assistants, remedial classes and sufficient time for individual work of pupils. For 14.2 % of pupils from SDE at ES, the schools adjusted the environment. For example, they created classes with a smaller number of pupils, imitated the family environment in class, equipped the classes with computers with video-projection and presentation surfaces, placed carpets in classes, provided space for relaxation and games during breaks, access to books and toys. School directors pointed out that in regions with high unemployment, the number of pupils living in environment which does not support their socialization and does not provide them sufficient amount of adequate impulses for the development of their personality, is increasing. The majority of them have not completed the pre-school education, which has had a negative impact on their self-realization, as well as on their hygiene practices. *The establishment of zero*

grades has had a positive impact on the development of socialization of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment. Zero grades provided pupils with a longer period of time for adaptation processes within the school environment. They have acquired basic social, health and work habits necessary for a successful handling of educational process. The cooperation with parents appears to be a persistent problem, because they are not interested in preparation of their children, in their school results and are showing careless attitude in addressing the upbringing and educational needs and problems of their children.

The pupils' lack of interest in education, subsequent frequently missed lessons and insufficient home preparation related to the non-motivating family environment, continuously remain the most frequently presented reasons for poor upbringing and educational results of students from SDE. The school providing an all-day educational system points out the benefits of this method of care for pupils from socially disadvantageous environment by their improving success in the upper grades of elementary school and improving their preconditions for a successful mastering of elementary education. They have increased their self-confidence and enhanced their relationship towards the education by the means of individual approach. The State School Inspection summarized the findings into two categories as follows:

Positive findings

Providing students with the possibility of longer adaptation process to the school environment,

- improving relations between special pedagogues and pupils,
- interest of pupils in activities requiring manual skills,
- involving pupils in team activities in and outside the school,
- ensuring an all-day educational system for pupils from SDE.

Negative findings

- lack of interest, weak or no communication from some of the parents,
- unsystematic and insufficient home preparation for school,
- slower progress in upbringing and education (frequent examples of forgetting to bring materials to school; problems in adapting to rules, norms and

requirements, language and cultural barriers; lack of work or labour skills; irregular school attendance),

- decline in average school achievements and attendance in classes.

Table 7 and Graphs 2 and 3 provide an overview of school failure of primary school pupils

Table 7 *Unsuccessfulness of pupils from mainstream ES classes in Slovakia in school years 1995/1996 up to 2010/2011*¹¹³

School year	Number of pupils at the beginning of the school year ¹	In this grade		Total number of pupils from 1st to 9th grade, thereof pupils of Roma nationality ²	Number of pupils from 1st to 9th grade at the end of the school year ³	Thereof pupils who were unsuccessful		Total number of pupils who failed, thereof pupils from socially disadvantaged environment	
		0.	1. – 9.			Absolute	v %	absolute	v %
1995/1996	661 082	–	661 082	8 113	659 354	14 743	2,24	–	–
1996/1997	644 902	–	644 902	7 698	640 728	15 482	2,42	–	–
1997/1998	647 001	1 060	645 941	5 915	644 796	15 389	2,39	–	–
1998/1999	648 684	807	647 877	6 123	645 729	15 599	2,42	–	–
1999/2000	672 660	954	671 706	5 546	670 277	16 203	2,42	8 981	55,43
2000/2001	652 053	1 087	650 966	4 654	649 980	15 924	2,45	9 397	59,01
2001/2002	627 749	1 104	626 645	4 489	625 617	15 017	2,40	8 633	57,49
2002/2003	603 330	970	602 360	4 255	600 888	15 597	2,60	9 144	58,63
2003/2004	580 791	1 780	579 011	3 072	576 728	14 813	2,57	9 811	66,23
2004/2005	557 328	1 993	555 335	3 454	553 902	14 916	2,69	9 758	65,42
2005/2006	534 147	1 959	532 188	2 758	530 981	13 768	2,59	9 505	69,04
2006/2007	510 510	2 380	508 130	2 231	505 905	14 798	2,93	9 920	67,04
2007/2008	485 018	2 452	482 566	2 137	481 026	14 192	2,95	9 494	66,90
2008/2009	461 715	2 542	459 173	1 840	457 965	13 678	2,99	8 331	60,91
2009/2010	448 371	3 134	445 237	1 559	444 456	12 552	2,82	7 903	62,96
2010/2011	439 675	3 024	436 651	1 020	435 638	12 037	2,76	7 835	65,09

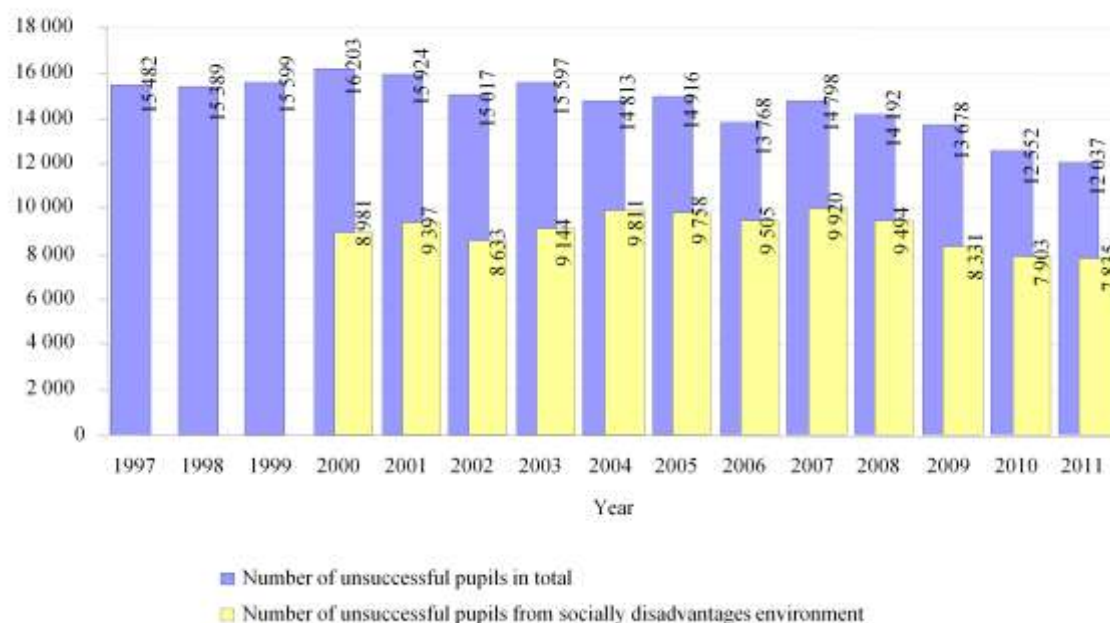
¹ The situation as of 15.9. in year, in which the school year started.

² Since the school year 2009/2010, of the total number of pupils of 1st – 9th grade as of 15.9 in year, in which the school year started

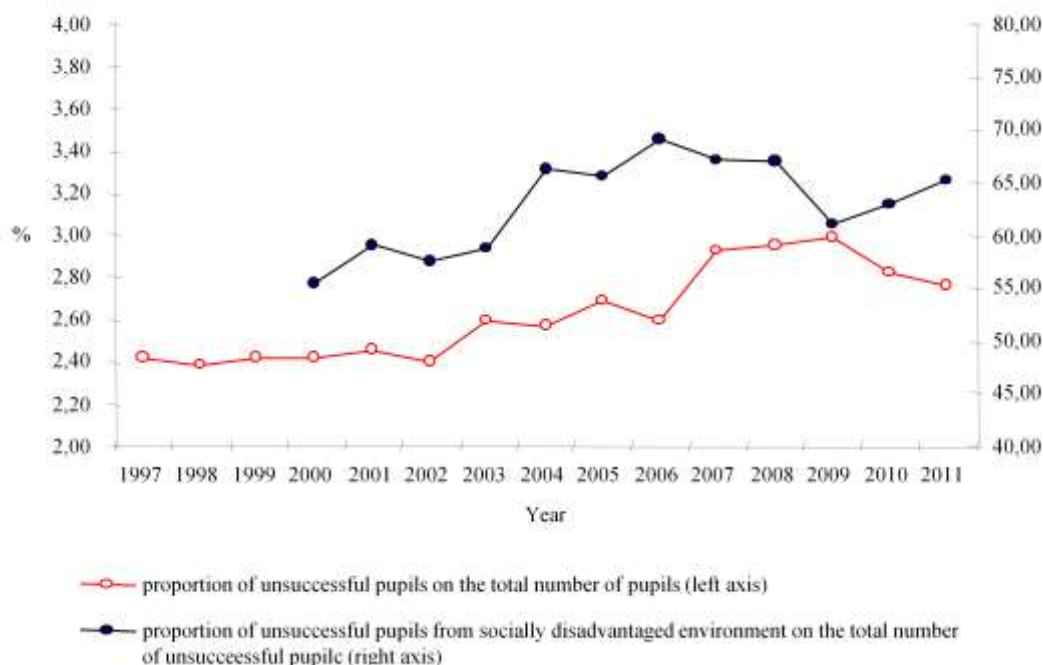
³ The situation as of 31.8. in year, in which the school year ended.

¹¹³ LIPSKÁ, M. 2012. Neúspešnosť žiakov v bežných triedach základných škôl v SR [Unsuccessfulness of pupils in mainstream classes of elementary schools in Slovakia]. The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education. Bratislava.

Graph 2 *Development of the number of unsuccessful pupils in regular classes of elementary schools in Slovakia in 1996 - 2011 (1st to 9th grade in total)*¹¹⁴



Graph 3 *Evolution of the failure rate of pupils in mainstream classes of elementary schools in Slovakia in years 1996-2011 (1st to 9th grade in total)*¹¹⁵



¹¹⁴ LIPSKÁ, M. 2012. Neúspešnosť žiakov v bežných triedach základných škôl v SR [Unsuccessfulness of pupils in mainstream classes of elementary schools in Slovakia]. The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education. Bratislava.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

Table 7 and Graphs 2 and 3 present disturbing findings about the high rate of unsuccessfulness of elementary school pupils who come from socially disadvantageous environment. The proportion of unsuccessful pupils from socially disadvantageous environment represents the range of 55 to 69 % (in the past school years) of the total number of unsuccessful pupils. Unfortunately, we could not find relevant information on the proportion of zero-grade pupils on the unsuccessfulness rate of pupils from socially disadvantageous environment (we will deal with this issue in the research part of our scientific study).

2 SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGEOUS ENVIRONMENT

In the second chapter of our work, we will discuss approaches and solutions on the education of children who come from socially disadvantaged environment (children from poor families, immigrant children, children of other nationalities, disabled children...), both in the Slovak Republic and abroad, with an emphasis on children coming from socially disadvantaged environment of marginalized Roma communities.

2.1 Socially disadvantaged environment – approaches abroad

The character of educational system, in which upbringing and education is carried out, is a crucial element for succeeding in education of ethnic or socially disadvantaged minorities. The educational system is formed under the influence of a long-term social state policy and reflects preferred view on the coexistence of majority and minority, to understand aspects of equality in general, particularly in education. The ways, by which equal opportunities are being implemented within the education, can be assessed only through a deeper analysis according to several criteria, for example: socio-economic, culturological, political and organizational, socio-educational.¹¹⁶ In some European countries during the eighties and nineties of the twentieth century, disadvantaged regions were identified according to strictly set criteria and they were characterized by their low social and economic welfare in areas with a strong concentration of population from lower social classes. The governments of these countries have adopted specific policy programmes to fight against the social exclusion and additional funds were allocated as well. In addition to adopted economic and social measures, these programmes were primarily focused on the improvement of the educational system. Schools in these areas were included in so-called zones of educational activities and this might also

¹¹⁶ KOSOVÁ, B. 2004. Analysis of the educational possibilities of the Roma minority in terms of the school system's character. In Positive discrimination in France and in the world.] Prešov. Methodological-pedaogical centre. 2004.

serve as a good inspiration for our educational system. As an example, we can mention:

1. GB – zones of educational activities, or pedagogically priority areas (EPA),
2. France – priority educational zones, zones of increased educational care,¹¹⁷
3. Belgium – zones of positive actions,
4. USA – Affirmative action,
5. Spain – Community Development Centres.

In Great Britain there are:

- zones of educational activities,
- Pedagogically priority areas (EPA).¹¹⁸

Zones in Great Britain monitor the following areas:

- improve the quality of education by improved pedagogical staff and more effective pedagogy,
- improve the quality of knowledge acquired by pupils,
- support for pupils,
- support for families, cooperation with businesses and other organizations within the zones.

Currently, there are so-called extended schools promoted in England. The Ministry of Education pointed out significantly weaker educational result of pupils from disadvantaged regions (1998). A new type of community school was introduced in Scotland and since 2002, the concept of “extended schools” has been significantly promoted in England. Innovative project aimed at the admission process of socially disadvantaged children have been supported as well.¹¹⁹

In relation to Roma pupils (immigrants from the Czech Republic and Slovakia), the special principle applies saying that Roma children attend schools within the mainstream education despite the fact that their first language is not English. In order to integrate these children into the British educational system, other institutions provide their services as well:

¹¹⁷ KUČERA, M. 1992. *Zones of increased educational care in France*.

¹¹⁸ RAWLES, D. 2004. Nine zones of priority educational activities. In *Positive discrimination in France and in the world*. Prešov. Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Prešov. 2004. p. 28 – 38.

¹¹⁹ EUROPEAN UNION, 2010. *Handbook on Integration for policy-makers and experts*. Available at: http://ec.europa.eu/ewsi/UDRW/images/items/docl_12892_89887398.pdf. 30.1. 2012.

- Traveller Education Support Service.
- Ethnic Minority Achievement Service.
- Services traditionally provided to members of Gypsies and Travellers communities within the mainstream education.

Since the late nineties, the services are provided to Roma children as well. According to the British Educational Act on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities from 2001 (Special Educational Needs and Disability Act 2001), the fact that English is not the first language of a child is not considered as special educational need, but only as one of the areas for the further support provided by teachers/schools.¹²⁰

In France, priority educational zones (Zones of increased educational care) seem to be a very effective form with its priority of improving the quality of educational services in disadvantaged areas. Priority educational zones offer more in and out-of-school:

- cultural and intellectual benefits,
- stimulation and activities,
- opportunities to learn and understand,
- research situations,
- assistance in personal work,
- Supplements.¹²¹

The selection of schools within the zones with this specific support is carried out by using objective socio-cultural handicaps of pupils, whose school is not a direct source (i.e. it is not school where school results are poor because of the low quality of education).

In Belgium, the support of socially disadvantaged pupils in the educational system is called *Zones of positive actions and priority education*. They are not perceived as allowances for a direct support of individuals, but they are designed as additional resources for schools in order to provide the best educational staff, with the highest possible quality of education offered to pupils. “To give more to those who have less, doesn’t mean to provide those

¹²⁰ <http://www.naldic.org.uk/ITTSEAL2/teaching/Inclusion.cfm>. 22. 2. 2012.

¹²¹ HALPIN, D. 2004. Positive discrimination in the United Kingdom. In *Positive discrimination in France and in the world*. Prešov. Methodological and Pedagogical Centre. 2004. p. 5 – 9.

with less money, talent, effort or fewer good teachers with more hours of traditional education. The thing is – to provide more quality rather than quantity. In other words, to give more educational innovation, improve the environment and equipment (aids), provide personal assistance, stimulation, pleasure of learning, show the importance of education to those who have less support, care and education in their social and family environment.”¹²²

In February 2012, we conducted a business trip to Belgium in order to identify the school system in the German-speaking Community in Belgium, with its total population of only 75 222 inhabitants. We visited schools and school facilities in towns Eupen (the capital of German-speaking Community with 18 717 inhabitants) and Eynatten, as well as the Ministry of German-speaking Community. In our opinion, we could implement many positive experiences into our school system as well. We agree with an application of affirmative action (positive discrimination), which is applied in Belgium (in Germany as well) in relation to pupils coming from migrant families, but also in relation to pupils with special educational needs. In the Slovak Republic, positive discrimination is prohibited by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter Constitutional Court), which according to an impulse from the Minister of Justice, examined the compliance of the paragraph 8 of the Act No. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination (Discrimination Act) with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The controversial paragraph would allow the positive discrimination to prevent disadvantages in regards to racial and ethnic backgrounds and therefore was cancelled by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. We certainly recognize the diversity of conditions in Belgium and Slovakia and we do not mean only the living conditions of economically developed country, but also an overall approach to the integration of migrant pupils and pupils with special educational needs. The entire educational system in Belgium is built on the strong pillars of democracy, integration and civic principle. It emerges for example from the naming of national German minority, which has a considerable autonomy (among others) in the field of

¹²² DEMEUSE, M. 2004. *Reduce differences, yes, but which?* Positive discrimination in France and in the world. Prešov. Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Prešov. 2004. p. 10 – 22.

education as well. They are called “German-speaking Belgians“, they have their own parliament and government for German Communities in Belgium located in Eupen. An interesting finding for us was their approach to pupils with special upbringing and educational needs, which the Belgian system does not address by the means of special schools, but with the so-called Supportive pedagogy for pupils outside the mainstream education (*Förder Pädagogik für behinderte Kinder*) and with the influence of so-called Integration pedagogue within the Belgian schools. We also agree with the implementation of so-called *Sonderpädagogische Förderung* (free translation: special, supportive pedagogy), implemented throughout a wide network of different organizations. The most important systems and facilities are:

- *All-day school system in Belgium (educational activities, afternoon activities, leisure-time activities, school clubs, tutoring and helping with homework, organization of an all-day school, children with learning difficulties, cooperation with parents, educational programmes and further education).*
- *Das Kompetenzzentrum: Zentrum für Förderpädagogik (ZFP) – compensation centre,*
- *Integrative Förderung – integration support,*
- *Jugendtreff Inside – youth clubs,*
- *animation centres – focused mainly on the preparation and education of pupils from migrant familie. This type of help is served mainly by the volunteers – students of secondary schools and university students.*
- *integrative pedagogues.*

These approaches might serve as an example to us, representing ways of addressing the problems of socially disadvantaged pupils (Roma pupils) within our education system. The establishment of segregated special schools (classes) for Roma pupils in Slovakia is definitely not a good solution. The educational system in Slovakia should adopt a lot of inspirational and positive approaches and measures according to the Belgian educational system. The truth is that we haven't seen the institute of zero grades in Belgium. In relation to an all-day educational system, it is important to mention that there is no united all-day educational system on ES in Belgium. Educational activities are diversified into many educational, cultural and social facilities with multi-source financing

and implementation of affirmative action in relation to socially disadvantaged pupils (especially for immigrants). Pupils with special upbringing and educational needs in Belgium are provided with the massive support in terms of the following idea: *“Es ist normal, verschieden zu sein. – It is normal to be different”*. This approach might be suitable and applicable in Slovakia as well.

Since the mid-sixties, until the present days, special support policies and measures are applied in relation to the members of disadvantaged social groups, which are better known as an *affirmative action*. The topic of affirmative action has been quite controversial in regards to the political, moral and even legal aspect. It is therefore not easy to provide its neutral definition. The author of one of the most frequently quoted definition is an American scientist James Jones (1963) who defines the affirmative action as “public or private measures; procedures or programmes providing opportunities or other benefits to people based on their membership in a particular group or groups “.¹²³

The policy of positive discrimination in terms of school education has achieved positive results in many countries and therefore it is very perspective for the future. It also indicates that even in Slovakia – without an overall transformation in the educational concept, without a radical transformation of hidden selective school system model, without targeted support for an improvement of the quality of education in vulnerable areas – the problem of improving the education of Roma minority cannot be radically changed. The affirmative action (positive discrimination) is not allowed in the Slovak Republic. It was prohibited by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic (hereinafter Constitutional Court), which according to an impulse from the Minister of Justice, examined the compliance of the paragraph 8 of the Act No. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination (Discrimination Act) with the Constitution of the Slovak Republic. The controversial paragraph would allow the positive discrimination to prevent disadvantages in regards to racial and ethnic backgrounds and therefore was cancelled by the Constitutional Court of the Slovak Republic. Nevertheless, we believe that the principles of affirmative action are put into

¹²³ <http://www.dpspke.vssvalzbety.sk/docs/romreal.pdf>. 6. 7. 2009

practice in Slovakia as well, at least in relation to the education of Roma children and pupils (coming from marginalized Roma communities) as compensatory measures in the following forms: pre-school preparation, zero grade, lower numbers of Roma pupils in classes, teacher's assistant, transition classes, second chance schools, all-day educational system, and so on.

In the USA, the full-service system is being promoted. The authors Joy Dryfoos and Sue Maguire claim that the basic, original idea was that the school would become a place where the educational, health and social services would be provided. It means that school buildings have determined premises for the provision of these services. The "full-service" school integrates education, health also social services implemented within the school premises, beneficial for meeting the needs of children, youth and their families. They also promote the model of so-called preparatory classes for immigrant pupils and socially disadvantaged pupils.¹²⁴

In *Spain*, the support for socially disadvantaged groups (such as the Roma) is applied through the programmes of the Community Development Centres. Besides others, they also include programmes for improving the educational process of children and pupils in the following areas:

- basic care,
- support and monitoring of children in schools, tutoring for pupils,
- vocational education and job selection,
- socio-educational activities for children,
- programmes designed for the support and continuing in studies until the university level,
- programmes aimed at preventing from all forms of discrimination within the school system,
- social participation in mutual communication, parents and school friends' association,
- support the personal development of Roma women.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ DRYFOOS, J., MAUGUIRE, S. 2012. *Inside Full-Service Community Schools*. Dostupné na [http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Full-Service-Community SchoolsDryfoos/dp/0761945113](http://www.amazon.com/Inside-Full-Service-Community-SchoolsDryfoos/dp/0761945113). 31. 1. 2012.

¹²⁵ FRESNO, J. M. – FERNÁNDEZ, C. *La Comunidad Gitana en España y Eslovaquia*. Madrid : Asociación Secretariado General Gitano, 2001. s. 108 – 111. M-50847-2001.

Currently, all-day schools are being promoted in Germany (up to 41.7% of elementary schools and schools of lower secondary level of education implement all-day educational activities), including the establishment of so-called preps for children unprepared for the first grade entry on elementary school.¹²⁶

There is a special type of school in Greece – *Holoimero*. The name is derived from the Greek words *holo*: everything and *imer*: day. This means that *holoimero* serves as a designation for all-day schools. Holoimero school was established in Greece in 1998 as part of a centrally driven reform efforts of the Greek government to rehabilitate the primary education in order to strengthen (among other things) preparatory classes for socially disadvantaged children.¹²⁷

Many studies have shown a clear association between the poverty and the school attainment. The school attainment is reduced when the number of poor people is increasing, for example:

- an increase in average family income is associated with better educational results (Duncan, Brooks, Gunn, Klebanov;¹²⁸ Smith¹²⁹).
- Social and cognitive functioning of young (poor) children will improve if their family income increases (Dearing, McCartney, Taylor. Harvard Graduate School of Education).¹³⁰
- The risk of poverty impact (during an early childhood) on the success in math and reading on the first stage of elementary school (Entwistle, Alexander¹³¹; Lipman, Oxford¹³²; Gershoff, Aber, Raver¹³³).

¹²⁶ PAVLÍKOVÁ, B. 2010. *Sociální pedagogika*. Brno.

¹²⁷ LOUKERIS, D. – VERDIS, A. – KARABATZAKI, Z. – SYRIOU, I. *Aspects of The Effectiveness of The Greek HOLOIMERO ('ALL-DAY') Elementary School*. Dostupné na http://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0011/89849/09_-_2_karabatzaki-syriou.pdf. 30. 1. 2012.

¹²⁸ <http://www.google.sk/search?q=Duncan%2C+Brooks%2C+Gunn%2C+Klebanov%2C+1994&ie=utf-8&oe=utf-8&aq=t&rls=org.mozilla:sk:official&client=firefox-a>. 20. 7. 2009.

¹²⁹ <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3Ask%3Aofficial&hs=ODC&num=100&newwindow=1&q=Smith%2C+Brooks%2C+Gunn%2C+Klebanov%2C+1997&btnG=H%C4%BEada%C5%A5&meta=>. 20. 7. 2009.

¹³⁰ <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3Ask%3Aofficial&hs=8uW&num=100&newwindow=1&q=Dearing%2C+McCartney%2C+Taylor%2C+Harvard+Graduate+School+of+Education%2C+2001&btnG=H%C4%BEada%C5%A5&meta=>. 20. 7. 2009.

¹³¹ <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3Ask%3Aofficial&hs=UHC&num=100&newwindow=1&q=Entwistle%2C+Alexander+1992&btnG=H%C4%BEada%C5%A5&meta=>. 20. 7. 2009.

- Economic family background has a significant impact on the pupil's school attainment (Halsey¹³⁴).

2.2 Socially disadvantageous environment – approaches in SR

Currently, the literature often provides terms, by which the authors seek to define the social environment, which causes cultural and psychological deprivation and they identify such environment as:

- socially disadvantaged environment (Průcha¹³⁵, Zelina¹³⁶, Kariková – Kasáčová¹³⁷, Kovalčíková¹³⁸),
- educationally and socially less stimulating environment (Hornák¹³⁹, Portik¹⁴⁰),
- socially and linguistically disadvantaged environment (Drapák¹⁴¹),
- Insufficiently socially and educationally stimulating environment (Zelina and collective.¹⁴²),
- educationally and socially pathological environment (Cipro¹⁴³),
- little verbally stimulating environment (Belásová¹⁴⁴),

¹³² <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3AAsk%3Aofficial&hs=cKC&num=100&newwindow=1&q=Lipman%2C+Oxford+1997&btnG=H%C4%BEada%C5%A5&meta=>. 20. 7. 2009

¹³³ <http://www.google.sk/search?hl=sk&client=firefox-a&rls=org.mozilla%3AAsk%3Aofficial&hs=ofr&num=100&newwindow=1&q=Gershoff%2C+Aber%2C+Raver+2001&btnG=H%C4%BEada%C5%A5&meta=>. 20. 7. 2009.

¹³⁴ HALSEY, A. H. 1980. *Origins an Desination*. Oxford. University Press. 1980.

¹³⁵ PRŮCHA, J. – WALTEROVÁ, E. – MAREŠ, J. 1995. *Pedagogical dictionary*. Praha. Portál, 1995. p. 292. ISBN 80-7178-029-4.

¹³⁶ ZELINA, M. a kol. 2004. *The concept of integrated education of children and youth*. Bratislava : Ministerstvo školstva SR, 2004. 161 s. ISBN 80-89055-47-8.

¹³⁷ KARIKOVÁ, S. – KASÁČOVÁ, B. 2005. Teachers's assistant preparation for the education of Roma pupils. In Hornák, L. – Scholtzová, I. (eds.) *Collection of abstracts from the workshop Ways of improving the socialization of Roma*. Prešov. 2005. Faculty of Education. p. 23 – 46. ISBN 80-8068-374-3.

¹³⁸ Details: project APVV *Dynamic testing of latent learning capacities of children from socially disadvantaged environment*. 2007 – 2009.

¹³⁹ HORNÁK, L. 2005. *Roma pupil in school*. Prešov. PF PU. 2005. p. 357. ISBN 80-8068-356-5.

¹⁴⁰ PORTIK, M. 2003. *Determinants of education of Roma pupils*. Prešov. PdF PU. 2003. p. 177. ISBN 80-8068-155-4.

¹⁴¹ DRAPÁK, J. 2000. *Literacy of the Roma minority*. In Teachers' newspaper. 2000. Vol. L, No. 5. p. 1 – 2.

¹⁴² ZELINA, M. – VALACHOVÁ, D. – KADLEČÍKOVÁ, Z. – BUTAŠOVÁ, A. 2002. *Education of Roma*. Bratislava : SPN. 2002. p. 205. ISBN 80-08-03339-8.

¹⁴³ CIPRO, M. 2001. *Debate on upbringing of handicapped groups*. In Balvín, J. – Tancoš, J. a kol. *Roma and social pedagogy*. 18. setkání Hnutí R v Přerově a Levoči 7. – 9. June 2001. Ústí nad Labem. Hnutí R. 2001. p. 200. ISBN 80-902461-4-1.

- low stimulating social and cultural environment (Kasáčová¹⁴⁵),
- socially disadvantaged Roma environment (Daňo¹⁴⁶),
- socially disadvantageous and low educationally stimulating environment (Liba¹⁴⁷),
- low stimulating social environment (Kosová¹⁴⁸),
- socio-cultural disadvantageous environment (Porubský¹⁴⁹),
- socially disadvantageous environment (Klein – Rosinský¹⁵⁰, Porubský¹⁵¹),
- socially disadvantageous environment and children from socially disadvantageous environment (Džuka – Kovalčíková¹⁵²),
- socio-cultural environment (Knausová¹⁵³).

Most authors associate the term “socially and linguistically disadvantaged environment” with the way of life in the Roma communities. In the pedagogical dictionary¹⁵⁴, “socially disadvantaged pupil” is defined as a

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- ¹⁴⁴ BELÁSOVÁ, L. 2006 Teacher's assistant competences in the process of creating the initial literacy of Roma pupils. In *Increasing the level of socialization of the Roma community through the systems of education of missionary workers and teacher's assistants*. 2006. Nitra. ISBN 80-8050-998-0.
- ¹⁴⁵ KASÁČOVÁ, B. 2006. *The theoretical context of diagnostic competence of teachers in elementary and pre-school education* Pedagogical viewpoints. 15. 2006. No. 2. p. 13 – 15.
- ¹⁴⁶ DAŇO, J. 2004. Formation of the personal character traits of Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment. In Balvín (edit.) *Upbringing, education and culture in relation to the national minorities*. 2004. Praha. ISBN 80-902972-6-9.
- ¹⁴⁷ LIBA, J. 2006. Competencies of teacher's assistants in the process of primary prevention from habit-forming substances in relation to Roma children. In *Increasing the level of socialization of the Roma community through the systems of education of missionary workers and teacher's assistants* 2006. Nitra. ISBN 80-8050-998-0.
- ¹⁴⁸ KOSOVÁ, B. 2008. Education for all and social justice within the education. In LUPTÁKOVÁ – VANČÍKOVÁ, K. (edit.) *Improvement of an access of Roma to education*. 2008. UMB Banská Bystrica. ISBN 978-80-8083-639-9.
- ¹⁴⁹ PORUBSKÝ, Š. 2008. Assumptions of the systematization of education of Roma pupils from socially and culturally disadvantageous environment. In LUPTÁKOVÁ – VANČÍKOVÁ, K. (edit.) *Improvement of an access of Roma to education*. 2008. UMB Banská Bystrica. ISBN 978-80-8083-639-9.
- ¹⁵⁰ ROSINSKÝ, R. – KLEIN, V. 2007. Socially disadvantageous environment and education. In *Pedagogical revue: Magazine for pedagogical theory and practice*. ISSN 1335-1982. Roč. 59, No. 5. 2007. p. 589 – 598.
- ¹⁵¹ PORUBSKÝ, Š. 2008. Assumptions of the systematization of education of Roma pupils from socially and culturally disadvantageous environment In LUPTÁKOVÁ – VANČÍKOVÁ, K. (edit.) *Improvement of an access of Roma to education*. 2008. UMB Banská Bystrica. ISBN 978-80-8083-639-9.
- ¹⁵² DŽUKA, J. – KOVALČÍKOVÁ, I. 2008. Socially disadvantageous environment and a child from socially disadvantageous environment – term, definition. 2008. In *Československá psychológia*, 52, No. 6.
- ¹⁵³ KNAUSOVÁ, I. 2009. The issue of child's socio-cultural handicap in education. In *Our school*. No. 10, vol. XII. Bratislava. ISSN 1335 - 2733.
- ¹⁵⁴ PRŮCHA, J. – WALTEROVÁ, E. – MAREŠ, J. 1995. *Pedagogical vocabulary*. Praha : Portál. 1995. p. 203. ISBN 80-7178-029-4.

pupil who “due to his social status” has limited access to some of the social and material assets. These children also suffer from psychological deprivation, which occurs in cases of children coming from low-stimulating environment. It is externally manifested by intellectual immaturity, uneven development and behavioural disorders. “The authors Klein and Matulayová¹⁵⁵ associate social disadvantage with the poverty, which “...is regarded as an essential determinant of the quality of life” and point out that “generally recognized key to solving the problem of poverty is education”. Loran¹⁵⁶ defines a socially disadvantaged environment through its special demarcation as a “real social environment that does not create a separate territorial unit in regards to the urban point of view. Disadvantage of such an environment, compared to other residential units, is mostly based on its seclusion from the wider environment. Socio-economic degradation (marginalization) and exclusion are the most common results of living in such an environment”. However Zelina¹⁵⁷ says that “...boundaries of socially disadvantaged environment cannot be precisely defined“. He wonders if socially disadvantaged environment also includes families where parents are workaholics and have no time left to take care of their children, or families where hard and drastic education practices are applied. He also raises a question of whether socially disadvantaged environment also includes schools where pupils are constantly criticized, humiliated, mocked, where high requirements are expected, or where a pupil sits in the last seat and no one notices him. Vankova¹⁵⁸ says that “socially disadvantaged environment is characterized by the lack, dramatically circumscribed deficit in the implementation of basic needs (material, economic, cultural and spiritual), whose satisfaction determines an overall behaviour of all the people living within this environment.“

¹⁵⁵ KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2006. The impact of poverty on education of Roma children in the region of Spiš. In *The Technology of Education*. 2006, vol. 0, No. 1, Slovak teacher – annex. p. 8 – 9. ISSN 1335-003X.

¹⁵⁶ LORAN, T. 2007. *Inclusion vs. exclusion of roma children in the educational environment. Violence at school and in family* III. Collection of abstracts. Nitra. FSVaZ. 2007. p. 2.

¹⁵⁷ ZELINA, M. 2001. *The Roma ethnicity in a multicultural system of education*. Prešov. PF PU. 2001. p. 14.

¹⁵⁸ VANKOVÁ, K. 2006 Analysis of disadvantaged environment, its elimination and the problem of the Roma identity. In Rosinský R. (edit.) *Increasing the level of socialization of Roma ethnic group through the educational systems of social and missionary workers and teacher's assistants* Nitra. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. FSVaZ. 2006. p. 22 – 32. ISBN 80-8050-987-5.

The most obvious and the largest part of the poor population in Slovakia is represented by the Roma national minority. Rosinský¹⁵⁹ points out that 80 % of children from socially disadvantaged environment are Roma children. Their situation is characterized by the material deprivation, low educational level, low standard of living and high unemployment rate. The proofs of poverty and social exclusion are shocking. The at-risk-of-poverty rate of Roma is up to ten times higher than among the rest of the population. In the early nineties, primarily Roma were dismissed from their jobs and they belong to the category which has been continually blocked from an access to the labour market. Exclusion from the labour market keeps the existence of the “vicious circle of poverty” accompanied by a lower living standard. Many Roma have limited opportunities to escape from poverty in the future, due to the low level of human development and long-term discrimination – including the lack of education, poor health state and limited opportunities to participate in social and political life. Differences in the living standards are ubiquitous. Regarding education, over 90 % of Roma living in Slovakia do not complete the elementary education. 50 % up to 85 % of school-able Roma children are attending the schools for mentally and physically disabled.¹⁶⁰ Even in Slovakia, children are the most vulnerable group within the entire population. The *at-risk-of-poverty rate* of children aged zero to fifteen is at 30 % in Slovakia, which is the highest rate among the new EU member states (17%) and even among the old EU member states (15%). Undoubtedly, it is affected by the fact that 50 % of the poorest population within the Roma settlements are children. Material disadvantage of these children is reflected in their overall backwardness, low educational level and ultimately in their limited employment possibilities and limited possibilities of escaping from the persistent poverty.¹⁶¹

The existence of socially disadvantaged Roma environment has several causes:

¹⁵⁹ ROSINSKÝ, R. 2006. *Čhavale Romale or motivation of Roma pupils for education*. Nitra. FSVaZ UKF. 2006. p. 263. ISBN 80-8050-955-7.

¹⁶⁰ Details: *The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005 – 2015*. <http://www.orgovanova.vlada.gov.sk/index.php?ID=1804>. 15. 3. 2009.

¹⁶¹ Details: *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion*. Bratislava. MPSVaR. 2004. www.employment.gov.sk/new/index.php?id=580. 10. 3. 2009.

- *historical factor*: determines the creation of socially disadvantaged environment in relation to different historical development, in comparison with the history of the majority population. The process of acculturation and integration into the majority society has always been accompanied by growing defence mechanisms.
- *family factor*: is the most powerful educational influence and instils children unfavourable habits in relation to themselves, as well as to the society.
- *economical factor*: is reflected in socially disadvantaged areas by the lack of economic potential, resulting from the low educational level of Roma and also from their subsequent inapplicability on the labour market, thus creating a space for various asocial tendencies.
- *personal-individual factor*, which includes somatic, communicative and cognitive factors, occurring mainly during the children's' admission to schools,
- *cultural factor*: has the least negative impact on the disadvantageous social environment of Roma. The Roma culture, rich in music, dance, literary and art forms, provides a wide scope for strengthening and development of their identity. It is a culture that can help in pulling down the boundaries of socially disadvantaged environment, by presenting and unveiling their own identity.¹⁶²

2.2.1 Socially disadvantageous environment - definition

Based on the analysis of literature and empirical experiences, we suggest defining the environment with a negative impact on the development of child's personality, mainly from the education perspective as follows:

Socially disadvantaged environment – Is the environment, which according to social and linguistic conditions insufficiently stimulates the development of

¹⁶² VANKOVÁ, K. 2006. Analysis of disadvantaged environment, its elimination and the problem of the Roma identity. In Rosinský R. (edit.) *Increasing the level of socialization of Roma ethnic group through the educational systems of social and missionary workers and teacher's assistants*. Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra. FSVaZ. 2006. p. 22 – 32. ISBN 80-8050-987-5.

mental, emotional characteristics of the individual, does not support his effective socialization and does not provide appropriate incentives for the personal development. Socially disadvantageous environment causes the socio-cultural deprivation, distorts an intellectual, moral and emotional development of the individual, who is due to these reasons considered as a person with special upbringing and educational needs.

Socially disadvantageous environment – basic characteristics (criteria):

- family in which the child lives does not fulfil the basic functions (economic, educational, socialization, etc.),
- poverty and material deprivation of child's family (as defined in the Act No. 599/2003 Coll. on Assistance in Material Need, as amended),
- lack of education of the child's parents, or legal guardians (if none of them successfully completed the elementary education),
- poor housing and hygienic conditions, in which the child grows up,
- language, in which the educational process is under way is different than the language of child's family,
- segregated Roma communities (e.g. marginalized settlements), in which the child's family lives,
- social exclusion of the community (e.g. settlement), or the child's family within the majority society.

A person who meets at least three of the above mentioned criteria is considered as an individual coming from socially disadvantaged environment.¹⁶³

We consider social environment as a significant factor affecting the quality of education, including the education of Roma pupils, because socially disadvantaged environment doesn't provide sufficient incentives to meet the needs that are necessary for proper upbringing and development of children. It is characterized by the lack of incentives for an optimal somatic and psychological development of a child. The child lacks incentives for the

¹⁶³ Similar characteristics (taken from Klein and Rovinsky) is used in the Act No. 245/2008 on Education and Training (Educational Act) and on the Revision and amendment of Certain Act.<http://www.nrsr.sk/default.aspx?sid=zakony/prehľad>. 27. 7. 2011

development of cognitive skills, development of senses, emotions and personality characteristics. This is caused either due to the lack of time for the child's upbringing, or an unconcern of his/her parents. This situation causes social and educational neglect of children growing up in such an environment, which creates problem in the development of cognitive skills and knowledge and also problems with socialization on one hand, and recognizing existing social norms of the mainstream society on the other hand. The child from socially disadvantaged environment does not have his/her basic needs satisfied and ultimately, the consequences of his/her psychological and cultural deprivations are reflected in the child's mental, social, emotional and professional development.

Socially disadvantaged environment is perceived as a *very specific environment, negatively affecting a child, pupil*. We can also talk about the environment, which disadvantages a pupil who lives and is formed within this environment. There are many authors dedicating their work to this topic and almost every one of them uses different naming for this purpose. The vast majority of authors prefer a specific feature of disadvantage (such as language, culture, pathology, emphasizing the ethnicity etc.). Social area covers all of the aspects listed above, so it seems like *socially disadvantageous environment* is the best and the most universal naming. It is also possible to discuss the concept of *socially disadvantaged environment* used by Průcha, Zelina and other authors. When comparing these two similar terms, we used semantics and logical interpretation, *Socially disadvantageous environment reflects the dynamic characteristics of the environment* (with possible changes). Socially disadvantaged environment reflects the static characteristics of the environment (in certain fatalism, destiny, as if it cannot be changed).

3 ZERO (PREPARATORY) GRADE IN THE SLOVAK AND CZECH REPUBLIC

New approaches in the education of Roma children include the introduction of preparatory (zero) grades. According to common historical background of the Slovak and Czech Republic, which is reflected in the educational theory and practice, as well as in the current level of cooperation, we will be dealing with the situation in the Czech Republic as well.

3.1 Preparatory grade in the Czech Republic

In this chapter, we will address the problem area of preparatory grades in the Czech Republic. We've based our opinion mainly on Resolution of the Government No. 210 of April 28, 1993¹⁶⁴, the Instruction of the Ministry of Education No. 18004/93-21 of June 6, 1993, the Statute of the experimental verification of preparatory classes No. 12748/97-20 of June 30, 2000¹⁶⁵, the Collection of abstracts *The Roma and Social Pedagogy*¹⁶⁶ and based on Baldwin's work.¹⁶⁷

To facilitate the transition process of the Roma child from its family into the school environment, preparatory classes were introduced within the Czech Republic's educational system since 1993. The primary focus was on the Roma pupils entering the first year of compulsory education and experiencing difficulties in many ways. This was due to not only language barrier, but also cultural and social barriers. A systematic solution was introduced in order to overcome these barriers and to create relatively fair conditions for Roma pupils

¹⁶⁴ Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 210 of 28 April, 1993 – Report on the problems of the Romani community

¹⁶⁵ Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 599 of 14 June, 2000 - Concept of the Government policy towards the members of the Roma community, supporting their integration into society

¹⁶⁶ BALVÍN, J. – TANCOŠ, J. a kol. 2001. *The Roma and Social Pedagogy*: 18. setkání Hnutí R v Přerově a Levoči 7. – 9. června 2001. Ústí nad Labem: Hnutí R, 2001. 200 s. ISBN 80-902461-4-1.

¹⁶⁷ BALVÍN, J. 2004. *The education of Roma children as an educational system*. Praha : Radix, s. r. o., 2004. 206 p. ISBN 80-86031-48-9.

while entering the first grade of elementary school and to overcome the barriers in continuing process of compulsory school attendance.

In most cases, the content, methodology, creation of an environment for education and educational materials, rely on the experience of "preparatory classes" within the kindergartens. Elementary and special elementary school directors employed mainly teachers who formally had long-term experiences with the education at kindergartens. During the practical implementation of preparatory classes, they were profiled as a specific organizational form, as one that helps children coming from disadvantaged socio-cultural environment to overcome communication barriers while entering the first grade.

According to the Resolution of the Government No. 599 of June 14, 2000 on the *“Concept of the Government policy towards the members of the Roma community, supporting their integration into society”*..., preparatory and remedial classes are perceived as one of the methods of remedial action planned until 2020.¹⁶⁸

The first impulse for the establishment of preparatory classes emerged from the representatives of the Roma community. They understood that adequate preparation for the educational process is very important for their children. Z. Helus¹⁶⁹ considers the school entry as a significant occasion with far-reaching consequences for a child.

Another reason for establishing the preparatory classes for Roma children was their language handicap. The Government document No. 686 of October 29, 1997¹⁷⁰, presents the results of a sociological survey, which confirms that “Most of the majority society regards the language barrier as a totally insignificant factor related to the integration of the Roma”. But according to experts “blockade caused by the language is a source of many failures of Roma children at the very beginning of the educational process, including the ability of abstraction, communication etc. As the educational

¹⁶⁸ Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 599 of 14 June, 2000 - Concept of the Government policy towards the members of the Roma community, supporting their integration into society

¹⁶⁹ HELUS, Z. 1993. Dítě jako východisko transformace obecné školy. In Piřha, Petr, Helus, Zdeněk *Návrh pojetí Obecné školy*. MŠMT ČR : Portál, 1993, p. 19.

¹⁷⁰ Resolution of the Government of the Czech Republic No. 686 of 29 October, 1997: Report of situation of Roma community in the Czech Republic and current situation in Roma community. p. 13.

process gets tougher and demands get higher, the language disadvantage strongly reinforces and its symptoms are often mistakenly considered as a handicap according to which a child can be reassigned to a special school...”

Kamiš¹⁷¹ says that from a communication point of view, a child's first-grade entry at the elementary school represents a great verbal shock (not only for Roma children). The reason is that most of the upbringing and education within the first stage of elementary school has a verbal character (in literary language) and for the most children, it is a relatively new situation.

Preparatory classes represent a significant help in overcoming the language handicap of Roma children (p. 49).¹⁷² But the real help consists of maintaining the multicultural approach, in respecting particular social and language situation of the Roma child and in respecting the following two patterns:

- “Pre-school language education of Roma children should be conducted in their native language, especially in the Roma family environment. Socialization of Roma children is unthinkable without respecting the securities of Roma families and their communication code.
- In addition, the education in the Czech language should be covered within the pre-school age as well, because Roma children will attend the Czech school requiring the literary standard, which might be slightly difficult for children to understand. This may cause a potential code-barrier for younger Roma pupils, regardless of their intelligence. To avoid this situation, preparatory classes for younger Roma pupils are being used. “¹⁷³

Roma pedagogical assistants had worked in preparatory classes from the beginning and they later became known as teacher's assistants. They have been working in preparatory classes with Roma children to help them overcome the obstacles in several areas:

¹⁷¹ KAMIŠ, K. 1996. Elementary school – school language and child's speech... In BALVÍN, J. and collective. *Barriers and negative phenomena in the education of Roma*. Ústí nad Labem : Hnutí R, 1996. p. 31.

¹⁷² BALVÍN, J. 2004. *Upbringing and education of Roma pupils as a pedagogical system*. Praha : Radix, s. r. o., 2004. p. 49. ISBN 80-86031-48-9.

¹⁷³ KAMIŠ, K. 1996. Elementary school – school language and child's speech. In BALVÍN, J. a kol. *Barriers and negative phenomena in the education of Roma*. Ústí nad Labem : Hnutí R, 1996. p. 31.

- in overcoming the “psychological and verbal shock” occurring when Roma pupils join the first grade of elementary school,
- in developing the necessary communication between schools and Roma families,
- in spreading awareness among the Roma parents on the importance of education, kindergartens and pre-school preparation within the preparatory grades,
- in creating a relationship and motivation of pupils towards the school and in developing their own perspective in life,
- In building the tolerant intercultural relations among citizens. Multicultural pedagogical duo – the Czech teacher and the Roma teacher’s assistant, their correct division of work and interpersonal relations, creating an image of tolerant coexistence of people of different nationalities and cultures,
- In the formation of an identical ethnic image, which Roma children lacked within the Czech educational system.¹⁷⁴

The issue of preparatory classes is currently regulated by § 47 of the Act No. 561/2004 Coll. on Pre-school, Elementary, Secondary, Tertiary Professional and Other Education¹⁷⁵ and the Decree No. 48/2005 Coll. on Basic Education and Several Matters Relating to the Obligation to Attend School¹⁷⁶, in § 7 Preparatory Classes.

3.2 Zero grade in the Slovak Republic

Successful school entry of children assumes a certain level of mental, physical, emotional and social development. The playful child activities are largely superseded by the school work and learning, which requires an active attention, concentration, cooperation, subordination to established work pace of school rules and discipline. These significant changes are very difficult to handle successfully for all the children.

¹⁷⁴ BALVÍN, J. 2004. *Upbringing and education of Roma pupils as a pedagogical system*. Praha : Radix, s. r. o., 2004. s. 51. ISBN 80-86031-48-9.

¹⁷⁵ <http://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/novy-skolsky-zakon>. 24. 6. 2011.

¹⁷⁶ <http://www.msmt.cz/dokumenty/vyhlasaka-c-48-2005-sb-1>. 24. 6. 2011.

A certain percentage of an overall population of six-year old children is not able to fulfil the demanding school requirements. School entry becomes an immediate trauma for them; they start to meet their first failures, problems.

According to some experts (e.g. Adamovič) ¹⁷⁷, the general population involves an about 10 to 15 % of under-qualified children (terms used: “school maturity“, “school eligibility“, ”school capability“, “school readiness“) for the school entry. It is necessary to distinguish the temporary school immaturity from the permanent, global immaturity. We can talk about reparable and irreparable backwardness in school maturity of a pupil. The temporary school immaturity involves cases of insufficient school maturity, because the child’s development has been temporarily slowed, stopped or stagnated. The permanent irreparable immaturity is characterized by a permanent stoppage of the mental development. The most common cases of permanent school immaturity are socially and educationally deprived children, with frequent somatic diseases and temporary psychological traumatisations, emotionally and psychologically deprived. “An overall intellectual defect is considered as the permanent irreparable school immaturity. “¹⁷⁸

Pedagogical practice shows that a large number of six-year old children, who are unprepared for a successful first-grade completion, come from socially and educationally deprived environment. These are children who are living in an unfavourable social environment and have the wrong or lacking upbringing. If the social environment provides poor incentives for mental, emotional and social development, it becomes an obstacle for the further development. There is also a disproportion of mental and chronological development. These are primarily children from the broken families, from families with low social and cultural level, the children neglected, socially isolated, not being taken care of, primarily Roma children. In such conditions, a child stagnates and develops mentally, physically, emotionally and personally much slower than it would be appropriate for his/her chronological age.¹⁷⁹ The vast majority of these children

¹⁷⁷ ADAMOVIČ, K. 1985. *Diagnostics of school-readiness and monitoring of the school success in the first grades of compulsory education within the ES*. Final thesis. Bratislava : VÚDPaP, 1985.

¹⁷⁸ BAJO, I. – VAŠEK, Š. *Pedagogy for mentally disabled*. Bratislava : Sapientia, 1994.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

do not attend the pre-school facilities due to various reasons. It has been a common practice that these children have delayed compulsory school attendance one or even twice. According to the valid legislation, there is no need for a child (aged six and less) to attend the pre-school educational facility, even if he/she has already been delayed in the compulsory school attendance. The only possible solution is not to delay the compulsory school attendance of the six year old children coming from socially and educationally deprived environment and to establish the zero grades for them.

Based on the document *“The Strategy of the Government of the Slovak Republic for the Solution of the Problems of the Roma National Minority and the Set of Measures for its Implementation”*, the government has an interest to effectively address the persistent deficiencies in the quality of education of Roma children. In order to achieve this, it is necessary to create suitable conditions for a replacement of the existing rigid school system, so the Roma children would be as successful as other children.

The government therefore supported the initiative of pedagogues and extended the institute of preparatory (zero) grade, introduced experimentally in 1992 in Košice, throughout the whole Slovak Republic. In our work, we use the term “preparatory grade” until August 1, 2002. We use the term “zero grade” following the Act No. 408/2002 Coll. The first comprehensive material on this topic was the *Methodological guidelines for establishing the preparatory grades within the ES for linguistically and socially disadvantaged children* written by the author Mária Maczejkovej in 1995¹⁸⁰. The aim of establishing the preparatory grades was to intensively affect pupils by an all-day upbringing and educational system, representing an interaction of the kindergarten curriculum with a partial implementation of the first-grade curriculum.

The model of preparatory grades implemented in Košice clearly pointed to a significant increase in the success of children attending the preparatory grade compared to children attending the mainstream first-grade classes of ES. Mentioned children improved their graphomotor skills, communication skills

¹⁸⁰ MACZEJKOVÁ, M. 1995. *Methodological guidance for opening the zero grades for schildren from linguistically and socially disadvantaged environment*. Košice : MO ŠS, 1995.

(fluency of speech), enhanced their vocabulary and improved their performance of social skills.

At the same time, based on the request for establishing preparatory grades within ES for children from linguistically disadvantaged environment and according to the document approved by the Council Board of the Ministry of Education of May 29, 1992, No. 2135/9222/HE, the project of preparatory grades took place in the district of Spišská Nová Ves, in the municipalities Smižany, Bystrany, Kluknava a Hrabušice. This project was based on the division of the first-grade curriculum into two separate school years. During the first year of compulsory school attendance, pupils adopted and developed their language skills, fine motor skills, math skills, visual and auditory perception, memory and motor skills through a special programme designed, monitored and evaluated by the Pedagogical and Psychological Counselling Centres.

In order to harmonize the tasks within the stimulation programme with the regular documentation of curriculum in the class book, the teachers were recommended to transform the role of the programme into monthly curriculums and to assign them to the particular subjects of study. In the second half of the first school year within the compulsory education, pupils adopted the first-grade curriculum appropriately, in accordance with applicable curriculum.

In the second year of school attendance, after acquiring a “longer starting line”, the pupils were able to easily work according to the first-grade ES curriculum. The advantage of the programme implemented in Spišská Nová Ves over the all-day programme implemented in Košice was its lower financial costs, since it was prepared in accordance with the valid school legislation. The pupils were taught by a teacher in the morning and attended a school club during the afternoon, where educated nursemaid took care of them. The school club educated children in compliance with the educational programme for the school clubs. This project did not need to have secured all-day educational programme with two teachers and a daily diet, which required increased financial resources for teachers’ salaries and pupils’ catering.

Both of these projects reflected the experiences from the pedagogical practice, where pedagogues worked with the mentioned group of children and had to face the faulty school legislation. These two mentioned projects form the basis of the publication *Preparatory grade in elementary school for six-year old children being unprepared for a successful school entry* ¹⁸¹, where a team of authors defines:

- preparatory grade,
- aim of the preparatory grade,
- organizational preparation of its establishment,
- role of the school leadership, pedagogues,
- cooperation with families, third sector, community and interdepartmental cooperation,
- Offers a draft of preparatory-grade curriculum with an indicative thematic planning.

We appreciate the legislative institutionalization of zero grades within elementary schools by adopting the Act No. 408/2002 coll. of July 27, 2012, amending and supplementing the Act No. 313/2001 Coll. on Public Service, as amended.

The Ministry of Education, in order to harmonize the implementation of zero grades of elementary schools, issued the Guideline No. 600/2002-43 on the *Introduction of Zero Grades of Elementary Schools and also instructed the National Institute for Education in Bratislava* on preparing curriculums for zero grades of ES, while preparing the draft of thematic and time planning for zero grades within elementary schools. Methodological and Pedagogical Centre in Prešov published a Working Material in 2005, designed for zero grades of elementary schools and was elaborated by experts in the framework of the project *PHARE SD 0002.01 Better conditions for Roma self-realization in educational system*. This material was conducted by teachers with years of experience in theoretical field, as well as in the practical field of education of

¹⁸¹ MACZEJKOVÁ, M. a kol. *Preparatory – zero grade in elementary school for six year old children unprepared for a successful school entry*. Prešov : MC, 2000. 78 p. ISBN 80-8045-218-0.

Roma pupils and serves for the teachers and pupils in all educational areas within zero grades.

The zero grade of elementary school is currently defined by the Act No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education (The Educational Act) and on amendments to certain Acts, which states that the zero grade of elementary school is designed for children who reached six years of age by the 1st September, didn't reach sufficient school readiness, come from socially disadvantaged environment and in terms of their socially disadvantaged environment, there would be a very low probability for them to complete the educational programme of the first grade in elementary school. If a child did not reach school readiness even after the delay of compulsory school attendance, or after an additional delay of compulsory school attendance, he/she will be included in the first grade of ES, or will be included in the zero grade with an approval of his/her legal guardian no later than by the 1st September, following the day on which the child reached the age of eight.

The Ministry of Education supports the education of Roma children in zero grades of elementary school, as evidenced by the role defined for directors of elementary schools in the Pedagogical and Organizational guidelines for the school year 2008/2009¹⁸².

1. Only children, whose legal guardians give the informed consent, may be included in zero grades of ES. Such children begin their compulsory school attendance in zero grades.
2. Elementary schools with zero grades and elementary schools with pupils from socially disadvantaged environment cooperate with MPC in Prešov and with its Roma Educational, Information, Consulting and Documentation Centre (ROCEPO), which has a nationwide scope and is used by schools within the educational process for Roma pupils.
3. The application of Acceleration Programmes as compensatory education (this topic will be discussed in the next chapter) is an integral part (even inevitability) of the education of Roma pupils in zero grades.

¹⁸² <http://www.minedu.sk/index.php?lang=sk&rootId=154>. 24. 6. 2010.

We consider the zero grades as a form of compensatory education. Its establishment is perceived positively, even though the current pedagogical practice shows the need for:

- monitoring and measuring the quality of educational process in zero-grade classes,

Documenting knowledge on the future destiny of zero-grade graduates and answer the following questions:

- Are zero-grade graduates more successful in educational process as pupils who didn't attend the zero grade?
- Does this form of initial "segregation" lead to their successful integration, or does it enhance their segregation even more?
- Is it enough to divide the first-grade curriculum into two separate school years?

We will try to answer these questions in the empirical part of our study.

3.3 Zero grade – analysis of approaches and researches (surveys) in Slovakia, as well as in foreign countries, with regards to education of socially disadvantaged children and pupils

In this section, we will present our readers with the analysis of various researches (surveys) conducted by domestic and foreign authors from the field of theory and practice in the education of socially disadvantaged Roma pupils. Our objective is to acquire an overview of various domestic and foreign approaches of successful (even unsuccessful) educational concepts, which can contribute to an improvement of processes, forms and methods of the education of Roma children and pupils in Slovakia.

3.3.1 Analysis of researches (surveys) focused on zero (preparatory) grades in foreign countries

While preparing this part of our study, we built on relevant knowledge of foreign literature and we focused on researches and surveys that might be potentially interesting and inspiring for Slovak pedagogues (psychologists)

when designing effective educational programmes for Roma children and pupils who came from socially disadvantageous environment of Roma marginalized communities.

Research: Panayota Mantzicopoulos. *Academic and School Adjustment Outcomes Following Placement in a Developmental First-Grade Programme*

The research was conducted in the U.S between 1993 and 2000. It focused on children's' adaptation to school environment and was implemented by Panayota Mantzicopoulos and entitled *Academic and School Adjustment Outcomes Following Placement in a Developmental First-Grade Programme*.¹⁸³ The author measured effectiveness of the preparatory programme's implementation for children in kindergarten before entering the first year of elementary school. She compared and evaluated the development of thirty-four children in preparatory grade and thirty-seven children from socially disadvantageous environment who participated occasionally. Preparatory education was focused on memory exercises, on the development of social skills, elementary literacy and numeracy, to effectively address behavioural problems and on parents' participation in this preparation. The results showed high efficiency of such programmes, which resulted in the later expansion of preparatory classes in the U.S.

Research: Deanne A. Crone; Grover J. Whitehurst. *Age and Schooling Effects on Emergent Literacy and Early Reading Skills*

Thirty-seven children from economically disadvantaged families were monitored continuously since the completion of the programme *Head Start* (to promote early education of children from deprived environment) until the end of the first or second grade of elementary school. The research results inform on how the age, along with a completion of the first grade at ES, affects the literacy. The performance comparison of younger and older children in kindergarten and the ability of children of the same age, of which the first group of children started their school attendance one year ahead of the other

¹⁸³ PANAYOTA MANTZICOPOULOS. 2003. Academic and School Adjustment Outcomes Following Placement in a Developmental First-Grade Programme. In *Journal of Educational Research*, Vol. 97, No. 2 (2003). p. 90 – 105.

group, show that the impact of school attendance on the development of literacy and early reading skills is stronger than the effect of age¹⁸⁴.

Research: Peter May, Martin Peters. *Bildung für Fünfjährige?*

In this research, the authors have demonstrated the importance of pre-school education. This paper analysed the types of pre-school education in Hamburg, where parents have an opportunity to place their children during the last year of their pre-school education either within the day care educational system (Kita), or within the pre-school class (VSK).¹⁸⁵

Research: Michael D. Coyne; D. Betsy McCoach; Susan Loftus; Richard Zipoli Jr.; Sharon Kapp. 2010. *Direct Vocabulary Instruction in Kindergarten: Teaching for Breadth versus Depth Elementary school journal*

In the research, the authors compared two methods of working with text in preparatory grades of kindergarten situated in a big city of Connecticut (Northeast USA). Fairy tales were told loudly to children from socially disadvantaged environment and from other minority groups. The aim of this education was to show children the importance of few difficult and keen words in the context of a fairy tale, so they would understand those words clearly as soon as possible. The conducted research has shown that clear, direct and simple instructions are the most suitable means applicable for this process – additional explanatory instructions drew children's attention from the point of a fairy tale¹⁸⁶.

¹⁸⁴ DEANNE A. CRONE – GROVER J. WHITEHURST. 1999. Age and Schooling Effects on Emergent Literacy and Early Reading Skills. In *Journal of Educational Psychology*. Vol. 91, No. 4 (1999), p. 604 – 614.

¹⁸⁵ PETER MAY, P. – PETERS, M. 2010. *Bildung für Fünfjährige?* Pädagogik. vol. 62. No.. 7 – 8 (2010), Hamburg : Pädagogische Beiträge Verlag, 1988. ISSN 0933-422X. p. 78 – 79.

¹⁸⁶ MICHAEL D. COYNE – D. BETSY MCCOACH – SUSAN LOFTUS – RICHARD ZIPOLI JR. – SHARON KAPP. 2010. *Direct Vocabulary Instruction in Kindergarten: Teaching for Breadth versus Depth Elementary school journal*. Roč. 110, č. 1 (2009/2010), Chicago : University Of Chicago Press. ISSN 0013-5984. p. 1 – 18.

Research: Ewa Zawidniak; Agata Majewicz; Piotr Majewic. *Edukacja przedszkolna i wczesnoszkolna w USA*

The authors examined the basic education Acts and Regulations, which regulate the pre-school education and early education in the USA and monitored some differences between the particular states in the USA. They positively evaluate the *Head Start* programme and the zero grade with its programme¹⁸⁷.

Research: Alain Marchive. *Ethnographie d'une rentrée en classe de cours préparatoire: comment s'instaurent les règles de la vie scolaire*

The author publishes the results of his ethnographic examination of procedures used by the preparatory-grade teachers within the priority educational zones in France. The most important finding was that it is necessary for teachers to put emphasis on instilling the basic rules of common life for children in schools.¹⁸⁸

Research: James E. Gay: *The Gift of a Year to Grow: Blessing or Curse*

The author critically evaluates the programme of delaying the school attendance, preparation for the school attendance, or placing immature children into pre-school facilities. The research results have shown that delay of school attendance of immature children is unnecessary and inefficient¹⁸⁹. According to the author, the only suitable option is their early education in ES.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ EWA ZAWIDNIAK – AGATA MAJEWICZ – PIOTR MAJEWIC. 2005. *Edukacja przedszkolna i wczesnoszkolna w USA*. In *Zycie szkoły*. Roč. 59, č. 9 (2005). ISSN 0137-7310. s. 53 – 58

¹⁸⁸ ALAIN MARCHIVE. 2003. *Ethnographie d'une rentrée en classe de cours préparatoire: comment s'instaurent les règles de la vie scolaire?* In *Revue française de pédagogie*. č. 142 (2003), s. 21 – 32.

¹⁸⁹ The research results correspond with those of Slovak legislation according to which it is not recommended to delay the school attendance (Pedagogical-Organizational Guidelines, Ministry of Education, 2011).

¹⁹⁰ JAMES E. GAY. 2003. *The Gift of a Year to Grow: Blessing or Curse*. *Education*. Roč. 123, č.1 (2002/03), s. 63 – 72.

Research: Elizabeth Wood: *The impact of the National Curriculum on play in reception classes*

The research focused on the analysis of work with pre-school children in so-called preparatory classes in the UK, which were introduced by the national curriculum. The author presented some *positive results* on the research of theoretical approaches and practice of nine preparatory-class teachers and analysed the theory and practice of curriculum planning, game structure, teacher's role and evaluation of children by mentioned teachers¹⁹¹.

Research: Hanna Krauze-Sikorska; Kinga Kusza. *Jak pomóc dziecku*

The authors presented the research results on the issue of school failure of six year old pupils (first-grade and zero-grade pupils of ES). Most unsuccessful pupils have difficulties with pronunciation and self-expression, with the pace of work in classrooms and with the concentration (hyperactivity). It is therefore necessary that teachers would work together with experts from the fields of *medicine and psychology, as well as with the child's family*.¹⁹²

Research: Marc Dupuis. *Le nouveau défi de l'aristocratie enseignante*

The research has proven a very difficult position of preparatory-class teachers. Their work is more difficult compared to other teachers, because they have to work harder to adapt the educational process to weaker pupils. *The author suggests that the best teachers should teach in these classes and they should be adequately financially rewarded*.¹⁹³

Research: Wojciech Brejnak. *Rola rodziny w przygotowaniu dziecka do nauki czytania i pisanie*

The research was focused on the so-called *zerówki* – zero grades that were legislatively introduced since the beginning of the school year 2004/2005

¹⁹¹ ELIZABETH WOOD. 1999. *The impact of the National Curriculum on play in reception classes*. Educational Research; Vol. 41, No. 1 (1999), p. 11 – 22.

¹⁹² HANNA KRAUZE-SIKORSKA – KINGA KUSZA. 2007. *Jak pomóc dziecku*. Życie szkoły. Vol. 62, No. 3 (2007). ISSN 0137-7310. p. 5 – 10.

¹⁹³ MARC DUPUIS. 2007. *Le nouveau défi de l'aristocratie enseignante*. Monde de l'éducation. Vol. 2007, No. 355 (2007). p. 33 – 36. ISSN 0337-9213.

and are mandatory ever since then. The author states that zero grades are not able to sufficiently provide the zero-grade education for all the children.¹⁹⁴

Research: Mgr. Lucie Fremlová (*Equality* – non-governmental organization that promotes the rights of ethnic minorities in the UK and Europe. It primarily helps the Roma who moved to the UK from the new EU member states).¹⁹⁵ She is also the author of the research studies of Roma communities in new EU member states from the period of 2008 – 2009, which focused on the issue of integration of Roma pupils – Slovak and Czech immigrants in the UK.¹⁹⁶ Respondents included (among others) also the "Slovak Roma" from the Eastern Slovakia (Košice, Prešov, twelve of the thirty-eight Roma came from the Roma settlements in Trebišov, Sabinov, Pavlovce nad Hronom, Vyšné Ružbácht, Medzev, Olšiany and Kosice). 59 % of respondents (Roma) left to the UK to find a job, because they were not able to get one in their home country, mainly due to the discrimination, 22 % of them left in a search of a better life and non-segregated education for their children, 15 % left because of discrimination. 97 % of respondents declared that their life has improved since coming to England. The vast majority was satisfied with:

- the positive attitude of the school personnel,
- the lack of stereotypical perception of Roma,
- the finding that language and socio-cultural environment are not necessarily perceived as handicaps,
- the equal opportunities,
- an absence of racial segregation.

Key findings:

- 85 % of all respondents in the Slovak and Czech Republic were placed in special or segregated schools,

¹⁹⁴ BREJNAK, W. 2005. *Rola rodziny w przygotowaniu dziecka do nauki czytania i pisanie*. *Zycie szkoły*. Vol. 59, No. 2 (2005). ISSN 0137-7310. p. 14 – 20.

¹⁹⁵ <http://www.ceskatelivize.cz/porady/1097181328-udalosti/212411000100210/video>. 22. 2. 2012.

¹⁹⁶ *Discussion seminar within the project Equality: Transfer of Good Practice from the Great Britain in the field of inclusive education of children and pupils from the Roma communities in Slovakia*. British Embassy Bratislava, held in Prešov on 18. 2. 2012.

- in the UK, none of the respondents were diagnosed with special educational needs,
- the number of Roma children with special educational needs, caused by some form of sensory or physical disability, ranged from 2 to 4% (these pupils were educated within the mainstream education as well
- respondents have not experienced any forms of racism in the British schools, teachers were kind and willing to approach them individually,
- the vast majority of respondents indicated that they would prefer schools in the UK,
- parents appreciated almost complete absence of racism and discrimination within the British educational system,
- Respondents thought that their children would have better chances to be successful in their lives in the UK, rather than in Slovakia, or the Czech Republic.

Analysis of researches (surveys) focused on the zero grade in the Czech Republic
 Research: Lenka Gulová. *Activities and programmes leading to the development of educational perspectives of a Roma child.*

The author has dealt with the definitions of terms “*socially disadvantaged individual*” in the context of education, traditional support mechanisms assisting in achieving of equal opportunities in the education of socially disadvantaged children, e.g. Roma: pre-school preparation, teacher’s assistants, activation and education courses for adults, zero grades. The author believes that the *broader application of social pedagogue’s functions, along with the improvement of student practice targeted at the needs of socially disadvantaged children* should provide wider possibilities.¹⁹⁷

¹⁹⁷ GULOVÁ, L. 2008. Aktivita a programy směřující k rozvoji vzdělávacích perspektiv romského dítěte – Activities and programmes leading to the development of educational perspectives of a Roma child. In Miroslava BARTOŇOVÁ – MARIE VÍTKOVÁ et al.: *Vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami II.* – Education of pupils with special educational needs II. p. 221 – 227. Brno : Paido, 2008.

Research: Miroslava Bartoňová, Jarmila Pipeková. – *Teacher's assistant in preparatory classes of elementary schools*

The authors presented the results of their research conducted in the academic year 2006/2007 in the preparatory classes of elementary schools in the Czech Republic, whose aim was to demonstrate the important role of teacher's assistants in the education of socially disadvantaged pupils, including Roma pupils. This research brought information on the opinion of teacher's assistants, teachers and other school staff as well, the level of cooperation between teachers and their assistants, benefits of teacher's assistants' work. The results have shown the need for teacher's assistants for Roma pupils.¹⁹⁸

Research: Marie Těthalová. *What to offer for pre-school pupils?*

The author emphasizes the need for the preparation of children in the last year of kindergarten and during the transition process onto the first stage of elementary school, through an intensified individual preparation of socially disadvantaged children.¹⁹⁹

Research: Lenka Gulová; Jiří Němec; Ema Štěpařová. *Education of socially disadvantaged pupils – Roma pupil in preparatory class from teachers' point of view*

The research was focused on Roma children coming from socially disadvantaged environment and preparatory classes, with an emphasis on the improvement of children's language skills and on the family partnership. *The authors consider classroom games as very important (first, it is necessary to teach children how to play games).* Preparatory-class teacher has to approach each individual carefully. The Roma family values are reversed: early

¹⁹⁸ BARTOŇOVÁ, M. – PIPEKOVÁ, J. 2008. Asistent pedagoga v přípravné třídě základní školy – *Teacher's assistant in preparatory classes of elementary schools*. In Miroslava Bartoňová – Marie Vitková et al. *Vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami II. – Education of pupils with special educational needs II.* Brno : Paido, 2008. p. 229 – 244.

¹⁹⁹ TĚTHALOVÁ, M. *Co nabídnout předškolákům – What to offer for pre-school pupils?* Informatorium: časopis pro výchovu dětí od 3 – 8 let v mateřských školách a školních družinách – Informatorium – magazine for the education of pupils from 3-8 years of age in kindergartens and school-care centres. Vol. 17, No. 1 (2010). Praha: Portál, 1993, ISSN 1210-7506. p. 12 – 14.

motherhood, a woman with no education. Education value is ranked very low.²⁰⁰

Research: Jana Hájková. *Zero grade as an alternative solution for the school immaturity at the beginning of compulsory school attendance*

The author considers the zero grade as the most suitable alternative for the education of socially disadvantaged pupils (Roma pupils).²⁰¹

Research: Miroslava Bartoňová. *Approaches to early education of socially disadvantaged pupils*

The author presents the results on the research assessment conducted between the years 2000 – 2008 in preparatory classes of elementary schools in the Czech Republic. The aim of the research was a comprehensive analysis of theoretical and empirical sources on the issue of multicultural education of individuals of different ethnic background, with an emphasis on the possibilities for an effective education in the preparatory class. The research has shown that the establishment of preparatory classes in the Czech Republic was a right move.²⁰²

Research: Vladimíra Vojtěchová. *The Roma in preparatory classes*

The author presents the preparatory classes as a new form of education aimed at improving the school results of Roma children and emphasizes the need for an introduction of incentive programmes for the preparation of Roma children.²⁰³

²⁰⁰ LENKA GULOVÁ – JIŘÍ NĚMEC – EMA ŠTĚPAŘOVÁ. 2007. Edukace sociálně znevýhodněných žáků – romský žák v přípravné třídě z pohledu učitelů – Education of socially disadvantaged pupils – Romany pupil in preparatory class from teachers' point of view. In Marie Vítková et al. *Vzdělávání žáků se speciálními vzdělávacími potřebami I.* – Education of pupils with special educational needs I./č. 1, Brno: Paido, 2007. s. 127 – 141.

²⁰¹ JANA HÁJKOVÁ. 2000. *Nulté ročníky jako alternativní řešení školní nezralosti po zahájení školní docházky.* Pedagogická orientace. č. 3 (2000). s. 88 – 89.

²⁰² MIROSLAVA BARTOŇOVÁ. 2008. *Přístupy k počátečnímu vzdělávání dětí se sociálním znevýhodněním.* Speciální pedagogika: časopis pro teorii a praxi speciální pedagogiky [Approaches to early education of socially disadvantaged children. Special Pedagogy: magazine for the theory and practice of special education. Vol. 18, No. 2 (2008), p. 101 – 120. Praha : Univerzita Karlova. ISSN 1211-2720.

²⁰³ VLADIMÍRA VOJTĚCHOVÁ. 1998. *The Roma in preparatory class.* Informatorium 3 – 8. Vol. 5, No. 6 (1998), p. 6 – 7.

In accordance with Vojtěchova's opinions, one of our project's activities (*Project Code: SLO 042 Roma Education Fund "School for Everybody"*) is the elaboration (experimental verification as well) of Acceleration Programmes for Roma pupils.

Research: Milena Pospíšilová. *Roma children in preparatory grades of elementary (special) school - evaluation*

The author investigated the scope of preparatory classes for Roma children. Based on the evaluation research, she concludes that Roma children, who completed the preparatory class, were mostly successful in the first grade of ES. Children who attended the preparatory grade of ES were found more successful than children who attended the preparatory grade within the special ES. Based on these findings, the author does not recommend the establishment of preparatory grades within the special ES.²⁰⁴

Research: Eva Šotolová. *Current approaches to the education of Roma children in the Czech Republic focusing on preparatory classes and Roma teacher's assistants*

Addressing the handicap of Roma children while entering the first grade of ES in the area of language, social, cultural and physical skills, is according to the author, possible by *an expansion of preparatory classes perceived as one of the effective solutions when solving the problem of Roma education.*²⁰⁵

Preparatory grades are positively evaluated by some other authors as well, e.g. Jolanta Przybyłaková (1996)²⁰⁶, Alexej Bechtin (1994)²⁰⁷ and other experts from the pedagogical theory and practice.

²⁰⁴ MILENA POSPÍŠILOVÁ. 2002. Roma children in preparatory grade of ES (special ES) – evaluation. *Social Work* No. 2 (2001/02). p. 57 – 72.

²⁰⁵ EVA ŠOTOLOVÁ. 1999. *Current approaches to the education of Roma children in the Czech Republic focusing on preparatory classes and Roma teacher's assistants* *Pedagogy*. Vol. 53, No. 1 (2003). p. 79 – 83.

²⁰⁶ JOLANTA PRZYBYŁAKOVÁ. (1996). *Lack of education of the Roma in the Czech Republic is totally unbearable in the future* *Telegraf*. Vol. 5, No. 20. VII. (1996), p. 4.

²⁰⁷ ALEXEJ BECHTIN. 1994. *Courage and desire for experimenting. Elementary school is not just an ordinary stage of ES.* *Educational System*. No. 8 (1994). p. 5.

Summary

Based on the analysis of conducted researches, focused on the effectiveness of education of socially disadvantaged social groups in the pre-primary and primary education (ISCED 0 and 1), with an emphasis on zero grades (preparatory grades) in different countries – USA, France, Germany, Great Britain, Poland, Czech Republic... , we can state that almost all the conducted researches have confirmed legitimacy of introducing the compensatory education by using zero (preparatory) grades for children and pupils from socially (ethnically) disadvantageous environment.

3.3.2 Analysis of researches (surveys) focused on zero (preparatory) grades in Slovakia

Several authors in Slovakia have been dealing with the issue of education of Roma pupils, the issue of new educational approaches, the issue of zero grades and teacher's assistants, for example: Miron Zelina (2002), Dana Valachová (2002), Ladislav Horňák (2004, 2005, 2006, 2007), Vladimír Klein (2003 – 2011), Tatiana Matulayová (2005, 2006, 2007), Milan Portik (2003, 2006), Beáta Kosová (2006), Bronislava Kasáčová (2006), Soňa Kariková (2006), Rastislav Rosinský (2006), Erika Novotná (2006), Štefan Porubský (2002, 2004), Ľubomíra Pružinská (2006), Iveta Boržíková (2006), Ľudmila Belásová (2006), Bibiána Hlebová (2006), Jozef Liba (2006), Elena Gallová-Kriglerová (2006) a Mária Hušová (2007). In this part of our work, we will analyse the most important researches (surveys) conducted during the last twenty years, dedicated to the issue of zero (preparatory) grade and the profession of a teacher's assistant.

Ivona Bellová. *The introduction of zero grades in elementary schools. Transformation of education and personal development of a pupil*

The author positively rates the results of the experiment's evaluation of the Ministry of Education: *The introduction of zero grades in elementary schools*

since 1992. She published a comparison of the results of zero-grade pupils with the results of first-grade pupils of ES who didn't attend zero grades, or kindergartens. According to the results, zero grades have proven to be far more beneficial.²⁰⁸

Viera Bystrenová. *Let's accept a child's right for education!*

The author expresses her own point of views on the existence of preparatory grades. She teaches at the elementary school of P. Dobšinského in Slavošovce – a region with a high concentration of Roma population, where a special preparatory grade has been established. It provides children with an excellent preparation for the first-grade entry at elementary school. Cultural, social, hygienic and community habits are being developed here as well. The specificities of Roma children are being used, such as musical and physical predispositions.²⁰⁹

Other authors (especially from practice) appreciate the introduction of zero grades as well, e.g. Elena Pajdlhauserová (2000),²¹⁰ Anna Šaffová (1999),²¹¹ Mária Maczejková (2000),²¹² Katarína Ondrášová (2002),²¹³ Eva Šotolová (1996),²¹⁴ Anna Pastorová (1994),²¹⁵ Jolana Manniová (2001),²¹⁶ Ladislav Józsa (1993),²¹⁷ Elena Šimková (2000)²¹⁸ and others.

²⁰⁸ BELLOVÁ, I. 1997. *Zavedenie nultých ročníkov v ZŠ. Premeny vzdelávania a rozvoj osobnosti žiaka.* (1997). s. 161 – 163.

²⁰⁹ BYSTRENOVÁ, V. 1999. *Let's accept a child's right for education!* Teachers' newspaper Vol. 49, No.31 (1999), p. 4.

²¹⁰ PAJDLHAUSEROVÁ, E. 2000. *Analysis of the current situation.* Draft concept. Teachers' newspaper. Vol. 50, No.7 (2000), p. 6 – 7.

²¹¹ ŠAFFOVÁ, A. 1999. *A child from low-stimulating Roma environment in the preparatory grade of ES.* Our school; Vol. 2, No. 1 (1998/99), p. 36 – 37.

²¹² MACZEJKOVÁ, M. 2000. *Genesis (and future?).* Teachers' newspaper. Vol. 50, No. 37 (2000). p. 3.

²¹³ ONDRÁŠOVÁ, K. 2002. *Quantification of zero grades in ES.* Family and School. Vol. 50, No.3 (2002), p. 11.

²¹⁴ ŠOTOLOVÁ, E. 1996. *Zero – preparatory grades in Slovakia.* Special Pedagogy. Vol. 6, No. 4 (1996). p. 47 – 49.

²¹⁵ PASTOROVÁ, A. *We need a zero grade!* Teachers' newspaper. Vol. 44, No. 9 (1994). p. 8.

²¹⁶ MANNIOVÁ, J. 2001. *Preparatory grade – specific program for the development of language, communication and educational skills of Roma children.* School Free of Racism and Xenophobia. Bratislava, Inventa. 2001.

²¹⁷ JÓZSA, L. 1993. *I'm in! Echo for an article „My proposal: Zero grade“ (for Roma pupils).* Teachers' newspaper, Vol. 43, No.14 (1993). p. 4.

²¹⁸ ŠIMKOVÁ, E. 2000. *A brief report on the experiment.* Teachers' newspaper. Vol. 50, No. 39 (2000), p. 5.

Other well-known professionals have dealt with the importance of the profession of teacher's assistant in the process of education of Roma children in zero grades. In 2000, Horňák and Petrasová prepared the content of *pedagogical-psychological preparation of a teacher's assistant* and the possibilities of its application in classes (in zero grades as well) with the Roma pupils.²¹⁹

Zelina a Valachová (2002) were dealing with the issue of Roma education. The conducted researches were focused on *the measurement of effectiveness of the zero-grade education*, with the presence of teacher's assistant. They also performed the microanalyses of the educational process, which led to suggestions for improving the Roma education.²²⁰

Porubsky (2004) elaborated *The Basis of the Concept of Preparation of Teacher and Teacher's Assistant in the Context of Compensatory Education* and he also dealt with the perception of work and study of teacher's assistant/pedagogical assistant in zero grades. He positively evaluates the experimental verification of the projects *zero grade* and *the profession of a teacher's assistant*.²²¹

The possibilities of increasing the level of socialization within Roma communities have been the subject of targeted applied research, elaborated by the faculties of particular universities in Slovakia: Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, Faculty of Education in Presov, Faculty of Education and Pedagogical Faculty of UMB in Banská Bystrica. *The research project Enhancing Socialization Level of the Roma Community Through the Educational Systems for Social and Missionary Workers and Teacher's Assistants* (2004 – 2006) presents a certain vision of a realistic solution to the problems associated with the processes of socialization of Roma children, including the help of zero grades

²¹⁹ HORŇÁK, L. – PETRASOVÁ, A. 2000. A Roma teacher's assistant. In *Our School*. Vol. III., No. 10, 2000.

²²⁰ VALACHOVÁ, D. – ZELINA, M. 2002. Pedagogical monitoring – Measuring the effectiveness of education in pre-school and preparatory grades. In Butašová, A. and collective.: *Education of Roma children in the European Context*. 1.edition., Nové Zámky : CROCUS, 2002. p. 98 – 105. ISBN 80-85756-70-6.

²²¹ PORUBSKÝ, Š. 2004. The concept of work and study of teacher's assistant / pedagogical assistant. In Kosová, B. (edit.): *Roma ethnic – its specifics and education*. Zborník. Banská Bystrica. PdF UMB, 2004.

and teacher's assistants.²²² The profession of *teacher's assistant* and zero grades were positively evaluated within the research project elaborated by Kariková a Kasáčová as well (2006).²²³

Slovak Governance Institute (SGI) in Bratislava conducted a series of interviews with various persons involved in education, among others with teacher's assistants, in order to determine their attitudes towards the established measures. This have resulted into a quantitative research entitled *The Impact of Measures Focused on Improving the Situation of Roma Children in Education* (Gallová-Kriglerová, 2006)²²⁴, implemented in the regions of Brezno, Michalovce and Skalica. Conclusions of the research have shown that teacher's assistants should be representatives from the Roma community. The parents and children know these people quite well and they even trust him. However, they criticize the segregation of Roma pupils who are educated in separated Roma classes (including zero grades).

Klein was dealing comprehensively with the topic of teacher's assistant and zero grades (sometimes in joint authorship with Matulayová or Rosinský).²²⁵ From all the research conducted by them, we've decided to

²²² *Increasing the level of socialization of the Roma community through education of social and missionary workers and teacher's assistants. Final Report on the solution of the state commission of the Ministry of Education, approved by the Fovernment Resolution No. 912/2002. UKF Nitra, UMB Banská Bystrica. UK Bratislava, PU Prešov. Nitra : 2006. ISBN 80-8050-998-0.*

²²³ KARIKOVÁ, S. – KASÁČOVÁ, B. 2006. Summarizing the partial results of researches focused on the opinions of pedagogical employees on the education of teacher's assistants. In Rosinský, R. (edit.) *Increasing the level of of socialization of the Roma ethnic through the educational systems designed for social and missionary workers and teacher's assistants* 1. edition., Nitra : FSVZ UKF, 2006. p. 270 – 290. ISBN 80-8085-987-5.

²²⁴ GALLOVÁ, A. – KRIGLEROVÁ, E. 2007. *The Impact of Measures Focused on Improving the Situation of Roma Children in Education*. SGI (Slovak Governance Institute). Bratislava. 2007. without ISBN.

²²⁵ KLEIN, V. 2003. Teacher's assistant. In *Empirical knowledge from the education of Roma children. The impact of family and the role of mothers in the education of Roma children* Collection of abstracts from the scientific seminar with an international participation. Spišská Nová Ves : FSV UKF – VVaPC, 2003. p. 241, ISBN 80-8050-667-1.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2005. Education of teacher's assistants. In *Quality of life and equal opportunities – from the perspective of adults' education and social work*. Prešov : Faculty of Arts of the Presov University, 2005, p. 795 – 800. ISBN 80-8068-425-1.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2005. Preparation of Roma teacher's assistants. In *Upbringing and educational methods in rektion to national minorities*. Praha : Commision of the Prague City Council for National Minorities, 2005, p. 270 – 272. ISBN 80-902972-8-9.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2005. Roma as teacher's assistants see them. In *School through the eyes of the world today*. Collection of abstracts from the international scientific conference. Prešov: Faculty of Arts of the Presov University, 2005, p. 276 – 280. ISBN 80-8045-398-5.

mention the research focused on teacher's assistants in zero grades conducted by Klein (2007), entitled *Education of Socially and Educationally Handicapped Pupils in the Zero Grade of Elementary School* in the districts of Stará Ľubovňa a Svidník. He verified the effectiveness of zero grades on the research file of ninety-two Roma parents and forty-eight teachers working in zero grades of ES. The findings confirm the *positive impact of the zero grade and the role of teacher's assistant on the quality of education of Roma children*. The zero grades have a significant importance, especially for Roma pupils who are educationally and socially handicapped and the most significant finding of the conducted research is a confirmation of our experiences that teacher's assistants should operate in all zero grade classes of ES.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2006. Survey among the Roma teacher's assistants. In *Identity in relation to national minorities*. Praha : Commision of the Prague City Council for National Minorities, 2006, p. 387 – 397. ISBN 80-903727-0-8.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2006. Knowledge and experience of teacher's assistants in elementary schools In *Pedagogical spectrum*. 2006, Vol. 0, p. 91 – 102. ISSN 1335-5589.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2007. Education to the system of values of Roma. In *Human – History – Values*. Ostrava : University of Ostrava, Pedagogical Faculty, 2007, p. 409 – 413. ISBN 80-7368-273-7.

KLEIN, V. 2007. Education of socially and educationally handicapped pupils in the zero grade of elementary school. In KLEIN, Vladimír – FABIANOVÁ, Vlasta. *Current trends in the socio-educational work with Roma pupils*. Nitra : Constantine The Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, 2007. p. 179 – 230. ISBN 978-80-8094-119-2.

KLEIN, V. 2007. *Education of Roma children by a teacher's assistant and zero grade*. Ružomberok : Catholic Univeristy in Ruzomberok, 2007. 115 p. ISBN 978-80-8084-176-8.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2007. Teacher's assistant and multicultural education. In *ACTA HUMANICA 2/2007 Multicultural aspects of education in the learning society*. Faculty of Humanities, University of Žilina, 2007.p. 56 – 65. ISSN 1336-5126.

KLEIN, V. – MATULAYOVÁ, T. 2007. Project of the European Social Fund „Additional Education of Teacher's Assistants and teachers with a focus on marginalized groups. In KLEIN, V. – FABIANOVÁ, V. (edit.) *Current trends in the socio-educational work with Roma pupils*. Nitra : Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, 2007. p. 6 – 43. ISBN 978-80-8094-119-2.

KLEIN, V. – HORVÁTHOVÁ, I. 2007. Roles of a teacher's assistant in the education of Roma pupils from socially low-stimulating environment. In KLEIN, V. – FABIANOVÁ, V. (edit.) *Current trends in the socio-educational work with Roma pupils*. Nitra : Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, 2007. p. 274 – 282. ISBN 978-80-8094-119-2.

KLEIN, V. 2008. *Teacher's assistant in the process of elementary education of Roma pupils*. Nitra : UKF, 2008. 198 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-348-6.

KLEIN, V. 2008. *Multicultural education and the Roma*. Nitra : UKF, 2008. 170 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-333-2.

ROSINSKÝ, R. – ŠRAMOVÁ, B. – KLEIN, V. – VANKOVÁ, K. 2009. *Pedagogical-psychological and cross-cultural aspects of the teachers' work with pupils from a different socio-cultural environment*. Nitra. UKF, 2009. 209 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-589-3.

A Comprehensive view at the profession of teacher's assistant and the institute of zero grade is given by Klein in his scientific monographs *Education of Roma children by a teacher's assistant and zero grades* (2007) and *Teacher's assistant in the process of primary education for Roma pupils* (2008), which among other topics include the analysis of new approaches in the education of Roma children (teacher's assistants, zero grades and empirical knowledge from their application).

The result of these researches (surveys) represent the findings that the effect of zero grade and teacher's assistant on the quality of education of Roma pupils is positive and in the future it will be necessary to:

- help Roma pupils to identify with the value system of the majority society and to realize the need for education,
- break down the unfriendly parents' attitudes towards the school and education of their children,
- integrate pupils from socially disadvantageous environment in classes with fewer pupils and thus creating better conditions for applying an individual approach to pupils,
- support the all-day educational system (school clubs, courses, competitions, school of arts...),
- support an employment of (Roma) pedagogical assistants in schools attended mostly by the pupils from socially disadvantaged environment,
- support people coming from the Roma communities in becoming teacher's assistants,
- support permanent increase of the teachers' and teacher's assistants' qualification in order to successfully work with Roma pupils,
- involve Roma parents into the educational process (e.g. out-of-school activities, competitions, cultural performances), because it has a positive impact on the school attendance and general interest in school,
- continue in the introduction of zero grades in ES, especially for pupils who come from socially disadvantageous environment,
- introduce the role of pedagogical assistant, especially teacher's assistant in classes with Roma pupils who come from socially disadvantageous environment and are insufficiently prepared for an entry within the formal educational system.

4 RESEARCH ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ZERO GRADES

In the theoretical part of the publication, we tried to highlight the problems of Roma pupils' education in the context of zero grades within elementary schools in Slovakia from different aspects. We analysed the specificities of Roma children's education, the development of zero grade introduction in Slovakia in comparison to the situation in Czech Republic. In our opinion, the important part of the study is the one, in which we've clearly defined the basic concepts and technical terms relevant to the subject of our scientific study. We managed to put together all existing current legislative standards and measures related to Roma education and zero grades within elementary schools. We also consider the analysis of all previously realized significant researches and surveys, focused on zero (preparatory) grade ²²⁶ in Slovakia and abroad, which have been implemented over the past nineteen years, as very important in this context.

Research part of our study is also focused on zero grades and was carried out between September 2011 and June 2012 (including interpretations and edition of final publication). As a part of this research, we also use the knowledge gained while participating on workshops and meetings with target groups of our research in recent years.

4.1 Research problem, research objectives and questions

Research problem

We consider zero grades as one of the forms of compensatory education. Its establishment is generally considered positively, but the contemporary educational theory and practice show the need to:

- monitor and measure the quality of educational process in classes of zero grade,
- document the findings regarding the future of zero grade graduates,
- analyse the effectiveness of zero grades.

²²⁶ In our study, we use the term *preparatory grade* until 1st September 2002 (experimental verification). Following the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 408/2002 Coll. and after institutionalizing of zero grades we will use the term *zero grade*.

Research objectives and questions

The main goal of our research is to analyse the effectiveness of zero grades in the process of education of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in selected schools. Zero grade was institutionalized in 2002²²⁷, but there are still not enough empirical findings (although there are a few studies, which are mentioned in other parts of this publication), that would give us sufficiently clear and detailed picture of the importance of zero grades in the educational career of students.

One of the indicators of efficiency of zero grades is the success of its graduates, their inclusion in mainstream classes after completing the zero grade; or vice-versa their failure, their inclusion in the segregated educational system in special elementary schools, or specialized classes within elementary schools for mentally disabled children. One of the starting points for assessing the effectiveness (success of zero grade graduates) will be subsequent educational achievement according to the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED), which serves as a tool for comparing, compiling and presenting statistics of education within individual countries, as well as international intensions. The advantage of zero grades in elementary school is the fact, that the zero grade is a part of educational standards in the category ISCED 1, based on the national educational programmes for pre-primary and primary education (ISCED 0 and ISCED 1)²²⁸. There is a possibility of continuing in the education of these pupils on the second stage of elementary school and after graduation also obtaining upper secondary education within ISCED 2.²²⁹

The main disadvantage for pupils who are being educated in segregated conditions of special elementary schools, or specialized classes within elementary schools for mentally disabled pupils is the fact, that the pupil will

²²⁷ In compliance with the amendment to the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 29/1984 Coll. on the System of Primary and Secondary Schools (School Act) as amended in wording of Act No. 408/2002 Coll. of June 27, 2002, *on establishment of zero grade in primary school and establishment of the profession of an assistant teacher within pre-school facilities, primary schools and special primary schools.*

²²⁸ According to § 19 Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. *on Education and Training (Education Act)* and on the revision and Amendment of Certain Acts

²²⁹ According to the National Educational Programme for second stage of elementary school in the Slovak Republic

obtain maximally “primary education within ISCED 1”²³⁰, after completing special elementary school, by receiving educational programme for pupils with mental disability. Special elementary school graduate or graduate from specialized class within elementary school (thus only within educational programme for pupils with mild degree of mental disability – variant A) reaches the maximum in education according to ISCED classification maximally on ISCED 1 level. This disadvantages him in the labour market, as well as in his/her social life in the future and it also decisively contributes to his/her further segregation in all areas of life.

Since the zero grade has become a part of compulsory education in 2004, it is not yet possible to evaluate the continuation of graduates in further education (the first graduates are still pupils of elementary schools). Therefore, we recommend observing also this aspect of their educational career in the future.

In connection with our research problem, many questions arise and we will try to find the answers.

- What was the evolution of zero grades in the Slovak Republic?
- What is the effectiveness of zero grades?
- What is the success / failure of zero-grade graduates examined in selected schools? What is their educational career (with particular focus on their further education in segregated – special elementary school, specialized class within elementary school, or integrated – mainstream class within elementary school)?
- Does this form of education carry elements of segregation or discrimination? If so, under what circumstances and how to change this situation?
- Do teacher’s assistants (Roma) work in zero grades?
- What are the barriers to the educational success of zero-grade graduates and Roma pupils in monitored schools?
- What are the views of pedagogical staff (including pedagogical assistants), parents and leading experts – in Slovakia and Czech Republic to:
 - the benefit and effectiveness of zero grades,

²³⁰ According to § 16 Section 2, Letter a) of Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. *on Education and Training (Education Act)*.

- advantages and disadvantages of zero grades,
- possible discrimination associated with education in zero grades?
- What are their proposals for changes in the educational system of Roma children?

We believe that if we find answers to above mentioned questions, we can contribute to the stabilization of zero grades as an organic part of the educational system in schools and educational institutions, or conversely, the inadequacy of this form of compensatory education in the educational system of Slovak Republic will be demonstrated. From the perspective of humanistic education and new trends in education of Roma children and pupils, we consider as extremely important to demonstrate (or refute) the need for the establishment of zero grades in elementary schools, as a part of inclusive (integrated) education of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (especially Roma children and pupils).

Partial objectives, which we set in line with questions, are divided into two groups:

A. Research objectives:

1. Analyse the evolution of zero grades in SR:

- from 1st September 1993 until 1st September 2002²³¹ (during the experimental verification of preparatory (zero grades),²³²
- from 1st September 2002 to the present (including the period after an adoption of the new Education Act No. 245/2008).

2. Find the (quantitative) success of zero grades graduates in selected schools through the data regarding:

- assigning of zero grade graduates into classes (proportion of graduates enrolled in special schools and classes),

²³¹ Following the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 408/2002.

²³² In our study, we use the term *preparatory grade* until 1st September 2002. After following the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 408/2002 of the Law Code we will use the term *zero grade*.

- continuing of zero grade graduates in further education (in secondary schools).
3. *Find the (qualitative) opinions of key persons on the effectiveness, importance, advantages and disadvantages of zero grades (for pupils, for school, for the society, for Roma population) through interviews and questionnaires:*
 - with directors of selected schools,
 - with zero-grade teachers,
 - with classroom teachers on the first stage of elementary schools in classes with zero-grade graduates,
 - with parents,
 - with experts.
 4. *Search for possible risks (or disadvantages) of zero grade with a special regard to the risk of creating an ethnically and socially homogeneous classes*
 - specifically monitor the composition of classes in zero grades (ethnicity, socio-economic conditions) and also monitor the composition of classes of graduates in higher grades.
 5. *Identify barriers to the educational successes of zero grade graduates in selected schools through:*
 - quantitative examination of school documents (class books, statistics on academic progress of pupils...),
 - qualitative interviews with key persons.
 6. *Search and analyse the support tools focused on Roma pupils and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment*
 7. *Based on the analysis, draw conclusions and propose recommendations for pedagogical theory and practice, with a focus on improving the situation in area of Roma pupils' education, with a special attention on further*

possibilities of implementation of inclusive (integration) trends in pedagogical process

B Experimental objectives:

- 1. Implement and verify the effectiveness of acceleration programmes for Roma pupils in selected schools*
- 2. Analyse the state of school maturity (readiness) of six year old Roma children in the district of Spišská Nová Ves²³³ during the last four school years (2007/2008, 2008/2009, 2009/2010, 2010/2011) and according to the diagnostics of school maturity their subsequent inclusion:*
 - to zero grade of elementary school,*
 - to 1st grade of elementary school,*
 - to 1st grade of special elementary school,*
 - to 1st grade of special class within elementary school.*
- 3. Analyse the results of Roma pupils assessment²³⁴ in the district of Spišská Nová Ves after one year of their education in zero grade during the past four school years (2007/2008, 2008/2009, 2009/2010, 2010/2011) and based on the results of the assessment analyse the possibilities of their further education in one of the alternatives of our educational system.*

4.2 Methods

In our research, we chose the combination of quantitative and qualitative detection, while being aware of advantages and limits of both approaches. The following methods were used:

²³³ School maturity was assessed by professional staff of the Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological counseling and prevention in Spišská Nová Ves

²²⁰ Rediagnosing was implemented by professional staff of the Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological counseling and prevention in Spišská Nová Ves.

a) Observation, assessment

During the visits of zero grade classes, we only focused on the observation of the phenomena, which we were interested in. We made the selection of observed phenomena and activities, which aimed to verify the effectiveness of zero grades. We used *direct, systematic observation*, in which we observed the set from the inside, as participants of observation.²³⁵ Interviews with teachers were carried out in zero-grade classes and there is a record written from each interview and visit. Besides to the above mentioned, we were interested in the location, size and equipment of the classroom.

b) Interview and discussion (conversation)

School visits were also used to carry out interviews (individual and group), which were led by the pedagogical staff according to pre-established dispositions (for each group of pedagogical participants we have developed research tool). The aim of interviews was to enhance the information obtained from quantitative and qualitative part of the survey, to examine the effectiveness, advantages, disadvantages and success of pupils of zero grades from the perspective of our participants. Interviews were structured into several topics (besides participants' data, we were interested in the following areas: pupils in zero grades, satisfaction of participants with the equipment of zero grades, the effectiveness of zero grades, advantages and disadvantages of zero grades (including any discriminatory school practices), the success of graduates from zero grades in comparison to other school pupils, the effectiveness of Roma pupil education and obstacles, recommendations for improving the quality of education in zero grades and education of Roma pupils). We followed Zelina²³⁶ during the interviews.

²³⁵ KOMÁRIK, E. 2002. *Metódy vedeckého poznávania človeka (Methods of scientific human cognition)*. Univerzita Komenského. Bratislava. p. 67. ISBN 80-223-1717-9 and ONDREJKOVIČ, P. 2006. *Úvod do metodológie sociálnych vied (Introduction to the methodology of the social science)*. REGENT, s. r. o. Bratislava. 2006. p. 130. ISBN 80-88904-44-7.

²³⁶ In ŠVEC, Š. et. al. 1998. *Metodológia vied o výchove: kvantitatívno – scientické a kvalitatívno-humanitné prístupy v edukačnom výskume (Methodology science of education: quantitative – scientific and qualitative – humanistic approaches in educational research)*. Bratislava : IRIS, 1998. p. 115 – 120. ISBN 80-88778-73-5.

c) Focus group (FG)

We used the method of focus group by working with parents of pupils in the municipality of Modrá. Parents were offered several model situations (and key questions related to them), concerning the effectiveness of zero grade, the satisfaction with zero grade (including the satisfaction with pedagogical staff), any discriminatory practices of school (concentration of Roma pupils in zero grades) and relationship with the management and pedagogical school staff. Although FG took place in the school premises, it was organized during a free day, and therefore there was no one present in school besides administrative staff and participants of FG. Parents were behaving openly; they had no problem developing discussions among themselves and with researchers.

d) Biographical method

This method is not a separate research method. It includes mainly the analysis of documents, observation, sounding diagnostic method and dialogue method (page 68).²³⁷ This method was used in our research with the intension to analyse and describe mainly human („educational“) life in the context of a fragment of social reality, with an emphasis on the particular type of activity in terms of professional work. In our research, we focused mainly on life of pupils of primary (and secondary) schools who graduated from zero grades at elementary school.

e) Analysis, evaluation and interpretation of outputs, documents

The essential research method is based on studying the documents and analysis of their content in this part of the research. Analysis, synthesis and generalization²³⁸ were applied as logical processing procedures. Primarily, we used the following written materials related to the research: statistics, class books, class catalogues, inspection records, private records from control and

²³⁷ JUSZSCYK, S. 2003. *Metodológia empirických výskumov v spoločenských vedách (Methodology of empirical research in the social science)*. Bratislava : IRIS. p. 68. ISBN 80-89018-13-0.

²³⁸ ŠVEC, Š. et. al. 1998. *Metodológia vied o výchove: kvantitatívno – scientické a kvalitatívno-humanitné prístupy v edukačnom výskume. (Methodology science of education: quantitative – scientific and qualitative – humanistic approaches in educational research)*. Bratislava : IRIS, 1998. p. 150 – 155. ISBN 80-88778-73-5.

audit activities. We proceeded according to the content analysis of Gavora.²³⁹ Furthermore, we used the database and statistic data of the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava, The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education of the Slovak Republic in Bratislava, regional school offices and our own evidence since we devote to this issue for many years.

e) Questionnaire

We used the questionnaires compiled by us and investigated the necessary information about zero grades within monitored elementary schools, as well as the information regarding the success/failure of zero-grade graduates in their further education. We proceeded according to Švec.²⁴⁰ In the questionnaire survey, we were mainly interested in data regarding school pupils and pupils of zero grades. We examined their school attainment in further grades of ES, as well as the interest in their further education.

4.3 Characteristics of the research file

As we promised the anonymity to the participants (we emphasize that we have respected the fundamental ethical principles of the research – the principle of voluntariness and anonymity), we will try to avoid the accurate data regarding municipalities and schools. All names of towns, municipalities and schools, as well as the names of the people stayed anonymous.

4.3.1 Characteristics of towns and municipalities

Overall, we visited three elementary schools in two municipalities and one town. All municipalities are located in Roma marginalized regions of the Eastern Slovakia. Red is considered as district town, others are rural

²³⁹ GAVORA, P. 1977. *Výskumné metódy v pedagogike (Research methods in pedagogy)*. Bratislava : Univerzita Komenského, 1997. p. 108 – 114. ISBN 80-223-1173-1.

²⁴⁰ ŠVEC, Š. et. al. 1998. *Metodológia vied o výchove: kvantitatívno-scientické a kvalitatívno-humanitné prístupy v edukačnom výskume. (Methodology science of education: quantitative – scientific and qualitative – humanistic approaches in educational research)*. Bratislava : IRIS, 1998. p. 125 – 158. ISBN 80-88778-73-5.

municipalities. They are all located in the same district. In each municipality, there is more than one Roma settlement of different types.²⁴¹ Their brief descriptions are presented in the following table. The figures in the tables were drawn from local documents, Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia 2004²⁴², interviews and bases on our own observations.

Table 8 *Towns and municipalities*

Municipality	District	Number of inhabitants (in cat.) from 2010	Number of Roma (In cat.) from 2004	Number of ES/ Specialized elementary schools	Number and type of Roma settlements (plus families living scattered)	Characteristics of settlements
Blue	Red	3500 – 4000	1500 – 2000	1/1	2 settlements in the outskirts of the municipality, 3 settlements outside of the municipality	Is segregated Roma settlement. Unofficially the settlement is divided into two parts – the richer (big houses) and poor (shacks). Some families live in homes with a lower standard. Unemployment here is high, even though according to teachers, some parents work abroad (for example Czech Republic and UK). Many families of school pupils live in very poor conditions (without water and sewerage).

²⁴¹ Based on well-established typology of Roma settlements (according to Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia, 2004) based on the location of settlement in relation to the municipality / town. **In the municipality of scattered settlement:** settlement residents live scattered among majority. In the municipality of concentrated settlement: municipal and urban concentration (for example neighborhoods, streets). **Roma settlements in the outskirts of municipalities:** A group of houses inhabited by Roma population and forms the border of built-up area of the municipality. **Settlement outside of the municipality:** a group of homes, that are located far from the municipality, or separated by some barrier. There is a continuous development between such settlement and the municipality.

²⁴² RADÍČOVÁ, I. and collective. 2004. *Atlas rómskych komunít na Slovensku 2004 (Atlas of Roma communities in Slovakia 2004)*. Bratislava : Inštitút pre verejné otázky, 2004. ISBN 80-88991-27-7.

Green	Red	8500 – 9000	over 2000	2/0	1 settlement outside of the municipality	Roma settlement is divided into two parts that are different at the first sight (huge differences in quality of living). „Better” part is well civil-equipped.
Red	Red	over 35000	over 2000	8/1	3 outside of town, 1 concentrated settlement	Very diverse settlements (in quality of living, equipment and overall standard of living). The unemployment is very high in all settlements.

4.3.2 Characteristics of schools

All visited schools have high proportion of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment and Roma pupils. They all have a long tradition of zero grades and are fully organized. In one case, the school is located in town (Red elementary school), other schools are rural. The information provided in the next section of the text has been drawn from school documents, discussions and observation.

Roma pupils are mentioned in school documents only sporadically (also pedagogical staff and directors of schools were avoiding such labelling of pupils in interviews). We haven't found programmes focused on Roma pupils (concerning their ethnicity), or other inclusive programmes (although all schools have pedagogical assistants and zero grades) in any document (with a small exception of one interest group in Red elementary school). In the field research, we found out that there is a project implemented in Blue elementary school focused on the adjustment of school plans. Interest groups for Roma pupils are also a part of it.

Schools mention pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (especially as a challenge for the improvement of their education success or in case of a poor school attendance).

Table 9 *Data on schools in the school year 2011/2012*

	Number of pupils	Proportion of pupils from SDE in %	Proportion of Roma pupils	Number of zero grades	Number of classes	Number of specialized classes	Number of pedagogical staff	Number of assistants
Blue ES	600 - 650	about 80	about 78	6	33	3	44	3
Green ES	650 - 700	about 65	about 60	2	33	4	56	6
Red ES	600 - 650	about 7	about 15	1	30	2	55	3

Blue elementary school

Blue elementary school is a rural elementary school connected with kindergarten. The proportion of Roma pupils is according to the director (Patrik, Blue ES) almost eighty % and most of these pupils come from local segregated Roma settlements. Many of them belong to the group of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (SDE) following the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. According to the opinion of the school director, the characteristic of pupils from SDE is “confounded” in praxis. There are pupils at school, who are not included in this category by labour office, but they do not differ from pupils included into the category by living conditions (poverty in family).

This determination of definition of students from socially disadvantaged environment is an obstacle for schools because of several reasons. One of the reasons is the calculation of pedagogical assistants according to the number of pupils from SDE – school has six assistants nowadays, but more are needed. The vast majority of pupils come from poor Roma households and that is, according to the director, the result of demographic development in the municipality, as well as the effort of non-Roma parents placing their children to schools in a nearby district town.

Although the school building has been reconstructed in recent years, its capacity cannot handle the increase of the number of pupils and therefore some classes (especially zero grades) function in two shifts. It is an obstacle

while organizing out-of-school afternoon activities, although in the current school year, pupils are offered thirty-seven interest groups (artistic, sporting, creative, and educational). The school is quite well equipped with specialized classrooms (school workshops, classroom of art, language, physical, chemical and biological laboratories, a training school kitchen, three ICT classrooms and multifunctional playground). The school is involved in several projects. Within one of them, the school was asked to elaborate the analysis of needs (focused on pupils from marginalized Roma communities) with the aim to create an all-day educational programme.

Green elementary school

It is a fairly large school with almost seven hundred pupils (60 % of Roma pupils; about 60% of this number come from socially disadvantaged environment). According to the evaluation report, the school has perfect conditions for the implementation of educational process. There are four buildings within the school. Classrooms are equipped with new furniture and high level didactic material (LCD TV's, DVD players, and some interactive whiteboards). Besides three gyms and fitness, two playgrounds, laboratories and a training kitchen, pupils also use the land with greenhouse and a gazebo for teaching in nature. The school offers thirty-eight various interest groups for pupils in the current school year.

According to the evaluation report, following objectives also belong to the conceptual school targets:

- implementation of projects that aim to increase the success of Roma pupils in school,
- implementation of zero grades,
- employing Roma assistants,
- improvement of the academic progress of Roma pupils by individual approach and tutoring,
- improvement of the communication between school and Roma community.

The report does not state how these targets will be met. The education of Roma pupils is also mentioned in the strengths part of this document.

Red elementary school

Red elementary school is the only school from our selection, which is located in town. The school is visited by more than six-hundred pupils; only 15% of them are Roma. We have included this school into selection, because there are Roma pupils from the poorest local area. There is one zero grade at the school (visited only by Roma pupils) and graduates from zero grade often continue in further education within further grades in unchanged class group (same classmates). According to our findings, gained from the observation and interview with the school director, there are classes within the school, where only Roma pupils are concentrated (informally called “Roma classes”). These classes are remedial classes and classes that represent a continuation of zero grades.

The school underwent a partial reconstruction. The equipment is very good, rated above standard (two gyms, pool, specialized classes, grounds, playgrounds). Forty interest groups, mainly sport groups, are being offered. According to their names, this school is the only one that offers the interest group accenting different ethnicity of Roma pupils (singing group is called in Roma language). The school is involved in several projects; most of them are focused on the completion and equipment of the school and school facilities.

4.3.3 Characteristics of participants

Our participants represent the pedagogical staff of selected schools – directors, zero grade teachers, class teachers in the first, second and third grade on the primary stage of elementary school (in classes attended by zero grade graduates) and teacher’s assistant (see table 10). There were also parents of pupils from Roma settlement nearby the municipality of Modrá and the experts (recognized experts, scientists and representatives of elementary schools in the Slovak Republic with a longer tradition of zero grades). We also addressed a number of successful zero-grade graduates, whose statements are presented in chapter 6. Data on the number of participants and research methods are summarized in the following table.

Table 10 *Number of participants according to the research methods*

	Individual interview	Group interview	Focus group	Survey
Directors of elementary schools	–	3	–	–
Assistants of teacher	3	–	–	–
Zero grade teachers	3	–	–	–
Class teachers on primary stage	9	–	–	–
Parents	–	–	6	–
Experts and representatives of schools with zero grade	–	–	–	9+21
Successful graduates	2	–	–	–
Teachers who have experience with working with children from SDE and Roma pupils	–	–	–	12

We approached overall twenty-seven experts, mainly from Slovakia, and forty school representatives who have the experience with zero grades, via e-mail. We asked for the answers to several questions (see table 11) the recognized experts, scientists and representatives of all relevant governmental and non-governmental institutions, that deal with this topic (for example The Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, Centre for the Research of ethnicity and culture, faculties of education within several universities, foundations). Nine celebrities responded to our request. Out of forty addressed elementary schools, twenty-one responded.

Table 11 *Questions for experts*

What are – in your opinion – pros and cons of zero grades? Can zero grades be considered as discriminatory form of education? If so, when and under what conditions? What would you suggest for reparation? What other (alternative) method of education would you suggest instead of zero grades? What would be its advantages in comparison to zero grades?
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Focus group with parents was carried out in the municipality of Modrá, as the elementary school in this municipality has the highest proportion of pupils from Roma segregated settlement. The meeting was attended by six parents. All of them come from mentioned segregated settlements. Most of the

parents (with the exception of one attendee) have children in the school age at the local elementary school. They are all parents of graduates from zero grade or pupils of zero grades as well. Teacher's assistant who lives in mentioned settlement, helped us with the selection and addressing of parents. The following table summarizes brief information regarding parents.

Table 12 *Data about parents*

Pseudonym	Age	Number of children	Number of children in local PS	Number of children in zero grade
Karin	47	4	–	–
Izidor	28	4	1	1
Viola	40	7	6	1
Ivana	32	9	6	1
Pavol	33	6	5	1
Michal	–	4	2	–

Table 13 summarizes basic information regarding pedagogic participants, with whom we carried out the individual interviews and one group discussion (directors).

With the exception of Lydia (27, Blue ES), participants are not interested in education focused on working with Roma pupils. Lydia is interested in multicultural education „...where I would learn more about the Roma issue...”

We promised to all teachers from Green elementary school, that we will not mention any of their personal data (including the age and length of their practice). They all have experience with working in zero grades (school leadership assigns them to work in zero grade every few years).

Table 13 *Brief characteristics of the participants – teachers*

Pseudo-nym	School	Age	Title	Length of practice	Education	Specialized education	Motivation
Patrik	Blue ES	–	Director	–	–	–	–
Eva		34	Teacher in zero grade	15 yrs.	University	Yes (1, 3 attestation, short-term trainings on subjects, communication..)	Was assigned to zero grade
Alena		52	Teacher in 1 st grade	25 yrs.	University	Yes (for zero grade)	–
Dana		58	Teacher in 2 nd grade	39 yrs.	University	yes (various short-term trainings on subject)	–
Lýdia		27	Teacher in 3 rd grade	5 yrs.	University	Yes (short-term trainings focused on communication, assertiveness...)	–
Marta		44	Assistant	8 yrs.	Secondary specialized school	Teacher's assistant course	Was recommended for the job
Júlia	Green ES	–	Director	–	–	–	–
Ema		–	Teacher in zero grade	–	–	Yes (Step by step)	–
Olina		–	Teacher in 1 st grade	–	–	Yes (Step by step)	–
Žaneta		–	Teacher in 2 nd grade	–	–	Yes (Step by step)	–
Milada		–	Teacher in 3 rd grade	–	–	Yes (Step by step)	–
Ilona		28	Assistant	7 yrs.	University	Yes (teacher's assistant course, supplement of educational qualification)	Was recommended (during studies)
Martin	Red ES	–	Director	–	–		
Hana		61	Teacher in zero grade	–	University	No	Asked the school leadership to work in zero grade (in

							retirement)
Vlasta		50	Teacher in 1 st grade	More than 30 years (20 years working with Roma pupils)	University	Yes (attestation, trainings on education of Roma pupils)	
Jela		57	Teacher in 2 nd grade	35	University	Yes (attestations)	
Klaudia		44	Teacher in 3 rd grade	21	University	Yes (qualification tests, education on the subject)	
Jita		33	Assistant	14	Secondary school	Yes (qualification – teacher's assistant)	Through the labour office

5 BASIC QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This chapter presents findings from both parts of the research – quantitative and qualitative. It concerns statistics regarding the zero grades, which complement explanations obtained in interviews.

Before we focus on the topic of following subsection, let us state the criticism of statutory definition of pupil from socially disadvantaged environment, or putting into practice of such pupil, according to the director of Blue ES. Other present directors agreed with his criticism as well: *„This characteristic significantly distorts the pupil from SDE, as labour offices identify him by receiving, or not-receiving the benefits in material need. When a mother starts maternity leave, they drop out of the system.”* (Patrik) If it did not work like that, directors could hire more pedagogical assistants and more children would be entitled for the support in material need. *„The Ministry of Education adopted the methodology of the Ministry of Labour without having any correlation with the characteristic of pupil from SDE in education. The methodology of the Ministry of Labour is based on the income per capita; not on the five conditions, which characterize the pupil from SDE in the education. This means that not all of the conditions are being followed, only the material need – the person who is beneficiary recipient of food and school supplies.”*

5.1 Pupils from socially disadvantaged environment or Roma pupils?²⁴³

Our primary research objective was to determine the effectiveness (benefits and risks) of zero grades in relation to Roma pupils. We assumed (and our assumption has partially fulfilled), that the respondents will try to avoid the labelling of the ethnicity of zero grade pupils in the pursuit of political correctness. Therefore one of the issues, that we were trying to deal with during the preparation of the research and study, was the importance of the detection of pupils' ethnicity and how to label them in interviews (and study). Based on

²⁴³ Although we use the label „socially disadvantageous environment“ in the theoretical part of the study (with the explanation), we will remain in the use of the term „socially disadvantaged environment“ in the research part – as it was used by our participants.

the theoretical analysis of documents, professional publications, researches and our own experience, we register the critique of the negative consequences of concentration of children from similar social environment and same ethnicity in common classrooms, which is also the practical result of training of children from socially disadvantaged environment (SDE) in zero grades. We considered as important to open this topic in interviews and seek the views of participants. At the same time, we have decided to ask the questions regarding the ethnicity of pupils. If the ethnicity remains concealed, also the problems (risks) associated with the ethnicity remain unsaid – one of the major problems is the problem of segregated education.

In the study, we use the term “Roma pupil”, as well as the term “pupil from socially disadvantaged environment”.

We have already mentioned that a large proportion of pedagogic staff (perhaps with the exception of pedagogical assistants) tried to avoid the label of “Roma pupils” in interviews. They were justifying it by the legislation and the fear of the “accusation” of discrimination.

They used the term “pupils from socially disadvantaged environment” in interviews, but by the next question on their detailed characteristics, we had learned, that they meant “Roma children” in all cases and without any further effort of interviewers, the whole interview concerned the Roma pupils. It can be noted that more participants used the term “pupil from SDE” as a substitute for “Roma pupil” *despite the fact, that the number of Roma children does not match the number of children from SDE in two out of three monitored schools*. Out of the total number of Roma pupils attending Green and Red ES, about 50% come from SDE (based on the statutory definition).

In principle, the interviews were related to Roma pupils who live in poor conditions – mostly segregated rural or urban settlements.

Also in the field of education (as in other areas of state interventions towards Roma), two approaches are present:

- *civil* (pupil from SDE – zero grade, teacher’s assistant): officially does not recognize the ethnicity and defines the target groups in pursuance of their living conditions and social needs

- *ethnic* (Roma pupil – national education): based on the ethnic diversity of Roma population.

Proponents of the civil approach argue that the consequence of handling with ethnicity can be attributing the ethnic specifics to social characteristics – ethnicity of poverty. According to them, there is no reason to ascribe the ethnicity “specificity” to living in Roma settlements, which is the result of social isolation and poverty.

Our interviews suggest that this risk is present in practice (despite the preference of citizenship) and pedagogical staff tend to attribute the characteristics of pupils (or their “imperfection”) to their ethnicity.

Our participants (mainly directors) emphasized the application of civil approach, but nevertheless, zero grades in all schools are ethnically homogeneous – Roma. According to the testimony of teachers (and also a theoretical analysis of documents), seems like a pupil from SDE is primarily a Roma pupil. Some experts pointed out that not all children who are not ready for the school education are included in zero grades, but mainly/only Roma children from SDE.

According to our participants, ethnicity has no place in the formal education. Teacher is not interested in ethnicity of pupils – even in terms of antidiscrimination legislation, which is often a bad thing. Patrik (director of Blue ES) criticizes preferring the equal approach to pupils with different needs: *„You know, our legislation is choked by equal opportunities and then the state is convinced that all children are alike.”*

Application of civil approach is justified and we do not want to question it in any way. But the absence of inclusive programmes for Roma (or others, different from the ethnic majority) pupils, may be detrimental, as such programs allow the development of inter-ethnic relations. Also, as we mentioned above, there are other possible problems linked to different ethnicity, which will remain hidden in case of withholding of ethnicity (especially if that is the cause of disadvantaging). One of them may be gathering of pupils of same ethnicity into common classrooms, which is, as it seems, the indirect consequence of children selection according to school readiness, academic progress and parental pressure in monitored schools.

Martin (director of Red ES) mentioned the existence of “white classes” within his school. Those are the classes where only, or mainly non-Roma pupils are gathered. Other directors briefly responded (although raised the concern about the allegations of discrimination) to the request of the interviewer to explain the term “white class” as well. They admitted that there are classes with pure or predominantly non-Roma pupils within their schools as well.²⁴⁴ As the parents from the municipality of Blue said to us: *“if such classes are visited also by Roma pupils, then only by those from “better” families or those, who do not live in settlements”*. Also Hana (teacher, 1st class, Red ES) indicated that they include only “good” Roma pupils into white classes, *“because pupils, when they are good, are put together with white pupils in 1st grade.”*

Most of the participants responded negatively to our questions regarding the existence of special programmes focused on Roma pupils or inclusive programmes. However, in two schools, we recorded activities supporting the ethnic sentiments of Roma children. All three schools have projects focused on the education of Roma pupils from marginalized communities (mostly projects on funding reconstruction and school equipment). Blue ES is trying to adapt the school educational programme to Roma pupils through the project and based on the analysis of needs (the proportion of Roma pupils in this school is almost 80%). As a part of mentioned project, diverse interest groups are organized for Roma pupils.

Emphasizing of civil approach on one hand and the existence of projects focused on Roma pupils and “Roma” zero grades on the other hand, suggests that schools do not have a clear concept of approach to Roma pupils (their ethnicity is indicated where it is necessary or required – for example within projects for marginalized Roma communities and in case of ethnically homogeneous zero grades, official documents speak of the pupils from SDE) and practice is not fully consistent with the theory (legislation).

²⁴⁴ More detailed in chapter 7.

5.2 Education of Roma pupils and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (motivation and barriers)

Directors assessed the school performance of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment briefly: as very weak. *“I think there is nothing to tell just weak, weak and faint again.”* (Júlia, Green ES) We remind that in these schools, the vast majority of Roma pupils are children from very poor conditions and segregated settlements.

According to them, there are only few exceptions (in consideration of the total number of such pupils).

Júlia (Green ES): *„Well, certainly, there are positive examples. Even now we have sixteen Roma pupils in the ninth grade and I suppose that five or six of them will go to the secondary school with graduation. Whether they will complete it, is questionable. But at the moment, they are interested.”*

Question: *Do you also have such examples?*

Patrik (Blue ES): *„Ninth graders of last year – that was a famous class. Seven out of nineteen pupils continued within the graduation field studies. But in such cases, the person is even sorrier for them, because they really have a problem with the employment, even if they finish school.”*

Martin (Red ES): *“Man could count the good ones on one hand.*

Júlia (Green ES): *“Thus, we also have university students.”*

Teachers were more cautious in their statements. They said that the results are individual – according to the abilities and interests of pupils, or parental motivation. More teachers mentioned the good pupils. But they also emphasized the worsening trend of their academic progress and the loss of motivation in higher grades, especially on the second stage of elementary school. Here lies the explanation of different experience compared to directors – they evaluated the entire school career of Roma pupils, while teachers “just” first years of the school career.

In the group interview with directors, we went deeper within the obstacles in achieving better academic progress, or higher school attainment. Other pedagogical school staff mentioned especially the disinterest of parents and the lack of homework.

One of the reasons of school unpreparedness of a large proportion of Roma pupils is the lack of training in kindergarten (or insufficient training lasting only one year) and weak preparation in their families (living in poor and socially excluded environment). Each year, only few Roma children visit kindergartens in the municipality of Modrá and almost none is from the local segregated settlement. Therefore, all children are included in zero grades after starting the elementary school. Parents claim, that if they want to register their child to kindergarten, it is not possible to do so (school leadership authority argues by the lack of capacity). A part of Roma children within Green ES finished kindergarten before entering the elementary school. But as we had learned, it is a “Roma” kindergarten.

Patrik (director, Blue ES) says that pupils in zero grades can adapt to the school environment and “everything needed” in one year despite the absence of training in kindergarten: *“We found out that children suck everything needed like a sponge and the problem of transfer from kindergarten to elementary school disappears. Adaptation issues had been compensated.”* This argument forces us to think, whether zero grade would lose its meaning after graduating from kindergarten.

All three directors consistently stated that the academic progress (and attendance) of Roma pupils from SDE on the second stage of elementary school is worsening. Patrik attributes it to the loss of motivation due to awareness of poor employment opportunities and the influence of older siblings. Parents of pupils also do not show the interest in education and they don’t bring any motivation, like it is in case of non-Roma.

Júlia (Green ES) doesn’t think that poor (no) offer on the labour market in the region is demotivating for them. She sees the main reason in the family: *“When they see that parents don’t go to work, have no obligation and live a relatively solid life, what motivation has such child to live differently than the parent?”* According to Julia, the generosity of social benefits has a negative impact on their attitude towards school: *“Personally, I think that social benefits are too generous. Simply, if a child gets seventeen euro for going to school...well...I don’t know.”* According to Patrik, the lifecycle of family, which is “dependant” on social benefits, precludes any discussion on employment: *“This*

benefit system has absolutely erased the discussion regarding employment. Employment has disappeared from the understanding of those children and families. The whole family mode follows the date of benefit payment and the functioning of the whole family are derived from that date...Material goods have become the predominant stimulus.”

On the first stage of elementary school, language barrier is crucial, which confirms the importance of pedagogical assistants with the knowledge of Roma language (especially in zero grades). Patrik (Blue ES) would need more assistants, but under the current funding system, the school cannot afford them. Júlia (Green ES) finances the income of one assistant from other sources – teacher’s salaries. Both of them criticized the methodology of funding the pedagogical assistants. Since a large part of Roma children entering the elementary school didn’t attend kindergarten (or attended segregated “Roma” kindergarten) and these children don’t have many opportunities to acquire the Slovak language at home – removing the language barrier is one of the tasks within the zero grade. Imperfect knowledge of the Slovak language causes difficulties to pupils in higher grades as well. As Júlia (director, Green ES) explained, children don’t understand the curriculum: *„A large percentage of them cannot handle such curriculum. The intelligence of some pupils is lower, but de facto, they do not understand the curriculum (...) mostly. We don’t realize that those pupils are bilingual. They are bilingual by the arrival to the first grade or zero grades, at least the first year of their school attendance, because they think bilingually and speak bilingually: Roma-Slovak. So for them, Slovak language comes as a foreign language. In third grade, we assign a second foreign language to them and in sixth grade, the third one. They are in the chaos and when it comes to physics, chemistry and mathematics with equations, many of them are killed off, they can’t handle it.”*

Júlia proposes to change the educational standards (compulsory curriculum content and the list of compulsory subjects) and adapt them to (language) abilities of pupils. Because it is discouraging for them in this form: *“Prepare the curriculum in a way, so that the child would be successful. Each one of us continues only if he sees that he is successful.”* It was agreed by all three directors.

In our opinion, it is questionable, whether the change in educational standards is the right way to improve the quality of education of Roma pupils from SDE. We recommend focusing on the improving of the language competencies of Roma pupils in the Slovak language in first years of school attendance, especially during their training.

Patrik (Blue ES) adds that since the first grade, “scissors” between what children really know and what they should know widen, it is even more difficult for children who have the absence of homework and help of parents, or have a lot of missed lessons. *“There is no pressure on the side of parents to have a child repeating and confirming the curriculum, so that the child could build on it further. The curriculum goes one year after another, month after month and there is no time to get back to something, to repeat, because the school curricula doesn’t count on it at all. Therefore, pupils on the second stage of elementary school get to the phase, where they don’t remember even the lighter curriculum. They do not have the basics, so in principle, they do not understand what teacher says and loose the interest.”*

The situation is worsening even more by the high amount of missed lessons. *“And not to forget, very often is the excused absence. I emphasize: excused.”* (Júlia, Green ES)

Patrik (Blue ES): *„There is no problem to bring a paper.”*

Martin (Red ES): *„Paper is passed to us with a two-month old date”.*

Almost all teachers, to whom we spoke, evaluated the attendance of their Roma pupils as good. All of them teach on the first stage of elementary school and they know, through mediated experience (meetings), that those same pupils go to school irregularly in upper grades. They could not explain why it is so.

Another problem is the number of pupils per class: *“They have increased the possible number of pupils per class. I can imagine the quantum of mayors who knead their hands, because they will save the money. (...) We don’t have to do the extensions and can stuff in thirty-two pupils in one class.”* (Patrik, Blue ES) This fact was also mentioned by some teachers.

There are “Roma” and “white” classes in each of the monitored schools. Only a minimum of Roma pupils is in “white” classes (pupils with the best

academic progress and pupils with “better” social background). In Roma classes, Roma children with worse academic progress are concentrated. For example in Red ES, those are remedial classes (to which, in recent years, come all graduates from zero grade and they also come from socially disadvantaged environment). Despite the fact that neither the directors, nor other pedagogical staff mentioned that as a barrier in education, we consider it as an obstacle. Various researches (also international) show that the lower motivation from family (or its absence) is associated with poorer socio-economic situation, as well as with the poor academic progress. Thus, children from socially disadvantaged environment are less motivated at home and have worse progress. If these children are concentrated in one class, they cannot motivate themselves and school only deepens their handicap.

Directors of elementary schools placed among systemic problems also the remuneration of teachers working with children from SDE. Entitled for the remuneration are only those who do not cooperate with pedagogical assistants in class and this creates tension among teachers.

The methods of funding of pedagogical assistants do not allow schools with high number of pupils from SDE to hire as many assistants as needed (only one of the monitored schools finances the assistant from other sources). Some teachers think that assistants should be rewarded better: “...*more appreciated*”.

Table 14 *Obstacles in education*

Absence of training in kindergarten (or training in segregated “Roma” kindergarten).

Language barrier (related to the environment, where the child is growing up) is not removed in kindergarten and therefore a Roma child comes to school without the knowledge of the Slovak language.

Bad academic progress is caused by:

- imperfect use of Slovak language (pupil does not understand the lessons),
- large number of excused missed lessons on the second stage (supported by sick excuse notes from paediatricians),
- weak motivation towards education from home and absence of homework (various researches show that motivation and academic progress are associated with socio-economic background of family, children from poor families are less motivated from home and have worse grades),
- loss of motivation by the transfer to the second stage (under the influence of older siblings, by realizing the reality on the labour market – impossibility to employ),
- poverty and social exclusion (lifecycle of poor family does not allow to think about the long-term life strategy, such as employment),
- concentration of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in common classes (thus their motivation diminishes even more).

Systematic barriers:

- selection of pupils based on academic progress and socio-economic background (existence of Roma and white classes),
- number of pupils in classes,
- methodology of funding the pedagogical assistants,
- methodology of remuneration of teachers working with children from socially disadvantaged environment,
- absence of places in kindergarten (for example kindergarten in the municipality of Blue is not able to cover the capacity requisites of the municipality, Roma children from segregated settlement – despite the interest of parents – don’t have the possibility to visit a kindergarten).

5.2.1 *Programmes for Roma pupils and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment*

As we already mentioned, with the exception of Blue ES, other schools have no programmes focused exclusively on Roma pupils (although they indicate education of Roma pupils as one of the objectives, or one of school strengths in different parts of evaluation reports). Each monitored school is, or was in the past, the implementer of projects (funded by the EU) for the area of education of children from marginalized Roma communities. All “special” programmes implemented by schools are intended for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (though in practise, those are mostly Roma children).

Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008²⁴⁵ states that schools create individual conditions for ensuring the education of children and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment.

These are exhaustively listed:

- a) education according to the individual educational programme,
- b) adjustment of the organization of education and training,
- c) adjustment of the environment, in which education and training is carried out,
- d) use of specific methods and form of education and training.

Monitored schools use following:

- *individual integration,*
- *zero grade,*
- *pedagogical assistant,*
- *special classes,*
- *remedial (specialized) classes,*
- *state social programmes (subsidies for food and school supplies, attendance allowance for pupils).*

Since we look closer on zero grades and pedagogical assistants in other parts of the study, here we will mediate views of pedagogical staff and directors towards individual integration, special and remedial classes (specialized classes).

²⁴⁵ Paragraph 107.

Individual integration

Júlia says that individually integrated pupils are especially those, whose parents don't agree with the reassignment to special school. *"We also have the individual integration of mentally disabled, because when a parent does not sign the paper, there's nothing we can do."* (Júlia, Green ES) She doesn't consider the individual integration in case of mentally disabled pupils as a good solution for the child, nor for his classmates, pedagogical staff, nor the school. If the child is in the mainstream class with an individual plan, he does not learn from same books as his classmates, does not have all subjects – and therefore is more aware of his otherness: *"We are in the third grade and he is learning from books for the first graders. He is aware of that and it is discriminatory for him. Secondly, the teacher who has twenty-two or twenty pupils in the first grade and also has integrated mentally handicapped pupil, does not know, whom to pay attention. Should he pay attention to those twenty children or the mentally handicapped one?"* Organizational support of education in classes with individually integrated pupils is problematic as well, because they don't have the same number of lessons as other children. *"When sixth-grader has around twenty-eight lessons and pupil with mental handicap only twenty-six, what to do when, for example, Slovak language is the last lesson of the schedule and he has to attend the Slovak language."* Patrik also agrees (Blue ES).

Special classes

A separate chapter are special classes. Special classes (belonging to the system of special education) are opened on all monitored schools, although not every year. The director of Green ES says that she will open a special class in case that she has mentally handicapped pupils, whose parents don't agree with the reassignment to special elementary school. Special classes can be attended by pupils of different age (from different grades). In case that the director has no option to integrate pupils from various grades, and therefore cannot open a special class, she offers an alternative to the parents: district town.

Based on our observations, we can conclude, that there are only ethnic Roma in special classes.

Patrik (Blue ES) considers the choice between special class and special school for mentally handicapped pupils to be comparable, although the social status of pupil from elementary school is higher than status of pupil from special elementary school. *“Their status in the environment of mainstream elementary school is a little bit higher, because they conform to others.”*

Remedial classes (specialized classes)

According to the questionnaires, remedial classes are opened at the Red ES. Most graduates from zero grades continue exactly in remedial class.

5.3 Zero grades in Slovakia and in Spišská Nová Ves district (experimental verification)

In this subhead, we will focus on the analysis of quantitative data on zero grades in SR and in selected district.

Table 15 provides the number of schools, classes and pupils (public, private and religious) in the Slovak Republic as well as the development of number of schools, classes and pupils of zero grades in SR.

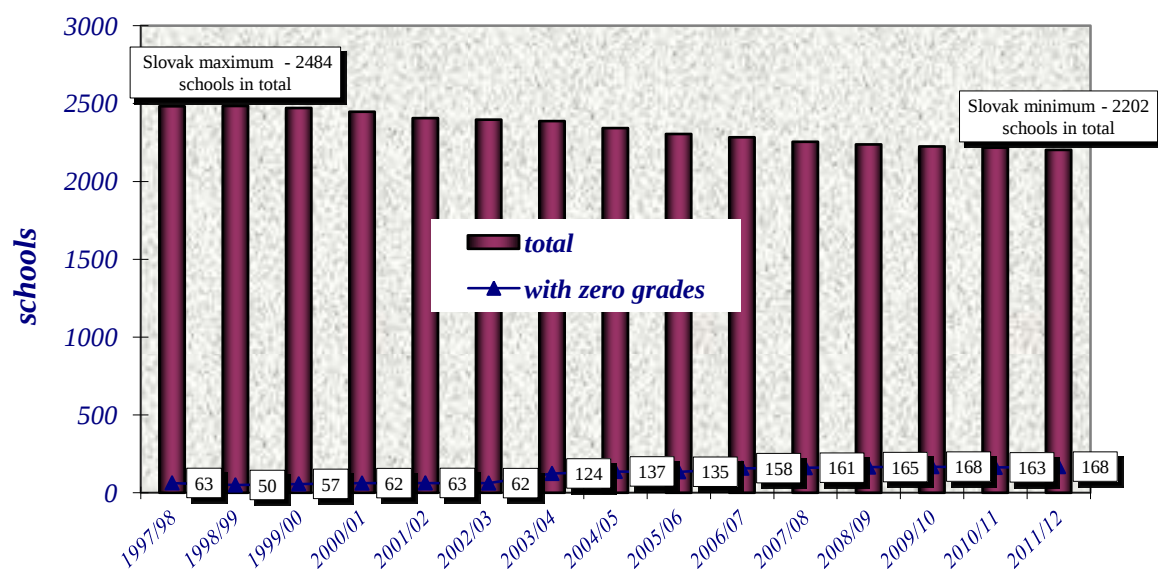
Table 15 *Zero (preparatory) grades at Elementary Schools in Slovakia*

School year	Total						
	Total number			Thereof in zero grade			
	schools	classes	pupils	schools	classes	pupils	% of pupils in zero grade of all pupils
1997/1998	2482	28513	647001	63	81	1060	0,16
1998/1999	2484	28982	648684	50	64	807	0,12
1999/2000	2471	29848	672660	57	75	954	0,14
2000/2001	2447	29181	652053	62	88	1087	0,16
2001/2002	2406	28625	627749	63	86	1104	0,17
2002/2003	2396	27992	603330	62	76	970	0,16
2003/2004	2387	27272	580791	124	155	1780	0,30
2004/2005	2342	26090	557328	137	166	1993	0,35
2005/2006	2304	25172	534147	135	160	1959	0,36
2006/2007	2283	24360	510510	158	195	2380	0,46
2007/2008	2254	23446	482566	161	202	2452	0,50
2008/2009	2237	23351	459173	165	205	2542	0,55
2009/2010	2224	23541	448371	168	254	3134	0,69
2010/2011	2216	23542	439675	163	237	3024	0,68
2011/2012	2202	23659	434477	168	258	3305	0,76

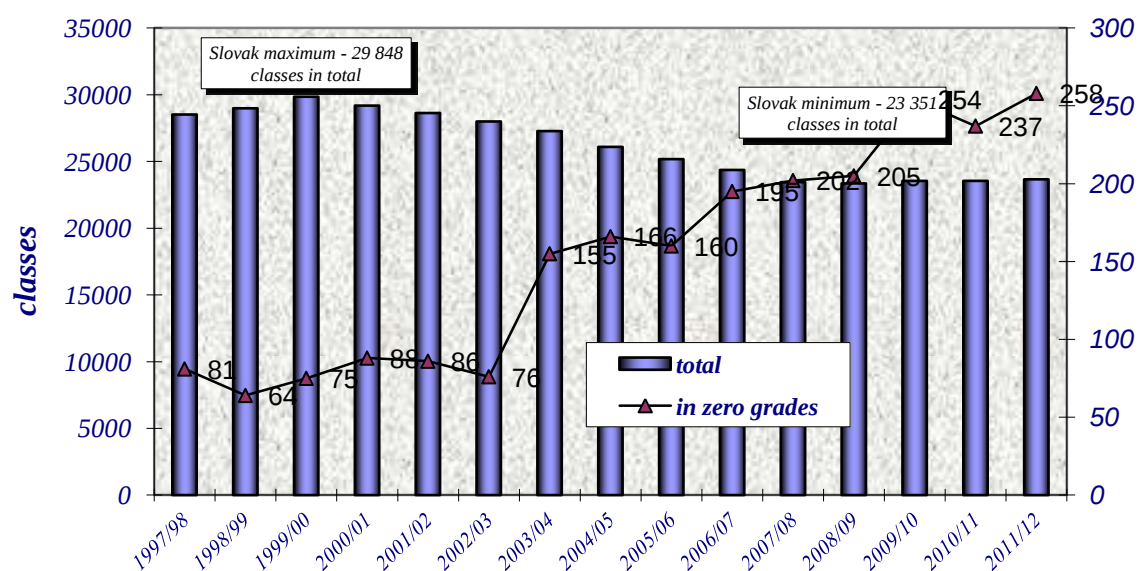
Source: *The Institute of Information and Prognoses of Education of SR Bratislava*

Note: *The table summarizes all elementary schools in SR including public, private and religious schools.*

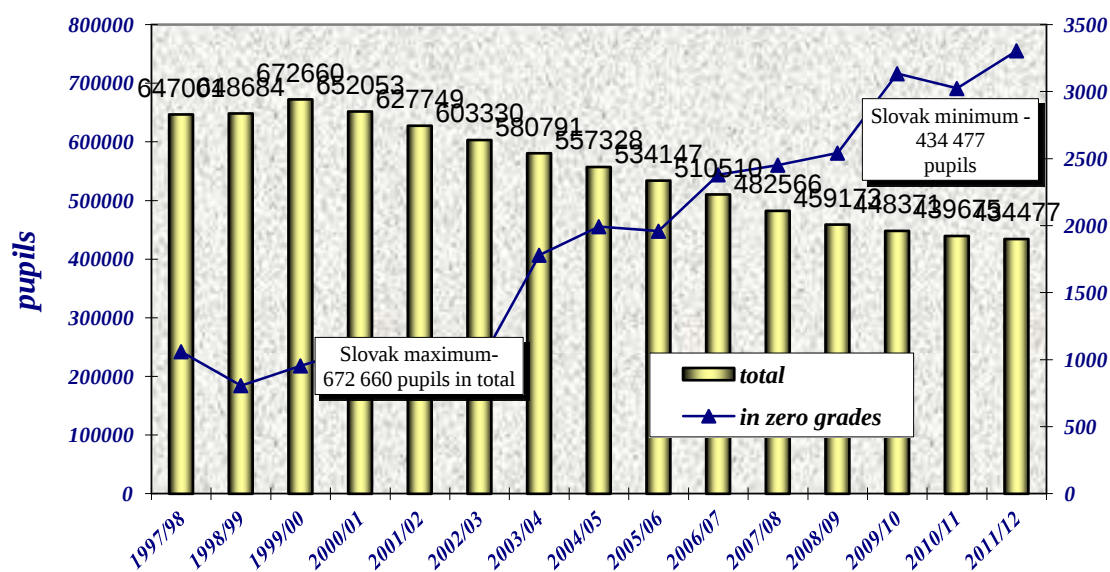
Graph 4a Number of ES in the SR, thereof schools with zero grades



Graph 4b Number of ES classes in the SR, thereof the number of zero grades



Graph 4c Number of ES pupils in the SR, thereof in zero grades



The table and graphs above show that from school year 2007/2008 to school year 2011/2012, there was a significant decrease of pupils on elementary schools, which results from the overall decrease of the Slovak population. During the monitored period, there was a significant decrease in the average number of pupils in classrooms. While in the school year 1997/1998 the average was 22,7 pupils per class, in the school year 2011/2012 the average dropped to 18,3 pupils per class, which we consider as a positive trend in improving conditions for teachers and especially pupils of elementary schools in the SR. Increase of the number of schools with zero grades, as well as the increase of the number of zero-grade pupils, is related to the institutionalization of zero grades (Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 408/2002) and its putting into practice from 1st September 2003, when it came to one-hundred % increase of the number of schools, classes and pupils in zero grades. From 1997 to 2002, zero grades existed on the basis of experimental verification. We state, that zero grades are from 2006 to the present stable and there is no significant decrease or increase in their growth.

Besides more detailed examination on the effectiveness of zero grades on the three selected schools, we have decided to analyse the statistic data on zero grades within elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district between 1st September 1993 and 1st September 2002, i.e. at the time of their experimental verification.²⁴⁶ We have chosen the Spišská Nová Ves district for two reasons: those schools were involved in the programme of zero-grade verification as one of the first schools in Slovakia and also the good relations with leaderships of schools, built during the long-term cooperation, allowed us to raise the demanding requirement to employees, for help in collecting statistic data. During the gathering of statistic data and information, we encountered a lot of problems, which often resulted from inaccurate records of zero-grade pupils on elementary schools involved in the experimental verification.

Thanks to the willingness and the support of directors and teachers, we managed to collect data during several weeks of our work. The result represents an overview in the following tables. Relevant data have been gathered from three elementary schools (Bystrany, Kluknava and Smížany). Despite the willingness and the effort of management of elementary school, it was not possible to process data from elementary school in Hrabušice, as class books and catalogue datasheets of pupils were destroyed after flood in 2009. *We remind that the selection of schools (and district) for this part of the research (including the chapter on diagnosis and re-diagnosis of graduates from zero grade and the chapter on school success of graduates from zero grades) has nothing to do with the selection of schools and respondents in the qualitative part of the research.*

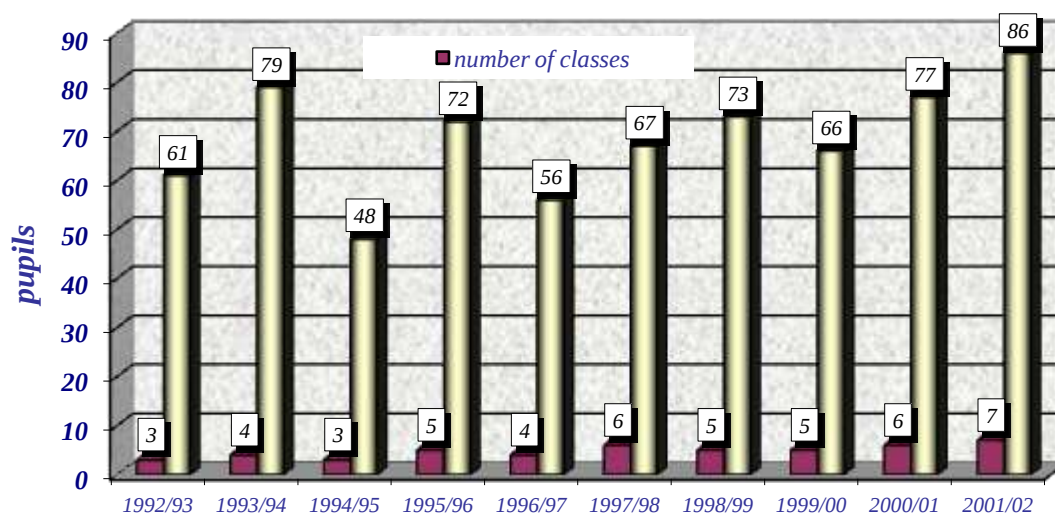
The summary tables show the information from Bystrany ES, Kluknava ES and Smížany ES.

²⁴⁶ According to the material approved by the Council's Board of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sport of the Slovak Republic from 29.5.1992 No. 2135/9222/HE, when the project on preparatory grades in Spišská Nová Ves district in elementary schools in Smížany, Bystrany, Kluknava and Hrabušice was conducted by the Administration Board.

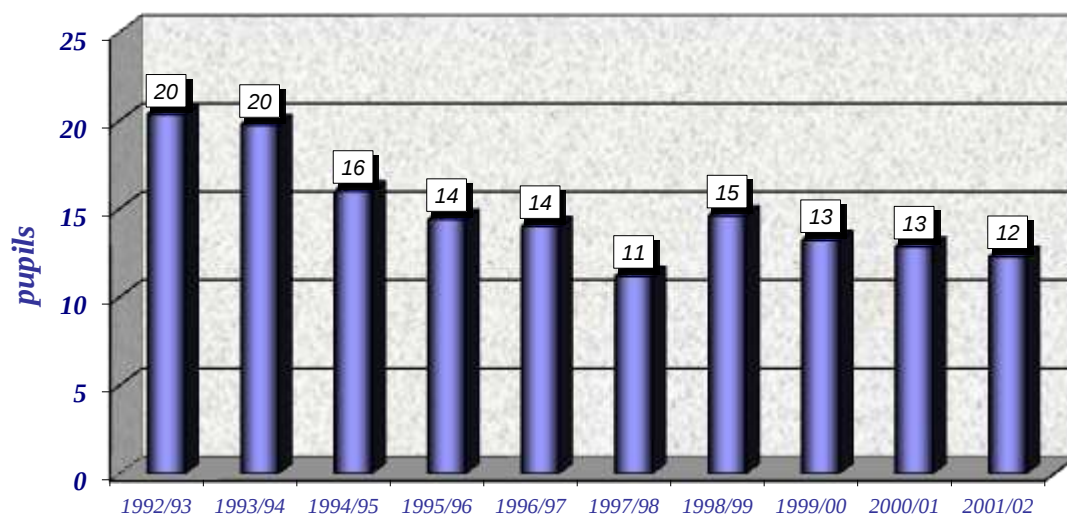
Table 16 *Experimental verification of zero (preparatory) grades in Spišská Nová Ves district (1. 9. 1993 – 31. 8. 2002)*

School year	Number of classes of zero (preparatory) grades	Number of pupils in zero (preparatory) grades	Number of teacher's assistants in preparatory grades	
			total	thereof Roma
1992/1993	3	61	2	2
1993/1994	4	79	4	4
1994/1995	3	48	3	3
1995/1996	5	72	4	4
1996/1997	4	56	4	4
1997/1998	6	67	5	5
1998/1999	5	73	5	5
1999/2000	5	66	4	4
2000/2001	6	77	5	5
2001/2002	7	86	6	6
Total	48	685	42	42

Graph 5a *Number of classes and pupils of zero grades on ES in the Spišská Nová Ves district*



Graph 5b *Average number of pupils per one zero-grade class at the ES in Spišská Nová Ves district*



Graph 5c *Number of teacher's assistants in zero grades at the ES in Spišská Nová Ves district, thereof Roma*

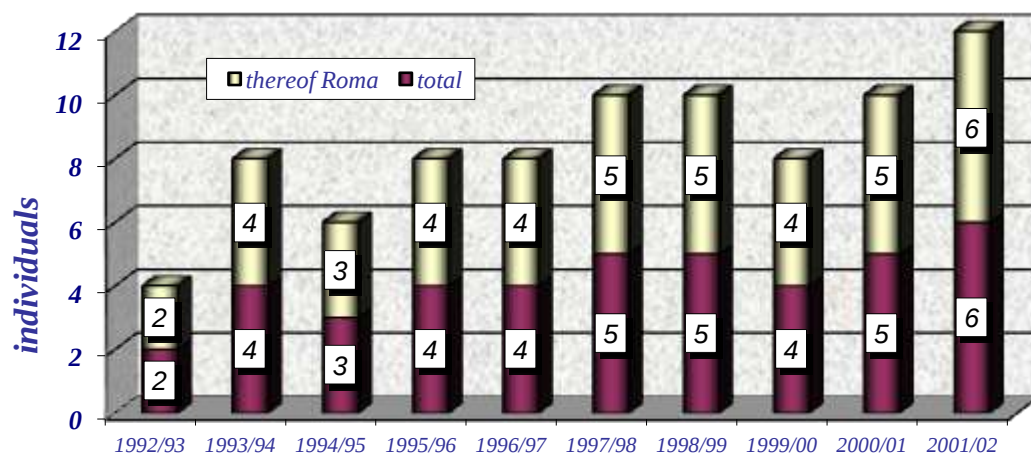


Table 16 and graphs 5a, 5b and 5c show that during the experimental verification of zero grades of ES from 1992 to 2002, there was an increase in the number of zero-grade classes on monitored elementary schools and, of course, also in the number of pupils. This proves that zero grade has begun to be seen as a positive element in the educational system of socially

disadvantaged (Roma) pupils by pedagogical staff. This period was marked by the discussions on topic: where does zero grade belong – to kindergarten or to elementary school? Finally, common sense prevailed and zero grades were assigned to elementary schools, counting for pupils as the first year of ten-year compulsory school attendance. We also positively evaluate the experimental verification of the profession of teacher's assistant and the first-ever inclusion of (Roma) teacher's assistants in the educational process and particularly the fact, that this pedagogical profession was entirely occupied by Roma on monitored schools. But we have to mention that these jobs were not funded by the budgets of schools, but through the Offices of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and community work, as well as through project activities of non-governmental organizations, such as *Open society foundation*, *Škola dokorán* foundation (*Wide Open School Foundation*) in Žiar nad Hronom, civil association *Dôstojný život* (*Decent Life*) in Spišská Nová Ves and civil association *Združenie mladých Rómov* (*Association of Young Roma*) in Banská Bystrica. Precisely in this period, foundations of establishment of the teacher's assistant profession were placed.²⁴⁷

5.3.1 School readiness of children from socially disadvantaged environment – diagnostics and re-diagnostics

In the next part of our study, we present the results of the research conducted at the Centre of Pedagogical and Psychological counselling and prevention in Spišská Nová Ves focused on the:

- area of school maturity (readiness),
- inclusion of children from socially disadvantaged environment to zero grades,

²⁴⁷ Bližšie: KLEIN, V. 2008. *Asistent učiteľa v procese primárneho vzdelávania rómskych žiakov. (Teacher's assistant in the process of primary education of Roma pupils)*. Nitra : UKF, 2008. 198 p. ISBN 978-80-8094-348-6.

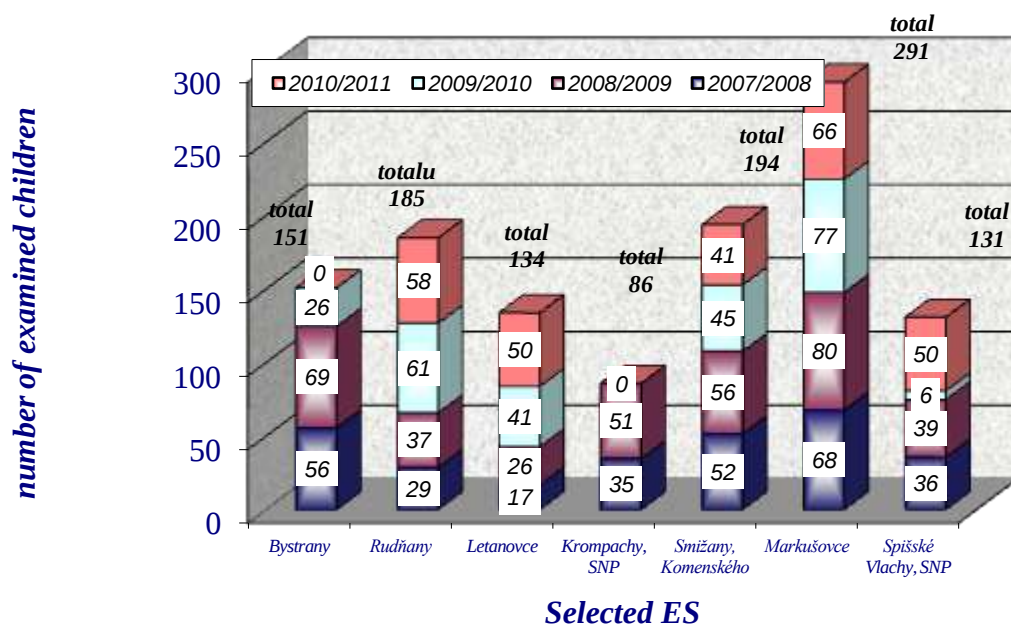
- area of re-diagnostics examinations,
- other forms of education, that emerged from the findings and recommendations of CPPPaP.

The method of the research was carried out by the analysis of 1797 clients (children and pupils) of CPPPaP Spišská Nová Ves for the past four school years. Initially examined pupils were attending thirty-two elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district. It is necessary to stress, that psychological examinations, aimed at school maturity (readiness) of children from socially disadvantaged environment, as well as re-diagnostics examinations, are performed annually, directly in the locations, from where these children come from, always in the presence of a child's legal guardian. Participation of parents (child's legal guardian) on examination is not only important in terms of providing anamnesis data on the child, but also because of overcoming the language barrier between the psychologist and a child, which represents the guarantee of the relevance of the special diagnosis results.

Table 17 *Overview of examined children in seven selected elementary schools*

	SCHOOL YEAR									
	2007/2008		2008/2009		2009/2010		2010/2011		Total	
Name of PS	school maturity	zero grade	school maturity	zero grade	school maturity	zero grade	school maturity	zero grade	school maturity	zero grade
Bystrany	56	53	69	66	26	5	–	–	151	124
Rudňany	29	25	37	32	61	53	58	44	185	154
Letanovce	17	15	26	20	41	37	50	45	134	117
Krompachy, SNP	35	33	51	42	–	–	–	–	86	75
Smižany, Komen-ského	52	49	56	49	45	37	41	35	194	170
Markušovce	68	68	80	71	77	66	66	63	291	268
Spišské Vlachy, SNP	36	30	39	37	6	6	50	47	131	120

Graph 6a *Overview of examined children (school maturity) at seven selected ES in the Spišská Nová Ves district in total*



Graph 6b *Overview of examined children (school maturity) at seven selected ES in the Spišská Nová Ves district in zero grades*

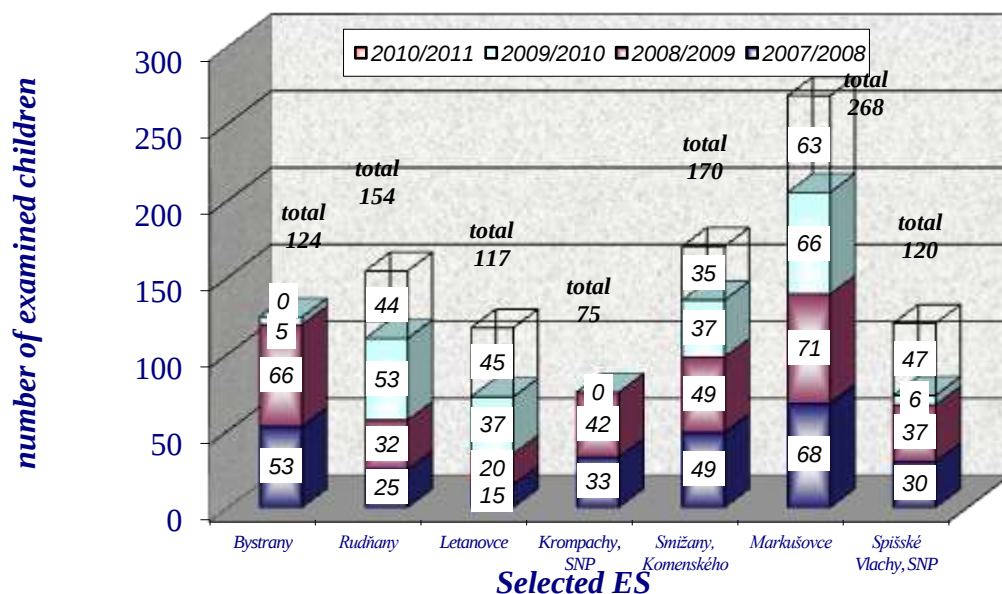


Table 17 and graphs 6a, 6b provide an overview of examined children in the area of school maturity and their subsequent inclusion in zero grades in seven selected elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district. From thirty-two monitored elementary schools, we chose purposely those, where is a large number of such pupils. Table 17 shows that the highest number of children

examined on school readiness (291) and pupils attending zero grades (268) in the past four school years were in ES Markušovce.

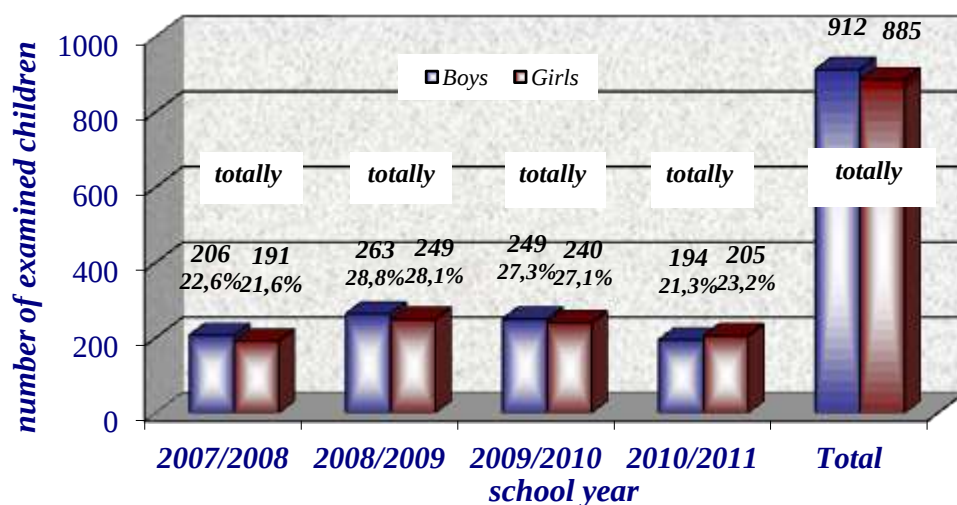
Table 18a *Children from socially disadvantaged environment examined on their school maturity*

School year	School maturity (readiness)					
	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2007/2008	206	22,59	191	21,58	397	22,09
2008/2009	263	28,84	249	28,14	512	28,49
2009/2010	249	27,30	240	27,12	489	27,21
2010/2011	194	21,27	205	23,16	399	22,21
Total	912	100	885	100	1797	100

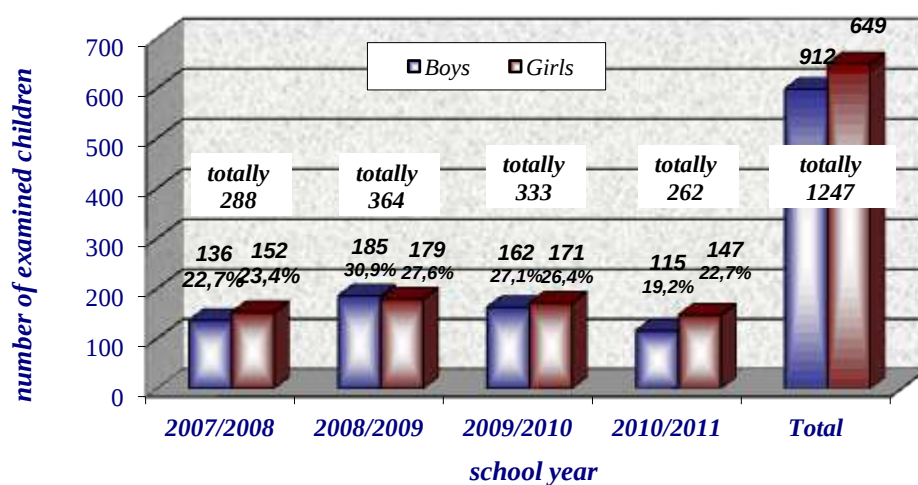
Table 18b *Children from socially disadvantaged environment examined on school maturity and subsequently included in zero grade*

School year	Zero grade					
	Boys		Girls		Total	
	N	%	N	%	N	%
2007/2008	136	22,74	152	23,42	288	23,10
2008/2009	185	30,94	179	27,58	364	29,19
2009/2010	162	27,09	171	26,35	333	26,70
2010/2011	115	19,23	147	22,65	262	21,01
Total	598	100	649	100	1247	100

Graph 7a *Children from socially disadvantaged environment examined on school maturity*



Graph 7b *Children from socially disadvantaged environment examined on school maturity and subsequently included in zero grade*



Graph 8 *Comparison of the school years on placement of children into zero grades*

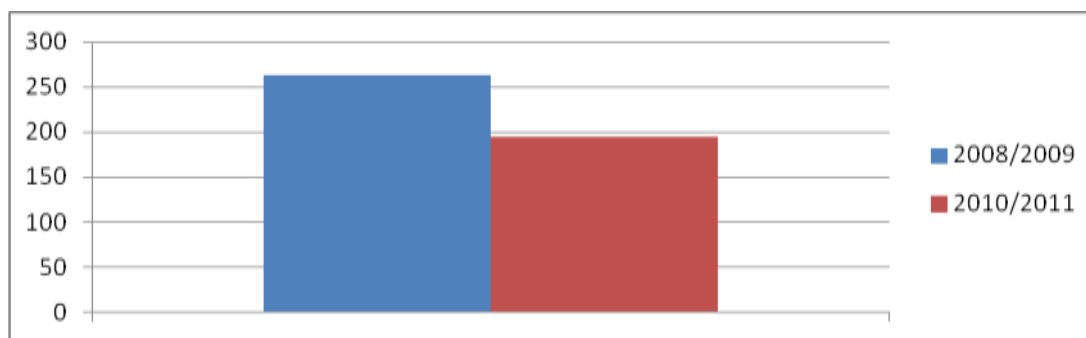


Table 18a, 18b and graphs 7a, 7b and 8 show the number of pupils – clients who were examined in the area of school maturity (readiness) in separate school years; and have been, in case of school immaturity, subsequently included in zero grades. The highest number of children examined in the area of school maturity and subsequently included in zero grades was in school year 2008/2009. The lowest number of children examined in the area of school maturity and subsequently included in zero grades was in school year 2010/2011.

On this basis, *the inclusion of children in zero grades has a downward trend*. This fact is related to possibilities of creating zero grades within elementary schools in Spišská Nová Ves district, because not everywhere are suitable conditions for their establishment (spaces, financial resources, etc.). This situation is the result of an increasing number of children from socially disadvantaged environment, who attend kindergarten.

Table 19 *Children examined on school readiness and subsequent inclusion in zero grade by gender*

School maturity (readiness) Total: 1797				Zero grade Total: 1247			
Boys		Girls		Boys		Girls	
N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
912	50,75	885	49,24	598	47,95	649	52,04

Graph 9 *Children examined on school readiness and their subsequent inclusion in zero grade by gender*

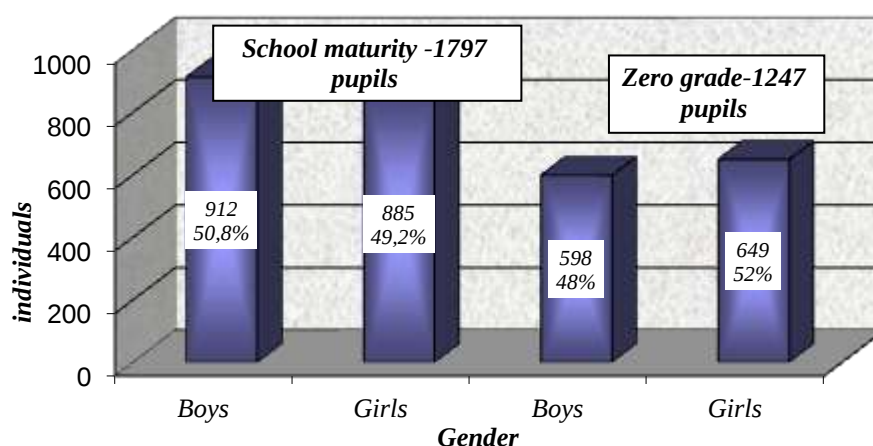
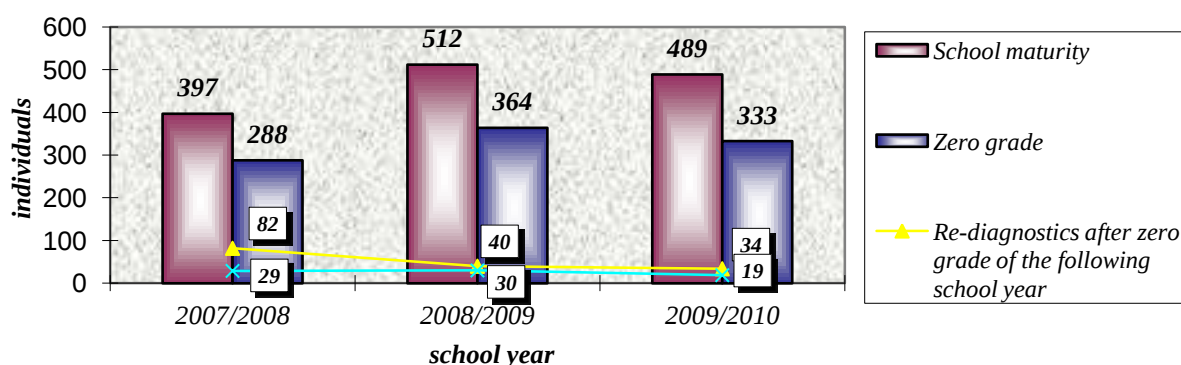


Table 19 and graph 9 show an interesting fact. We note a slightly higher proportion of boys (912 – 50, 75 %) than girls (885 – 49, 24 %) from the total number of children examined on school maturity (readiness), although a slight preponderance of girls (649 – 52, 04 %), who are included in zero grade, persists in comparison to boys (598 – 47, 95 %).

Table 20 *Clarification of the relationship between the school years in regards to re-diagnostics*

School year	School maturity (readiness)	Zero grade	School year	Re-diagnostics after zero grade	1 st grade, special class within PS, special PS
		N		N	N
2007/2008	397	288	2008/2009	82	29
2008/2009	512	364	2009/2010	40	30
2009/2010	489	333	2010/2011	34	19

Graph 10 *Clarification of the connection between the school years in regards to re-diagnostics*



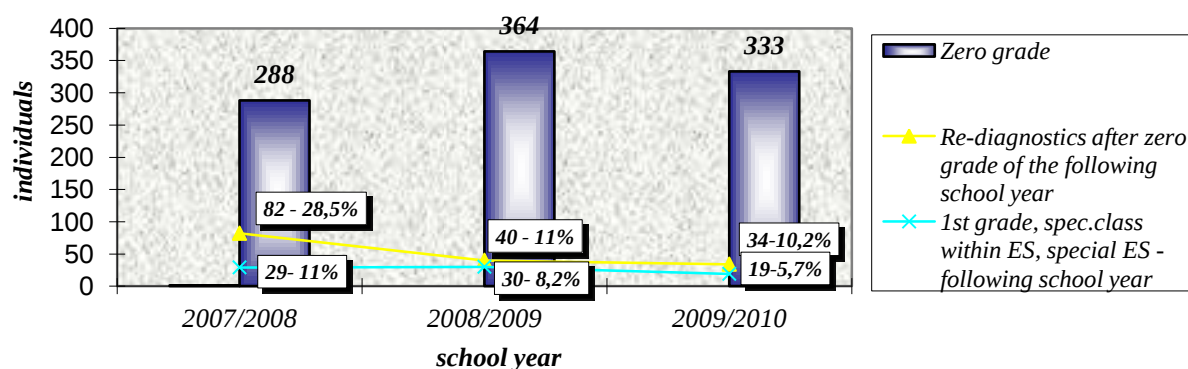
In table 20 and graph 10, we consider it important to explain the fact, that children who were in one school year (2007/2008) examined on school maturity (readiness) and recommended to zero grade, only in next school year (2008/2009), failing pupils in zero grades completed psychological re-diagnostics. Based on this re-diagnostics, they were recommended another way

of education (inclusion in 1st grade of ES, special class, or to special elementary school).

Table 21 *Reassignment of pupils to special elementary school after completing zero grade and after psychological re-diagnostics*

School year	Zero grade	School year	Re-diagnostics after zero grade		Reassignment to special PS	
			N	%	N	%
2007/2008	288	2008/2009	82	28,47	29	10,07
2008/2009	364	2009/2010	40	10,98	30	8,24
2009/2010	333	2010/2011	34	10,21	19	5,70

Graph 11 *Reassignment of pupils to special elementary school after completing zero grade and after psychological re-diagnostics*

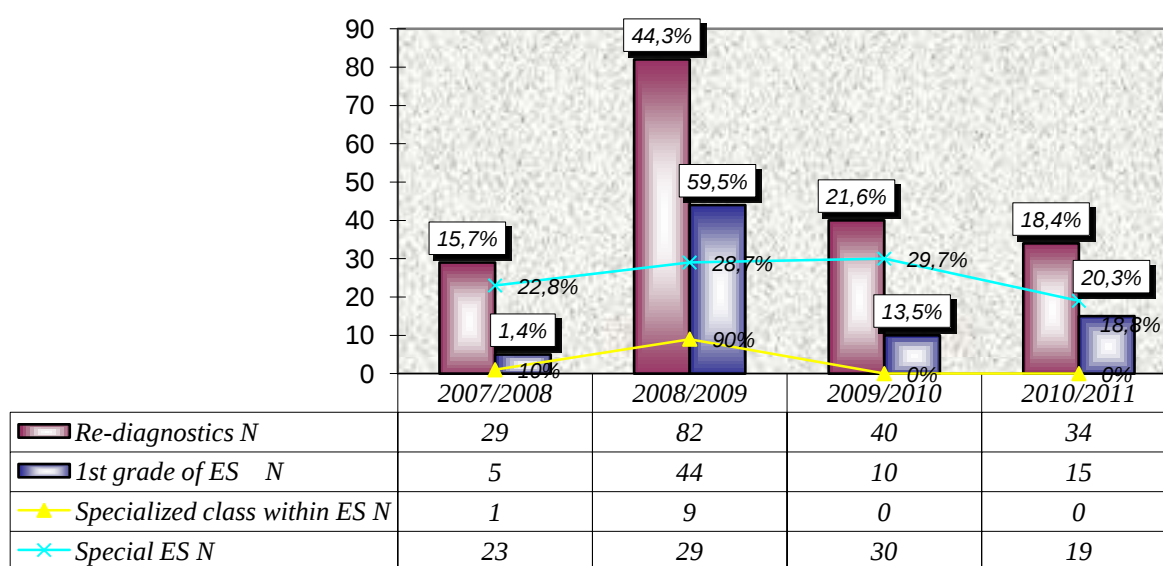


By the overview in table 21 and graph 11, we want to highlight the relationship between the number of pupils included in zero grade in separate school years and the number of re-diagnosed pupils and those who were reassigned to special elementary school. Of the three hundred thirty-three pupils recommended to zero grade in the school year 2009/2010, only nineteen pupils (5, 70 %) were transferred to special elementary school in the following school year 2010/2011, which confirms the fact, that *the number of pupils re-assigned to the system of special education is annually lower.*

Table 22 *Summary of the results of psychological re-diagnostics of failing pupils in zero grades and the number of pupils enrolled in the system of basic or special education*

School year	Re-diagnostics		1 st grade of ES		Special class within ES		Special ES	
	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%
2007/2008	29	15,67	5	1,35	1	10	23	22,77
2008/2009	82	44,32	44	59,45	9	90	29	28,71
2009/2010	40	21,62	10	13,51	–	–	30	29,70
2010/2011	34	18,37	15	20,27	–	–	19	18,81
Total	185	100	74	100	10	100	101	100

Graph 12 *Results of psychological re-diagnostics of failing pupils in zero grades and the number of pupils enrolled in the system of ES and special ES*



Our aim is to draw the attention to the number of pupils who were, after completing the zero grade, psychologically examined (re-diagnosed). The highest number of examined pupils (82) was in the school year 2008/2009, which is 44, 32 % from the total number of 185 re-diagnosed pupils in comparison to other school years showed in table 18 and graph 15. In the same school year, there was a significant decrease in assigning pupils of special classes of ES and significant increase of the number of pupils enrolled

in 1st grade of ES after re-diagnostics and to special class within elementary school. The school year 2010/2011 shows to a significant decrease of pupils reassigned to special classes within elementary schools and to special elementary schools. In general, tables 21, 22 and graphs 11 and 12 show, that *the number of pupils assigning into segregated educational process is decreasing*. We believe that this results from high-quality preparation of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in zero grades of ES in Spišská Nová Ves district. Zero grade is perceived as one of the important opportunities for Roma pupils, enabling them to successfully manage the challenges associated with primary education.

5.4 Zero grades in monitored schools

Zero grades have a long tradition at all schools, but Green ES is having the longest. This school was included to the programme of the experimental verification of zero grades already in 1992. Blue ES established a zero grade in 2002 through the project of foundation *Škola dokorán (Open wide School)*. Red ES does not open zero grades each year.

Reasons for the establishment (except of the offer) were following: the high number of pupils without pre-school preparation, low availability of pre-school facilities. *„Ninety % of children from Roma environment are not mature enough for training and now, there is an option to send them back to kindergarten. (...) They won't visit kindergarten, will spend one year at home instead and after one year they will come back as seven-year old being exactly the same like they were before. When we take them into the first grade, eighty % of them will simply fail, because they will not be able to handle reading in Slovak. As I already mentioned, there is definitely a bilingual problem.”* (Julia, Green ES) Martin (Red ES): *„These children need to adapt, because it is very important for most of Roma pupils.”*

According to the directors, zero grades have proven very quickly: *“We found out that children suck everything needed like a sponge and the problem of transfer from kindergarten to elementary school disappears. Adaptation issues had been compensated.”* (Patrik, Blue ES)

Financial, organizational, methodical and material support of zero grades

Funding of zero grades is rated by the pedagogical staff as good, also because a lower number of pupils per class is compensated by higher financial normative.

A teacher of Red ES is helping herself by her own material from home (toys), which is sufficient for teaching so far. Eva (Blue ES) is in the lack of teaching aids, workbooks and she criticizes the lack of methodological material as well: *„We have to provide the methodology ourselves.“* Methodical provision is almost missing: *„Each school must help itself.“* (Patrik, Blue ES) *„I think that most of us already have developed our own methodological documents over the years and our experience is that we can start with spelling-book already in zero grade, so pupils smoothly transfer from the zero grade into the first grade.“* (Green ES)

Schools rely on their own knowledge and experience, less on the methodical centres and other institutions in the school system. There are no textbooks for zero grade, teachers use spelling-book and various sources from the internet (such as images). The language barrier could not be overwhelmed without assistants, as there are no textbooks or methodological material for the Roma language.

Directors are aware of the advantage of tradition (and the resulting experience) and they recommend inexperienced schools the methodical visits of experienced schools. Methodologists (for example from general school offices) are useless, because they have no practical experience.

In Modrá, due to insufficient spatial capacities, few grades function in two shifts. Eva (teacher, zero grade, Blue ES) considers this as a disadvantage: *“I think, in terms of organization, there is one drawback. Children go to school in the afternoon and then they cannot manage the curriculum and also they are not able to focus as pupils in the morning.”*

Teachers responded differently when asked about the location of zero grade. Eva (Blue) is satisfied with the separation of zero grades from other classes, because older pupils do not “bother” them and her pupils feel like they are in the kindergarten. Older children do not affect them. Zero grades are located in a separate building at this school. Olina (Green) thinks it’s

impractical “...to run from one side to another, because zero grade is around the corner.” In Red ES, zero grade is located on the common corridor with other classes of primary stage.

In the current school year, there are six zero-grade classes at Blue ES, two at Green ES and one at Red ES.

Basic data on the number of zero grades from 2004 to the present are presented in the following table.

Table 23 *Zero grades on monitored schools*

	Number of zero grades		
	Blue ES	Green ES	Red ES
of 1. 9. 2003	2	2	1
of 1. 9. 2004	2	2	–
of 1. 9. 2005	–	2	–
of 1. 9. 2006	4	3	1
of 1. 9. 2007	4	2	–
of 1. 9. 2008	4	3	–
of 1. 9. 2009	6	3	1
of 1. 9. 2010	6	3	1
of 1. 9. 2011	5	2	1

5.5 Pupils in zero grades

In the current school year, zero grades are only attended by Roma pupils in all three monitored schools. Also in the poll for representatives of schools with a long tradition of zero grades, more participants mentioned that the composition of zero grades is ethnically homogeneous.

According to interviews with teachers, in all three cases, children are from segregated Roma settlements.

According to directors, zero grades include children who have not reached the necessary level of school maturity (based on pedagogical-psychological diagnostics)²⁴⁸. These Roma children, who did not attend kindergarten, come from socially disadvantaged environment (poor and socially

²⁴⁸ More info on this topic in other parts of the study.

excluded Roma settlements) and their school attainment would be endangered in case of the admission to the first grade.

Zero-grade teacher in Blue ES says that her pupils come from good family background: *“I think that most of these children come from good family background. So they are not from those completely deprived families within the settlements.”* (Eva, Blue ES) She doesn’t know their families very well, only has mediated information from her assistant, or pupils. She mentioned that many families are incomplete – parents are not living together, or one, or even both parents work abroad and support the family financially.

In comparison to non-Roma children in the first grade, Roma pupils of zero grades are less prepared for school: *“There is actually a lack of everything. From hygienic habits, high barriers in communication in the Slovak language, to fine, gross motor skills, which “white children” improve in kindergarten or at home.”* (Eva, Blue ES) It should be noted that in the current school year, the school opened six zero-grade classes and the participant was only taking about her pupils. Local segregated Roma settlement is among the extremely poor with absolutely sub-standard living conditions.

Teacher’s assistant describes zero-grade pupils as follows: *„They are Roma pupils. Most of them come from fairly decent families, but there are also families where living conditions are below standard. Most of them do not command the written language, they have difficulties with expressing themselves and don’t have basic information, such as names of parents and siblings. They cannot tell their address, they don’t know the colours, cannot count and so on. Pupils are different, some of them are smarter, some weaker, but all of them are nice children.”* (Marta, Blue ES)

Zero-grade pupils in Red ES live in poor and overcrowded households. *“A lot of them are living in one house. They are large families. They don’t live by themselves, but also with grandmother, who has a lot of children.”* (Hana, zero-grade teacher, Red ES)

„They are all Roma pupils, children from disadvantaged environment. Conditions are not created for them as for normal children.” (Jita, assistant, Red ES).

According to the assistant at Green ES, some pupils of zero grades visited kindergarten (Roma) as well, but when entering the school, they did not reach the desired level of school maturity: *“These children are very sweet, playful and very lively. They are interested in everything new, especially in the school environment.”* (Ilona, Green ES) Most of them come from socially disadvantaged families. However, there are also pupils from families, that are doing very well materially and they give everything needed to their child (physically and emotionally).

The following table shows the number of pupils in zero grades in monitored schools from 2003 to the present.

Table 24 *Zero-grade pupils in monitored schools*

	Number of pupils		
	Blue ES	Green ES	Red ES
of 1. 9. 2003	36	33	11
of 1. 9. 2004	37	28	–
of 1. 9. 2005	–	27	–
of 1. 9. 2006	65	39	12
of 1. 9. 2007	65	29	–
of 1. 9. 2008	62	46	–
of 1. 9. 2009	92	48	12
of 1. 9. 2010	76	44	13
of 1. 9. 2011	66	32	12

5.5.1 Attendance of pupils in zero grades

All participants from schools agreed that the attendance of zero-grade pupils is good. It is better in comparison to higher grades – especially on the second stage. Children don't have unexcused absences; they miss lessons mainly for the medical reasons.

„Attendance in zero grades is very good, but then – which I know from conversations or meetings with other colleagues – the attendance worsens. The older the student is, the higher is his absence.” (Eva, Blue ES) The assistant expressed herself similarly: *„Attendance of pupils in zero grades is much better than in other grades, (...) because parents care about zero-graders more thoroughly and they want them to learn something. (...) They don't go to school*

because of illness; a common reason is also a lack of food. Parents have nothing to give them for snack, or don't have clothes and shoes.” (Marta, Blue ES)

„I can't really complain about the attendance, but two pupils are sick very often and I always have an excuse note from the doctor.” (Hana, Red ES)

According to the assistant, children really like attending the school – especially when they emotionally attach themselves to the teacher, or assistant. They only absent because of illness. Similar comments were made by respondents from Green ES. Also at this school, the attendance of pupils of zero grades is (according to assistant) better than the other grades.

Classroom teachers of higher grades of the first stage (first, second, third grade) don't see a big difference in the attendance of graduates from zero grade and other children. No one complained about the attendance. Pupils mostly miss lessons only for the health reasons, or in the period of benefit payment – they go with their parents to buy clothing and footwear.

5.5.2 Cooperation with parents

Teachers in zero grades and teacher's assistants evaluate the cooperation with parents as good, or even excellent. They often meet at school or within the visits in households of parents.

Eva (Blue ES), who works in zero grade for the first year, says that the cooperation with parents is good. Except for the parents of one pupil, all other parents attend parents' associations. She meets with them outside the associations as well, as they accompany children to school. They pay a fee to the parents' association: *“Yes, but here I must again highlight the work of the Roma assistant. When I compare how children bring money to ZRPŠ (Parent-Teacher Association) in first grade and fourth grade, the money is collected only in zero grades. And for that we thank to the Roma assistant who consistently urges the parent to bring the money.”* Parents take care of children according to her. In case they work abroad, grandparents raise the children.

Assistant highlights the diversity of the approach of parents to school: *“Some parents show the interest in their children to their full potential and there*

are parents who do now show any interest." (Marta, Blue ES). She is in daily contact with them – at schools, but also at home visits.

Also Hana, teacher at zero grade (Red ES), evaluates her cooperation with pupils' parents as excellent. She meets them at school – when they accompany their children and especially at her visits in households of pupils: *"I go to the settlement, but they also come to school, for example with the sick excuse note. Some tend to pick up their children and also take them to school."* Hana is already retired and she asked the school representatives if she could work in zero grade.

Even assistant considers the cooperation with parents as good. She meets them often, especially when solving various problems. They don't attend parents' associations; therefore she and teacher visit parents at home. *"It has proven to be very good."* (Jita, Red ES)

The assistants of Green ES expressed herself similarly: *"From the experience it is very good, although it is not always smooth.* (Note: she means the cooperation with the parents) *There are still some parents who don't let us explain some things to them."* (Ilona, Green ES) She meets them on parents' associations, school events and especially at fieldwork.

Classroom teachers in upper grades of the first stage of EA evaluate the cooperation with parents a little more diversely. In Red ES, they are satisfied, they often encounter the parents. *"Very good I think."* (Note: she means the cooperation with the parents) *"They attend consultations and associations in a large number."* (Jela, Red ES) Also teachers of Blue ES meet with parents. Their experiences are diverse, because not all parents are interested in their consultations. *"My collaboration with parents is individual, depending on the parents of particular pupil. With some of them, it is very good, with others none."* (Lýdia, Blue ES) If Alena (Blue ES) needs to meet the parents, she asks them: *"When parents are invited, they come to school."* Olina (Green ES) was the most critical. According to her, parents are not interested in the approach of their child towards school, nor in the cooperation with school. They don't attend parents' associations: *"Parents don't cooperate with us. We only see them in the morning – when accompanying the children (...) – and when they come to pick them up. But otherwise they are not interested in cooperating."* (Olina)

It should be emphasized that we have addressed the issue of cooperation between parents and school mainly in interviews with pedagogical staff.

5.6 Pedagogical staff in zero grades

Teachers cooperate with pedagogical assistants in almost all zero grades – with the exception of Red ES. Most of them are qualified.²⁴⁹ There is one case, where teacher (Red ES) is retired already, but she is interested in working in zero grade. At each of the monitored schools (according to directors), there are teachers, who want to work mostly or only in zero grades, or with Roma pupils: *“I have one teacher who doesn’t want to teach in a traditional class, but only in Roma.”* (Martin, Red ES) *“I have two”* (note: teachers) *and they teach in zero grade only.”* (Patrik, Blue ES).

Directors appreciate the work of teachers: *“... there is a lot of work in zero grades, really pedagogical mastery.”* (Júlia, Green ES)

Neither one of the teachers speaks Roma language (assistants provide the interpretation). Directors could not comment on whether the knowledge of the language could be their advantage.

Teachers are satisfied with working in zero grades. Hana (Red ES) has requested this class by herself. Eva (Blue ES) works here for the first year: *“At the beginning, I was afraid of working with these children, because I didn’t know what it is like. The first month was probably the hardest, because we were getting used to each other. Children were getting used to me, I was getting used to completely different work with these children. I also had to get used to the assistant and to agree on the actions that we will perform. (...) After the first month, (...) I like working in zero grade and maybe it is due to the fact that there is a lower number of pupils per class. The assistant helps me by the learning process greatly.”*

Parents of pupils from Blue ES have a positive attitude towards zero-grade teachers. They appreciate their approach to children (recognition, support, individual approach, care), but also to them. Teachers are always willing to explain parents how the child is progressing, what are his pros and

²⁴⁹ More data on zero-grade teachers in table 13.

cons. They often praise children and criticize a little. *“Like my daughter says, the teacher praises her and helps her when she doesn’t know something. For example she writes the number three conversely and teacher always tries and shows her the right way.”* (Ivana, 32-year old mother) Michal (father of four children) compares with other teachers and he thinks that teachers in higher grades are more critical to children: *“My daughter is in the third grade. At the beginning, the teacher was praising her and then, at the end of the year, she summoned me to school due to complaints. She said that my daughter comes to school dirty. But my second daughter Nikolka is in the zero grade and they don’t complain.”*

Concerning the leadership of school, specifically the director, parents don’t complain. They appreciate his concern for children and the cooperation with them. For example: *“I am satisfied with the director. I have no complaints towards him. If he wants something, he summons me to school; I come and talk to him.”* (Ivana)

5.6.1 Teacher’s assistant in zero grade

The importance of teacher’s assistant is unquestionable and consists mainly of the knowledge of Roma language, as well as the conditions in home of the pupil. Assistants usually get along with parents, have information about the family and household of pupil, they often visit them. *“We act as a connecting bridge between the teachers and families of pupils.”* (Ilona, Green ES)

In two of the monitored schools (Blue ES and Green ES) assistants work also in zero grades. They are all Roma and participants have agreed that the assistant should be a member of the Roma ethnicity. Martin (director, Red ES): *„It is essential that there is a Roma assistant. The teacher is helpless without an assistant, because of communication and not even mentioning the cooperation with families.”* Júlia (director, Green ES): *„I fundamentally employ Roma assistants. Fundamentally! Non-Roma, who doesn’t speak Roma, is useless.”*

All teachers have similar view. Classroom teachers in zero grades could not imagine communicating with children with the language barrier without “interpreting” of assistants. Assistants facilitate the cooperation with parents

...parents *accept them, they speak Roma and know families of children...*” (Eva, Blue ES)

Table 25 *Data on assistants*

Anonym, school	Education	Practise in zero grade	Practise on the position of assistant	Way to work as an assistant	Satisfaction with the job of an assistant
Ilona, Green ES	University in the field of social work and specialized education	6 years	7 years	On the recommendation of the university teacher (thesis supervisor)	Work suits her so far, she likes working in zero grade
Jita, Red ES	Secondary school and qualification education	6 years	12 years	Through the labour office	She likes her job
Marta, Blue ES	Secondary specialized school and qualification education (assistant course)	8 years	8 years	Through the director of school	This job suits her in every aspect

Their responsibilities include:

- Helping pupils in acquiring the Slovak language and translation between the teacher and pupil.
- Cooperation with teacher during the lessons.
- Fieldwork (family visits) and collaboration with parents.
- Awareness rising (for example for hygienic habits).
- In the afternoon: helping with preparation for teaching (homework) or interest groups.
- Implementation of surveillance (for example during breaks, in school canteen).
- Accompanying of children in school and out of school (for example, psychological examination, and school canteen).

Even parents see the importance of teacher’s assistant at zero grades, especially their help to children by improving (or acquiring) the Slovak language: *“Those little kids don’t know how to speak Slovak and they teach them.”* (Ivana)

6 BENEFITS OF ZERO GRADE

With regards to the benefits of zero grade, participants were talking mainly about the elimination of language barrier (especially by the work of pedagogical assistants) and about the adaptation to the school environment (absenting especially among children who did not attend kindergarten). Therefore, zero grade becomes a kind of “replacement” for kindergarten. On the other hand, Júlia (director of Green ES) and several representatives of schools with a long tradition of zero grades, have pupils from socially disadvantaged environment who completed kindergarten and in spite of that, they were included (due to unpreparedness for school) into the zero grades. According to them, the problems of these pupils (first-grade unsuccessfulness) have been removed by the establishment of zero grade. However, in case of Green ES, children attended segregated “Roma” kindergarten, where they had limited opportunities to acquire the Slovak language. In other schools, we don’t know whether children have the opportunity of education in ethnically mixed or homogeneous kindergartens and how many years have they attended.

Zero grade thus underpins the success in the first grade (the pupil has a greater chance of its mastering by distributing the first grade’s curriculum in two years and by acquiring the basics of the Slovak language). Zero grade guarantees a more successful “start” of a school educational career of Roma pupil from socially disadvantaged environment. Participants were not able to specify the direct impacts on the school performance, motivation or attendance of pupils in upper grades, but they are related to their success in the first grade. If a pupil, who speaks Slovak poorly, comes to the first grade, he does not understand the teacher and is likely to repeat the class. Among other things, this would contribute to the loss of his motivation and the danger is that in the very beginning of his school career, he is experiencing failure. *“School failure has a negative impact on an overall mental development of a child, their self-confidence and self-esteem.”* (ES Košice) Alena (1st grade, Blue ES) thinks that passing a zero grade is directly related to repeating of grades: *“These pupils repeat classes less often.”*

Once again we remind that participants (with the exception of the above mentioned) were talking primarily about children not educated in kindergarten.

6.1 Advantages and disadvantages of zero grade

We have focused on advantages and disadvantages of zero grades mainly in interviews with school directors and in the survey for the experts and schools with a long tradition of zero grades. Participants have also included the benefits of zero grade to their answers regarding advantages – therefore we won't devote a separate subchapter to this topic, but will put their statements here.

Directors of monitored schools and several experts specified the benefits of zero grade in comparison to kindergarten. *“For years we have struggled with the problem of transition from kindergarten to elementary school. These children went to kindergarten only for one year and in that period, they accustomed to the teacher, surroundings and mode and all of a sudden, another change came. They came to a different surroundings, different school mode, self-service habits and so on.”* (Patrik, Blue ES) Interestingly, in another part of the interview, Patrik claims that those pupils of zero grade who didn't attend kindergarten are able to adapt to the school environment within one year. In his words, one year might be enough for children to adapt. The question is, why do they need the “adaptation” to zero-grade then?

The expert Edita Kovářová (coordinator of the national project ESF *Through Educating Pedagogical Staff to the Inclusion of Roma*) offers a different perspective. According to her, zero grade is only a poor substitute for kindergarten and in some cases, it cannot be replaced at all. The advantage (vs. kindergartens) is that it provides a regular school attendance (as it is a part of the compulsory education): *“Zero grade cannot replace kindergarten, which is attended by children up to six years, because that, as the primary institution, is irreplaceable. It should be emphasized that kindergarten is not only an upbringing, but also educational institution, so it's not possible to skip the cognitive development of children precisely in the surroundings of kindergarten. For children from marginalized Roma communities, the entry to elementary*

school is the violent transition to unnatural environment due to their domestic environment. Zero grade is only a poor substitute of kindergarten for such children, because children with a language barrier, a lack of basic hygienic, social and cultural habits, with emotional and social deprivation, cannot sit in the classroom and learn the letters!”

Eva Končoková (expert, director of Open wide School foundation) expressed the similar view: *“I don’t see any advantage in the establishment of zero grades. According to the Act No. 245/2008, zero grade may include children who did not reach the school readiness. I don’t consider it appropriate to make children, who are not ready for school, learn to read and write (although in specific conditions). In terms of development of cognitive, as well as social and psychomotor skills, more suitable for them would be the education in kindergarten in a heterogeneous group of peers. Usually these children are delayed in the area of fine motor skills and they can get overloaded.”*

Directors prefer zero grade with regards to language skills of children who don’t know the Slovak language and have poor vocabulary in Roma language. According to them, it is more effective than kindergarten, because its programme (and of course work of teacher’s assistant) provides more space for the improvement of their language skills. The only disadvantage was mentioned by Patrik (director, Blue ES) – it’s the spatial unpreparedness of schools. Schools’ capacity is designed only for nine grades. For example in several classes at his school, they teach in two shift operation. *“School designed for nine grades doesn’t have enough classrooms, thus space for teaching.”*

In the next section, we offer to readers the expert opinions on advantages and disadvantages of zero grades.

Advantages according to experts

In principle, all experts based their opinions according to the current state and accepted the fact that many Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment come to elementary schools without attending kindergarten and thereof resulting obstacles. These children need training and it is necessary to break down the language barrier.

Porubský (prorector, assistant professor, The Department of Elementary and Pre-School Pedagogy, Matej Bel University, Banská Bystrica) states that in the current situation (regarding the legal, organizational, financial and personal options), more effective alternatives of initial education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment do not exist.

Following experts consider reducing the obstacles resulting from the school entry of untrained children from socially disadvantaged environment who do not reach the school maturity, as an advantage: Šándorová (Roma Education Centre – ROCEPO), Rosinský (director of Roma Studies Institute, Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra), Kosová (Private Elementary Art School and Leisure Centre *Quo Vadis*, Zvolen), Kubánová (Slovak Governance Institute, SGI, Bratislava) and Kovářová. *“It is also suitable for a child in case they had an irregular attendance after completing the kindergarten and don’t prove the educational capability, or when parents agree to delay the schooling. For such children, their inclusion in zero grades is justified, since it is related to the child’s natural need for learning.”* (Kovářová)

Kubánová and Kovářová also remind that the zero grade is a suitable option for children with delay of compulsory schooling. *“In my opinion, in case of children from socially disadvantaged environment who don’t reach the school maturity, it’s counterproductive when a child stays at home for one year. It should be replaced by an automatic inclusion of a child into the zero grade, or pre-school class at kindergarten (in case there is no zero grade set up in school at the place of residence).”* (Kubánová)

Kosová and Kubánová emphasize smaller class, innovative methods and the possibility of more individualized approach (in case that the school character does not allow the individual integration) towards the pupils. Kosová also mentions the possibility of experiencing success in the area of education with reduced demands. Šándorová appreciates the time and space, which zero grades provide to pupils for psychological, social, cultural and physical maturing.

According to Rosinský, a pupil in zero grade acquires the habit towards school mode and duties, or acquires or develops a responsibility to oneself and his handicap (social and other) balances.

Disadvantages according to experts

It seems that involving the zero grade within the compulsory education can be an advantage, as well as a disadvantage. *“With regard to involving of zero grade within the compulsory education arises a problem, that if a pupil, for example, repeats a grade once during the elementary school, he completes the compulsory education before the ninth grade, while the elementary school is not obligated to allow him to complete his education at that school.”* (Kubánová).

Directors do not consider the problem of early completion of school attendance as serious, because they don't have such experience (pupils who repeat grades are usually not interested in continuing in studies after completing the compulsory education anymore). If such situation occurs, they would offer a pupil the possibility of completion of all elementary school grades. Please note that interviews were carried out in three schools and thus the willingness of other schools to “keep the pupil”, even after completing the compulsory education, is individual.

Porubský also suggests excluding the zero grade from the compulsory education (while ensuring the attendance of pupils differently). According to Šándorová, zero grade only “shortens” the compulsory education. Consequently, pupils are not obligated to continue their studies on the secondary school.

The heterogeneity of educational content (*“Two options: either split the first year's curriculum within two years, or balance the negligence within the first year and start the first grade in the second year.”*) and misunderstanding the philosophy of zero grade in some schools (for example, the specification for children with increased logopedics care, etc.), are considered as disadvantages by Rosinský. The educational content of zero grade was also criticized by Porubský and Kosová. Porubský recommends not including the content of the first grade. Kosová criticizes the ratio of the development of adaptation skills (for example hygienic) and the development of cognitive skills of a pupil: *“In practise, it often comes to a cultivation of good hygiene practises and abilities at the expense of the development of graphomotor and cognitive abilities of a child.”*

6.2 Benefits by teachers and directors

Directors and teachers stated benefits, which are applicable to all monitored schools, but also specific benefits in regard to the conditions in Roma communities.

For example Patrik (Blue ES) considers as one of the greatest benefits of zero grades that *“... it fully compensates the deficit of pre-school education.”* In the municipality of Blue, Roma children don't have a possibility of education in kindergarten (capacitively cannot handle the onrush) and therefore come to elementary school without adopting the basic skills.

Júlia (Green ES) doesn't have such problem, at least not with most pupils. *“When forty or fifty Roma come to my first grade, most of them are perfectly fine considering their image. They can dress up, know the habits and use the toilet. So I don't need a half year or four months for such pre-school stuff. I make use of the educational programme currently offered by the state, which defines the school educational programme on the principle of pre-school and primary education. (...) Then I start the primary education. This means that I start with the spelling book, so when they finish the zero grade, they know five or six letters.”* Júlia points out that zero-grade preparation provides a better perspective for the further education of pupils.

Another advantage is a reduced number of children in zero grades. In this case, it is an advantage for a teacher (his influence is more efficient), but also a financial advantage for school. *“I won't open a mainstream class – first grade with sixteen children, because it's unprofitable.”* (Júlia)

Zero-grade teachers were more detailed in their answers – they named skills and knowledge that pupils learn in zero grade. We state the testimony of Lýdia (Blue ES) for all of them. *“In the area of communication, they learn to talk, to greet, to understand the questions and respond to them, to integrate into the collective, are able to express their personality, they learn basic psycho-hygiene habits, acquire the mathematical knowledge and develop grammar skills.”*

Other benefits include: acquirement of learning habits, good hygiene practises and the Slovak language, completion of the vocabulary, greater

success in the first grade (less repeating pupils), becoming familiar with the school environment and mode.

It is worth noting that classroom teachers from the primary stage of PS (first, second, third grade) were relatively brief in their replies regarding the evaluation of the effectiveness of zero grades (as well as Roma pupils in general). They don't see any disadvantages of zero grades and they consider the simplification of first-grade teacher's work and lower number of failing pupils as a great advantage.

6.3 Benefits by parents

All parents who participated in the focus group consider zero grades beneficial. According to them, it is the most appropriate and necessary "substitute" for not attending the kindergarten. The leadership authorities of kindergarten refuse them (justifying it by capacitive insufficiency), but some parents also mentioned high financial demands on children in kindergarten, which they would not be able/willing to handle.

"In the past, we used to be starting in kindergarten, so we were able to understand the Slovak language. But since our children did not attend kindergarten, zero grade is good for them. And that's the start to the first grade."
(Michal, Blue)

In zero grades, they receive the basics of the Slovak language, acquire the basic knowledge needed for the first grade, and learn the discipline and behaviour in school: *"Because when children, for example from our settlement, enter the school for the first time, they don't understand Slovak. They don't know how to hold a pen in their hand; don't know what reading-book or satchel is. They learn such stuff in zero grades and thus are ready for the first grade."*
(Izidor, Blue)

Arguments of the parents comply with the statements of the director and teachers. All of them emphasize the contribution of zero grades: in addition to removing language barriers and dividing the first-grade's curriculum within two years, the acquirement of basic skills of a pupil, hygienic habits, discipline and orientation in school.

To the question, what would happen if their children would not attend the zero grade, more of them replied that they would be transferred to special school. *“They would send him to special school for his incompetence in the very next year.”* (Karin, Blue). Ivana thinks that her children were transferred to special school just because of this reason. She claims that reassignment of her daughters to special school was presented to her as the director’s decision, which she was not able to influence. She didn’t know about the legal right to make decisions on the educational institution of her children.

Ivana: My children have been sent like that as well.

Question: Did they attend the zero grade?

Ivana: No. (...) They started in the first grade.

Izidor: And after one year, they transferred them.

Question: Do you think that if they had completed the zero grade, they might have stayed here?

Ivana: Yes, yes!

If a child does not understand Slovak interpretation of the curriculum, because he doesn’t speak the language, he can’t be successful at school and simultaneously loses the interest. *“They learn the Slovak language a little bit. They understand the teacher while explaining stuff.”* (Michal, Blue)

6.4 Success of zero-grade graduates

In this part of the study, we offer the readers with the analysis of quantitative data on zero-grade pupils from three schools in the Spišská Nová Ves district. We focused on monitoring of their success in ES, as well as monitoring of their educational lives after completing the compulsory education. Taking into consideration that we went out from the documentation of elementary schools, it was not possible to determine whether pupils who signed up for secondary schools, also completed and obtained ISCED 3 level.

It was not possible to monitor zero-grade graduates after completing the compulsory education on schools, which we have chosen for the qualitative part of the research, because they are still fulfilling the compulsory education – graduates of 2003/2004 are currently in the eighth grade of ES.

6.4.1 Zero-grade graduates in selected schools in the Spišská Nová Ves district

We consider the information from table 26 and graph 13 as important, because one of our goals was to examine the success/failure rate of graduates from zero grades. The indicator of the success of zero-grade graduates was to determine how many pupils remain in the elementary school within the mainstream education (with a real chance to reach the education on ISCED 2 level) and how many pupils have been transferred to classes of specialized education (specialized classes of ES, or special elementary schools) for mentally handicapped pupils with a potential possibility (mainly with a limitation), to obtain the maximum level of education on ISCED 1 level. From the total number of 685 pupils of zero grades, 642 pupils (93,72 %) have been enrolled in the first grade of ES, 30 pupils (4,37 %) to specialized classes (schools) and 13 pupils (1,89 %) have moved abroad, mainly to Great Britain. Mentioned pupils are from three schools in Spišská Nová Ves district involved in the experimental verification of preparatory grades in ES (Kluknava, Smižany, Bystrany).

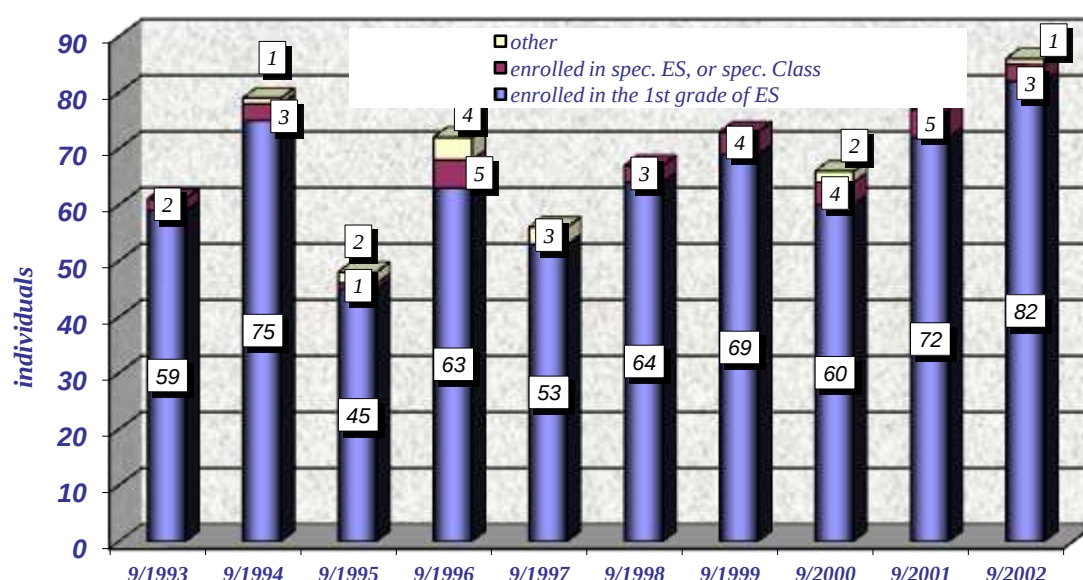
Table 26 *Inclusion of graduates from zero (preparatory) grades in the next school year*

School year	Graduates from zero (preparatory) grades				
	enrolled in 1st grade of PS	enrolled in remedial class	enrolled in special ES, or specialized class in ES	Other	Total
1993/1994	59	–	2	–	61
1994/1995	75	–	3	1	79
1995/1996	45	–	1	2	48
1996/1997	63	–	5	4	72
1997/1998	53	–	–	3	56
1998/1999	64	–	3	–	67
1999/2000	69	–	4	–	73
2000/2001	60	–	4	2	66

2001/2002	72	—	5	—	77
2002/2003	82	—	3	1	86
Total	642	—	30	13*	685

*moved-out pupils

Graph 13 *Inclusion of graduates from zero (preparatory) grades in the following school year*



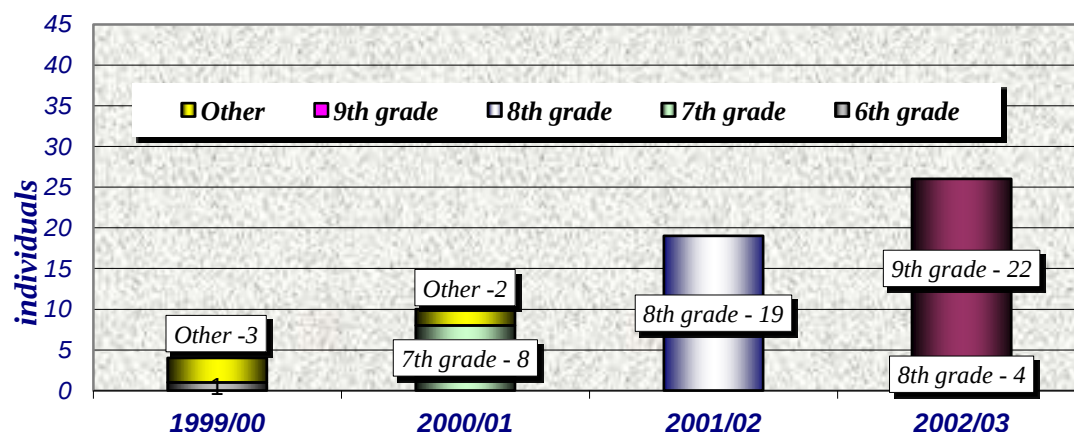
The following table shows the results of the investigation on further education of those pupils who completed a zero grade in the school year 1992/1993.

Table 27 *Graduates from zero (preparatory) grades of the school year 1992/1993 who completed ES*

School year	in 6th grade	in 7th grade	in 8th grade	in 9th grade	Other	Total
1999/2000	1	—	—	—	3	4
2000/2001	—	8	—	—	2	10
2001/2002	—	—	19	—	—	19
2002/2003	—	—	4	22	—	26
Total	1	8	23	22	5*	59

* moved-out pupils (Great Britain)

Graph 14a *Graduates from zero (preparatory) grades of the school year 1992/1993 who completed ES*



Graph 14b *Graduates from zero (preparatory) grades of the school year 1992/1993 who completed ES in total*

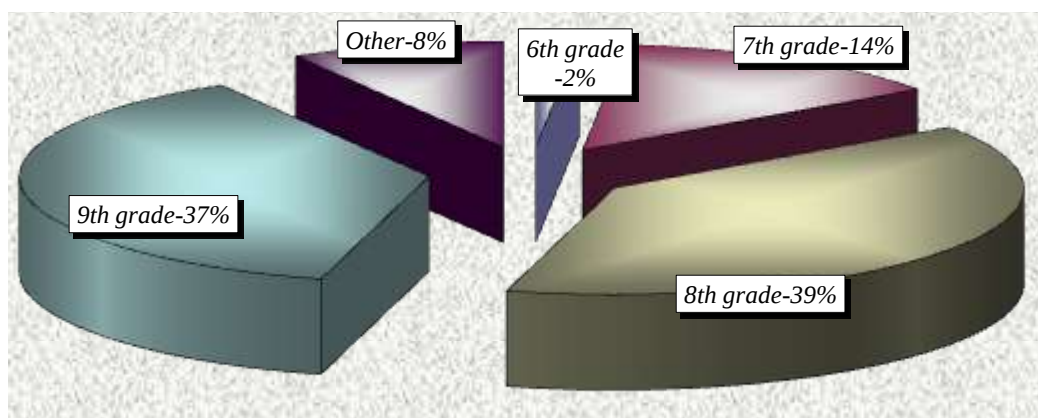


Table 27 and graphs 14a and 14b show that zero-grade graduates of three elementary schools (Bystrany, Kluknava, Smižany) have relatively successfully continued in education in upper grades of ES over ten years of compulsory education. They completed the compulsory education mainly in the eighth or ninth grade of ES: 45 pupils in total (76,27 %). Five pupils moved out (8,47 %). Only nine pupils completed their compulsory education in the sixth or seventh grade. Our original intension was to map and analyse all pupils of zero grades from the school year 1992/1993 to the school year 2002/2003, but we have encountered a lack of relevant information on the next “destiny” of zero-grade

pupils and therefore, we are glad that we were finally able to map the success/failure of at least one school year – 1992/1993. Note that it was a very difficult work of many people – directors, teachers, teacher’s assistants, as well as the work of people involved within the project of Roma Education Fund (REF) *School for everyone*.

In the next part of our research, we were interested in how many pupils (zero-grade graduates) continued their education on ISCED 3 level, in secondary schools. The results are presented in the following table 28.

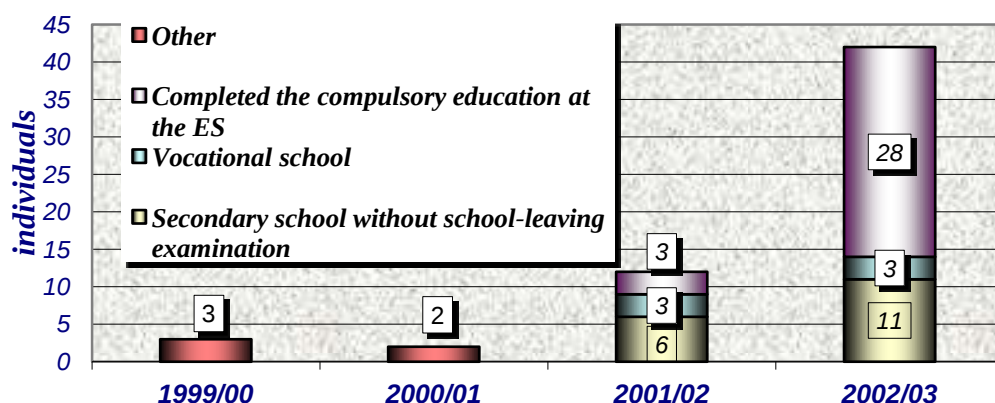
Table 28 *Graduates from zero grades of the school year 1992/1993 after completing the compulsory education*

School year	Graduates from zero grades after completing the compulsory education*					
	Secondary school with school-leaving examination	Secondary school without school-leaving examination	Vocational school	Completed the compulsory education at ES	Other	Total
1999/2000	–	–	–	–	3	3
2000/2001	–	–	–	–	2	2
2001/2002	–	6	3	3	–	12
2002/2003	–	11	3	28	–	42
Total	–	17	6	31	5**	59

* compulsory school attendance

** pupils who moved out

Graph 15a Zero-grade graduates of the school year 1992/1993 after their completion of compulsory education



Graph 15b Zero-grade graduates of the school year 1992/1993 after their completion of compulsory education – in total

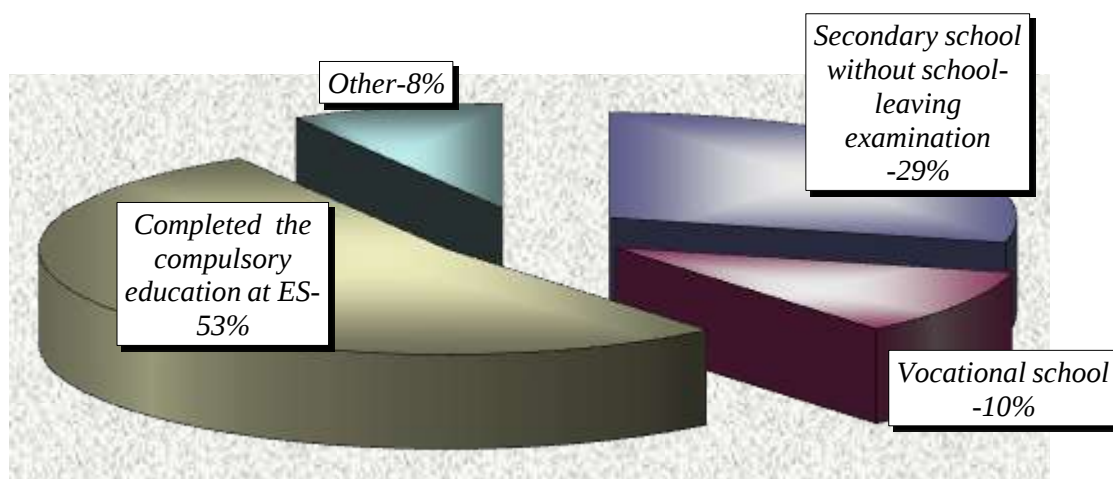


Table 28 and graphs 15a and 15b show that out of the total number of pupils – zero-grade graduates (59), 31 pupils have completed the ten-year compulsory education on elementary school (52,54 %) and reached the level of education at ISCED 2 level. Only 17 pupils (28,81%) continued their education at ISCED 3 level and according to our information, three pupils have even successfully completed the secondary school studies with the school-leaving examination. Two of them continued in university studies (Bachelor degree) and nowadays, they are studying on the second university level (Master study programme), which we consider to be a good motivational element for other young Roma (we will look closer to this topic in the next part of the scientific study).

6.4.2 Zero-grade graduates in monitored schools

As we have already mentioned, based on the quantitative data of monitored schools, it is possible to find out where zero-grade graduates have been assigned in the following school year. Data on their inclusion are shown in the following table.

Table 29 *Inclusion of zero grade graduates in the next school year (as of 1.9.)*

	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011
Blue ES								
<i>To 1st grade of PS</i>	36	37	–	50	47	51	79	67
<i>To remedial class</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>To special PS</i>	–	–	–	15	18	11	13	9
<i>To specialized class within PS</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Other</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
Green ES								
<i>To 1st grade of PS</i>	33	27	27	39	28	41	42	41
<i>To remedial class</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>To special PS</i>	–	1	–	–	1	–	–	–
<i>To specialized class within PS</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Other</i>	–	–	–	–	–	5	16	3
Red ES								
<i>To 1st grade of PS</i>	3	–	–	4	–	–	–	–
<i>To remedial class</i>	7	–	–	8	–	–	12	8
<i>To special PS</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	4
<i>To specialized class within PS</i>	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
<i>Other</i>	1*	–	–	–	–	–	–	–

* moved-out pupil

Tables show the data on the assignment of zero-grade graduates in the following school year by individual schools. In Green ES, from the first five years of its introduction within the compulsory education, most graduates were

assigned to the first grade of elementary school (with the exception of one pupil in the school year 2005/2006 and one pupil in the school year 2008/2009). From the school year 2008/2009, the legislation enables the repetition of zero grade – this opportunity is used by the school ever since.

Table 30 *Number of pupils in zero grades and the educational career of graduates from zero grades in elementary school – Green ES*

	Number of pupils in zero grade	Graduates were assigned to				
		<i>1st grade of ES</i>	<i>remedial class</i>	<i>special ES</i>	<i>specialized class within ES</i>	<i>Other</i>
of 1. 9. 2003	33					
of 1. 9. 2004	28	33	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2005	27	27	–	1	–	–
of 1. 9. 2006	39	27	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2007	29	39	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2008	46	28	–	1	–	–
of 1. 9. 2009	48	41	–	–	–	5*
of 1. 9. 2010	44	42	–	–	–	16**
of 1. 9. 2011	32	41	–	–	–	3***

* 5 pupils repeated zero grade

** 16 pupils repeated zero grade

*** 3 pupils repeated zero grade

From the data on Blue ES it is obvious, that in terms of the number of zero grades (and the number of its pupils), but also in terms of the number of pupils reassigned to special school, the school year 2006/2007 was a “breakthrough” year. According to the interview with the director (Patrik), that was the time when he joined the office. The former school leadership was not accepting Roma pupils until then and those pupils had been reassigned to special elementary school (preparatory grade) – without a possibility to complete the zero grade

Table 31 *Number of pupils in zero grades and the educational career of graduates from zero grade in elementary school – Blue ES*

	Number of pupils in zero grade	Graduates were assigned to				
		<i>1st grade of ES</i>	<i>remedial class</i>	<i>special ES</i>	<i>specialized class within ES</i>	<i>Other</i>
of 1. 9. 2003	36					
of 1. 9. 2004	37	36	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2005	–	37	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2006	65	–	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2007	65	50	–	15	–	–
of 1. 9. 2008	62	47	–	18	–	–
of 1. 9. 2009	92	51	–	11	–	–
of 1. 9. 2010	76	79	–	13	–	–
of 1. 9. 2011	66	67	–	9	–	–

Red ES differs from other two monitored schools. Most of the zero-grade graduates end up in remedial (specialized) classes, some of them in special school. Then the question remains: what is the meaning of the zero grade in this school?

Table 32 *Number of pupils in zero grades and the educational career of graduates from zero grade in elementary school – Red ES*

	Number of pupils in zero grade	Graduates were assigned to				
		<i>1st grade of ES</i>	<i>remedial class</i>	<i>special ES</i>	<i>specialized class within ES</i>	<i>Other</i>
of 1. 9. 2003	11					
of 1. 9. 2004	–	3	7	–	–	1*
of 1. 9. 2005	–	–	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2006	12	–	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2007	–	4	8	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2008	–	–	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2009	12	–	–	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2010	13	–	12	–	–	–
of 1. 9. 2011	12	–	8	4	–	–

* one pupil moved out

The following two tables present the data on transferring the zero-grade graduates to special elementary school and remedial (specialized) class – in absolute terms and percentages for all three schools. Graduates are reassigned to a remedial class only in Red ES. In this school, most of the zero-grade graduates end up within the remedial class. In the last two years, none of the zero-grade graduates has been transferred into the mainstream first grade. Teacher’s assistant doesn’t work in the zero grade on this school.

Table 33 *Graduates were transferred to special elementary school, specialized class within ES and remedial class*

	Blue ES			Green ES			Red ES		
	<i>Special ES</i>	<i>Specialized classes in ES</i>	<i>Remedial class</i>	<i>Special ES</i>	<i>Specialized classes in ES</i>	<i>Remedial class</i>	<i>Special ES</i>	<i>Specialized classes in ES</i>	<i>Remedial class</i>
of 1.9.2004	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	7
of 1.9.2005	–	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2006	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2007	15	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	8
of 1.9.2008	18	–	–	1	–	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2009	11	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2010	13	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	12
of 1.9.2011	9	–	–	–	–	–	4	–	8

Table 34 *Proportion of zero-grade graduates transferred to special ES and to remedial class*

	Blue ES			Green ES			Red ES		
	<i>Number of pupils in zero grades</i>	<i>Special ES in %</i>	<i>Remedial class in %</i>	<i>Number of pupils in zero grades</i>	<i>Special ES in %</i>	<i>Remedial class in %</i>	<i>Number of pupils in zero grades</i>	<i>Special ES in %</i>	<i>Remedial class in %</i>
of 1.9.2003	36			33			11		
of 1.9.2004	37	–	–	28	–	–	–	–	63,63
of 1.9.2005	–	–	–	27	3,57	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2006	65	–	–	39	–	–	12	–	–
of 1.9.2007	65	23,07	–	29	–	–	–	–	66,66
of 1.9.2008	62	27,69	–	46	3,44	–	–	–	–
of 1.9.2009	92	17,74	–	48	–	–	12	–	–
of 1.9.2010	76	14,13	–	44	–	–	13	–	100
of 1.9.2011	66	11,84	–	32	–	–	12	30,76	61,53

6.4.3 Life stories of graduates

In the following part of the study, we offer the readers with the “life-stories” of three successful zero-grade graduates. We mention them for inspirational purposes only and present them just as they were recorded.

First story – Tomáš

My name is Tomáš, I’m twenty-three year old and I live in the municipality of Hrabušice. I will try to tell you about my quest for education. There are two kindergartens in the municipality. One is located in the Roma settlement and the second one is located directly in the centre of the municipality. I was attending kindergarten in the Roma settlement, because it was closer to my house. Then, I attended the elementary school in Hrabušice. I didn’t start in the first grade, but in the zero grade. I was born with a health problem; therefore I couldn’t enter the first grade of ES immediately. Since I was experiencing health problems, I did not attend the zero grade very often, as I had to undergo some surgeries. In spite of that, I completed the zero grade

and started the first grade. I can say with certainty, that I was a much better pupil on the first stage of elementary school than on the second stage. Maybe it was because I was older and there were more Roma pupils in our class.

My memories regarding the elementary school in Hrabušice are not very positive. At first, I can mention that teachers don't pay such attention to Roma pupils as to non-Roma (at least in the class, which I was attending). I had always encountered teachers' opinion on Roma pupils that no matter what, they won't achieve anything anyways (note: Roma). I think that this attitude of pedagogical school staff is bad, because it hurts pupil and it only leads to one thing. Pupil will lose the motivation to learn something or to achieve something in his /her life and will not want to go to school.

In the ninth grade, I had an opportunity to submit an application to the secondary school. I have decided for a private secondary school (gymnasium) in Košice. Košice city attracted me and I wanted to get to know new places and new people. The school director is Mrs. Koptová. She was very helpful towards students and it mattered to her that Roma children are educated. At this school, I realized how important the education is for a human. I realized that through education, people can change their lives positively. My role model was the director, Mrs. Koptová, because she is Roma as well and she has achieved a lot in her life. In our class, there were only Roma and therefore we were getting along well. I have successfully finished the secondary school with the school-leaving examination and again, I had a chance to submit an application to the university. I have to admit that I did not want to go to university. After a long persuasion of the director Koptová, I applied to the Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra – Faculty of Social Sciences and Health Care, branch office Spišská Nová Ves, Department of Social Work. I was accepted to study at the university. I was very glad that they accepted me and I was proud of myself, but also my close surroundings were proud of me.

When I started the first grade on the university, I felt that I have a problem with the Slovak language. Since I attended a class with Roma pupils only in the secondary school, my Slovak language did not develop in any way. I felt the need to upgrade my vocabulary. So I started reading the newspaper and books. At the university, I met Roma students who were educated and they

even had a doctorate in their field of study. For me it was a challenge, as well as the motivation to be like them. These Roma also teach at this university. First grade was tough for me. I needed to adjust myself, adapt to new rules. I felt very good at that school and I liked going there. I have learned a lot. I have learned to look at the world with different eyes. I realized what I would like to do in life and what would fulfil me. I am very glad that I could study at this university and successfully complete it with the Bachelor degree. I am currently studying at the Catholic University in Ružomberok – Faculty of Theology, Department of Social Work, Master degree. I have been studying here for one year only and I hope that I will finish it successfully.

My message to all Roma students: don't give up and go hard for what you want to achieve. Education is very important for a human and Roma people need it, if they want to enter the labour market, or want to achieve something in their lives."

Second story – Peter

My name is Peter, actually Bc. Peter Koky. It is my pleasure to tell you my story of how I acquired the Bachelor degree.

I attended a kindergarten for Roma. It was situated above the settlement, at the same place where it is now and where the extension of the elementary school was built. I was attending it up to my six years. After that I took an exam for school, where I made a mistake in one colour and I forgot to draw hands to a figure. Based on those two mistakes, I had been sent to a zero grade, which I completed with full marks. In the zero grade, I occasionally worked as a translator, because there were children purely from the settlement and we spoke the Spiš dialect at home. Many friends, who attended the zero grade, have much better knowledge of the Slovak language as those who didn't attend it. But of course, even better knowledge might be gained in kindergarten.

I was immediately transferred to mixed class, where I attended the first grade again. The first stage was easy for me, but things got worse with the second stage of the elementary school, when they assigned new Roma classmates in our seventh and eighth grade. Since I was a "half-Roma", I was

being refused from one side, as from the other side as well and therefore I decided not to learn, to be closer at least to Roma pupils, which also happened. I still regret it.

On the secondary school, I was the only Roma in our class and my decision from the past has caught up on me. I missed everything I had not learned on elementary school. But with the support of *Wide Open School*, I arranged myself the tutoring for the most problematic subject – mathematics.

When I finally realized that the quest for the recognition among non-Roma is the education, I applied to the UKF in Nitra, hoping to get accepted. They accepted me and I achieved the Bachelor degree. At the moment, I am going to send the application to Master study programme.

Third story – Milan

I was born in a poor family, where standard of life is much lower as it is in non-Roma families. It means that I didn't live socially integrated way of life among the majority society. Although my parents were unemployed and we lived modestly, taking care of me was always on the first place.

I can still remember how my mother took me to psychological tests of school readiness to the elementary school in Smižany. I remember the teacher who asked me about the colour of a curtain and I made a mistake. Because of a colour, I was transferred to a zero grade based on the teacher's decision. I was attending the zero grade with Roma from my surroundings only. In zero grades, there were also such pupils who didn't belong there. The change came, when the teacher transferred several classmates within non-Roma pupils after the completion of the school year.

When I started the school, my mother was personally taking care of me to regularly attend the school by accompanying me on my way to school and picking me up from school, despite the fact that she was busy with the household, like other women. I think that this was the first step for me to succeed as a pupil. My mother had more time for me, unlike other parents of my classmates, who were never accompanying their children to school. I can say that my mother was always buying the needed school equipment, although we were in a lack of money. Her primary principle was sending me to school

clean and neat. She was always reminding me to wash my hands after using a toilet. I can't forget to mention that she was giving me tissues every day, in case that there is no toilet paper at school. She wasn't interested in my education as much as in my appearance, hygiene and safety. I remember how she used to say: *"Don't misbehave in the class!"* I felt comfortable when she took me to class and told me not to fight, not to disturb and pay attention to teacher during lessons. It's true that I was not a conflict type; I paid attention and was active during the lessons, because I had a good teacher, who liked me a lot. Parents were signing my marks in a pupil's book regularly. The teacher was constantly reminding pupils to give a pupil's book to parents. It was always my initiative to sign the marks. I also want to point that a huge part of signatures were mothers' – more than fathers'. Even when my father would check my pupil's book after a longer period of time, he never looked at my marks strictly. When he saw a bad mark, he told me to get it fixed as soon as possible. My mom attended the parents' association regularly, although most mothers of my classmates did not attend it despite the fact, that all of my classmates were from the same settlement as me. It also used to happen that some parents of my classmates neglected the proper upbringing of their children and they missed a lot of lessons. One of the main reasons was that boys had to go to the forest and collect the wood for their fire place, so they can cook and girls were taking care of younger siblings, or helped at home. That was one of the reasons for missing school. This has reflected in marks as well – our marks were better than marks of those, who had a lot of missed lessons. I can't say that those, who didn't attend school regularly, were stupid. They only lagged behind the curriculum, which hampered the rest of us in education. I can remember how I used to help those classmates with homework, so they don't get bad marks - fives.

The positive was that there were also highly skilled individuals among Roma and we actually competed to have more good marks in the pupil's books. And due to this competition, I was the most active during the lessons. When the teacher saw that I was the best pupil in class, she proposed to director to transfer me to a class with non-Roma pupils, thus, in a non-Roma class.

And that was a breaking point for me, when I started the fifth grade of the elementary school with non-Roma classmates. At first, I was looking forward that I had gotten into a “higher league”, but later on I had mixed feelings about it. I still remember how my new teacher welcomed me in front of everyone in class, when I started my first day among unknown peers. When I saw the views of non-Roma pupils and how my teacher held me by the arm and said: “This is your new classmate!” I felt as if they were not happy to see another Roma among them. Although I have never felt it from the teacher’s side. I was very happy to see another three Roma pupils in the class, so I was not alone. That was actually helping me to overcome the feeling of loneliness, due to the fact that I was used to be only with Roma from the first to the fourth grade. Involvement to the world, which was new to me, started when the teacher began asking the questions. And I shouted the correct answer without raising my hand. The teacher told me that I have to raise my hand first and then answer! I didn’t know how it works. I was used to a different way. In the Roma class, I didn’t have to raise my hand and wait. I could respond immediately. The teacher gave me mark two and classmates just looked at each other. And my Roma classmate asked me: “How do you know the correct answer?” And I replied: “Well, I was listening to my former teacher while talking about it.” I didn’t know yet by that time that the fifth grade transfer means more school work, more learning, homework and responsibilities. One day, I got surprised with a quiz, where I and other Roma got mark five. That bugged me horribly. I couldn’t sleep because I got a bad grade. That’s when I figured that listening is not enough, like it used to be in a zero grade. I never learned there, it was not needed, because I was the best one and learning does not progress at such pace as in a mainstream class. I started learning at home. Another exam came and I got a mark four. I couldn’t bear another bad mark. I forced myself, I don’t even know how, to learn at home by memorizing everything. Learning lasted until late in the evening. I even forced my mom to test me, because there was supposed to be an exam on the next day.

I didn’t have my own room at home, where I would keep my books, or my own table for writing homework. Nevertheless, I was always able to find a place, where I could learn. I didn’t understand everything, for example math. Because

teacher was not willing to explain stuff clearly. And no one was able to explain it to me at home, because they didn't know it as well. I had a problem with the expressions in Slovak and also with thinking in this language. I had to translate everything to Roma and then back to Slovak. Disadvantageous to me was also the fact that no one at home spoke to me in Slovak, only in Roma language. Speaking in Slovak only at school was not enough. I have acquired thinking in Slovak through memorizing the notes from lessons and I had also spent a lot of time watching fairy-tales, because TV was in a Slovak language. I had to spend twice as much effort as my non-Roma classmates, not to be so far behind them. I had to overcome many obstacles and these included the fact that children would call us Roma, gypsies. Therefore, we were always fighting. There were also some non-Roma classmates, who didn't curse us. I was getting along well with them. When I wanted to become friends with them, I had to adapt to their behaviour and their way of dealing. I have showed my true face on exams, where my marks were saying that I was as good as non-Roma pupils. Gradually, I have built a good background by the activity on lessons and regular attendance. Teachers and pupils liked me and had taken me as a good Roma. The fact, that I liked attending the school was due to motivation from the teacher's side and due to the whole school climate generally. After school, I attended interest groups and math tutoring. I felt comfortable at school.

Distance from school to the settlement is about fifteen minutes, but I didn't mind coming late from school. Although my surroundings was wondering why I come home so late. Even here I had to overcome the barrier, because everyone was telling me: "You won't achieve anything anyway."

Based on my own experience, I can confirm, as some authors claim, that Roma live a dual life. I acted differently at home as I did at school. This is what I consider as one of the possible factors affecting the school performance. I agree with the theory that if a teacher does not encourage the pupil enough, or doesn't know the qualities of a pupil, nor his home base, its effect in the education does not have an adequate success. In my opinion, other Roma who attended this school were unsuccessful, because they were in a separate class with Roma pupils only. Based on a high proportion of Roma pupils on

elementary school who showed a high failure rate right when entering the school, it was necessary to take concrete solutions, to the removal of this failed state. I would mainly draw the attention to the removal of a language barrier.

7 DISCRIMINATION IN ZERO GRADES – OPINIONS OF PARTICIPANTS

We discussed the topic of this chapter separately in all interviews and the survey. Most responses, however, were short and not very explanatory, despite the efforts made by interviewers.

7.1 Basic assumptions – discrimination and segregation in education

One of the basic principles of upbringing and education according to the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 is the “*prohibition of all forms of discrimination and segregation in particular.*” The act also does not explain how segregation is perceived and it is difficult to tell whether separate education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, pupils with special upbringing and educational needs, pupils with a mental handicap, as well as gifted pupils, carries elements of segregation according to this Act. In our view, the existence of specialized classes and schools, which are homogenized by one of the above mentioned characteristics of a pupil (such as health or social disadvantage, or his talent) is questionable at least in terms of segregation and contrary to the principles of the inclusive education, to which the Slovak Republic has undertaken.²⁵⁰ Many studies document the negative effects of concentration the pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (e.g. PISA). In the Slovak Republic, EDUMIGROM²⁵¹ research was dedicated to this topic. The authors noted that the effect of such school strategies (for example due to selection of pupils on the second stage according to their school performance, or talent) is the decrease of motivation of pupils from SDE and deterioration of their academic performance. Children from socially disadvantaged environment are often poorly motivated at home and if they are in class only with similarly motivated peers – the atmosphere of competitiveness and desire to learn in class is disappearing.

²⁵⁰ More about the discriminatory tendencies in education in chapter 1.4 *Negative tendencies in the educational system of the SR.*

²⁵¹ Detailed information on the research and all research reports are published on www.edumigrom.eu.

The existence of segregated education of pupils with different ethnicity is a “public” secret in the Slovak Republic. The authors of the research could confirm by their own experience the existence of so-called “Roma” schools and classes. The decision of the District Court in Prešov, claiming that the elementary school in Šarišské Michaľany broke the law by providing separate education of Roma pupils, can be an inspiring example for the founders and leadership authorities of schools. “For the first time, the Slovak court sentenced extended and unlawful practise of segregated education of Roma pupils, which affects thousands of children.” (Barbora Černušáková).²⁵²

Anti-discrimination act is mindful of the discrimination, because of the social origin²⁵³ and zero grade is (regardless of pupil’s ethnicity)²⁵⁴ designed for a child who “... *after reaching the age of six years has still not reached the school readiness and comes from socially disadvantaged environment.*”²⁵⁵ In such case, the school director can decide to delay the fulfilment of school attendance, or the inclusion into zero grade (based on the request of legal guardian, including a statement of general practitioner and Centres of Educational and Psychological Counselling and Prevention). Thus, zero grades are often homogeneous, at least in terms of the social background of pupils (possibly placed in the separate areas of the school). Therefore, it is questionable, whether they are perceived as a support (as perceived by most of the surveyed teachers), or as an obstacle within the school integration of pupils.²⁵⁶ For example Hapalová and Drál²⁵⁷ consider the zero grade, in terms of integration, as controversial, because class collectives remain often unchanged in following grades.

²⁵² [http://sabinov.korzar.sme.sk/c/6209394/sud-prikazal-skole-prestat-segregovat-romske - deti.html#ixzz1uwUDHZMn](http://sabinov.korzar.sme.sk/c/6209394/sud-prikazal-skole-prestat-segregovat-romske-deti.html#ixzz1uwUDHZMn); court-commanded-school-to-stop-segregating-Roma-children

²⁵³ Paragraph 2 of the Antidiscrimination Act states: “*Respect for the principle of equal treatment consists of the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of sex, religion or belief, race, nationality or ethnic origin, disability, age, sexual orientation, marital or family status, colour, language, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or others.*”

²⁵⁴ Although, according to our findings, there is a prevalence of Roma pupils in zero grades.

²⁵⁵ Educational Act, § 19.

²⁵⁶ We wonder why the Act states as a reason for the inclusion in a zero grade the social disadvantage of a pupil? Is the assessment of school capability and the development potential of a pupil not enough to justify the inclusion in a zero grade?

²⁵⁷ Rafael, V. (edit.). 2011. *Odpovede na otázky (de)segregácie žiakov vo vzdelávacom systéme Slovenska. (Answers to questions on (de)segregation of pupils in the educational system of Slovakia).* Nadácia otvorenej spoločnosti – Open Society Foundation, 2011. ISBN 978-80-970143-7-7. p. 75 – 77.

According to the findings of the international research EDUMIGROM, retention of class collectives, after completing a zero grade, is one of the important milestones of zero-grade graduates' educational career. "After completing the zero grade, pupils may continue in the first grade with same classmates, or they may be divided into other first-grade classes. Decision depends on the number of classes in school and the director's discretion. The arrangement of zero grades, which are according to observers, attended by Roma children only, may lead to the inclusion of Roma children into "de facto" segregated class, or, conversely, may provide them the education in the ethnically mixed class. There is no specific regulation of this process and thus no explicit ban on clustering the Roma pupils who progressed from zero grade, to separated first-grade classes."²⁵⁸

School integration, according to the Education Act, means "upbringing and education of children or pupils with special upbringing and educational needs in the classrooms of schools and school facilities designed for children or pupils without special upbringing and educational needs."²⁵⁹

If the above mentioned applies, then segregated education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in a zero grade does not contribute to their school integration.

Here we are again referring to the results of the EDUMIGROM research. Although the research was conducted in ethnically heterogeneous schools, authors confirm the rarity of interethnic friendships. According to them, selection of pupils on the second stage contributes to this condition (for example selection by sports talent or educational results). The result of this selection is a concentration of pupils with similar social background to common classes (the majority of Roma pupils are in joint classes with overall weaker educational results) and predominant (frontal) way of learning. When zero-grade graduates remain in the same class collective in upper grades as

²⁵⁸ Kusá, Z. – Rusnáková, J. – Kostlan, D. 2011. *EDUMIGROM – Zistenia a odporúčania Slovenskej republiky. (Findings and recommendations of the Slovak Republic)*. Bratislava : SAV, 2011. p. 6.

²⁵⁹ Education Act, § 2.

well, their opportunities to build a relationship with classmates from other classes are limited.²⁶⁰

The respondents' opinions on the negative effects of segregation of education in zero grades vary. Most of the interviewed teachers don't allow the potential discrimination, or segregation of zero-grade pupils. Unlike some of the experts who not only admit it, but also criticize the educational system because of this phenomena. Participants of parental focus group are aware of disadvantages of such education (for example their children don't meet, or meet only occasionally with non-Roma pupils), but also reminded us that zero grade is the best available (and known) alternative. However, the fact remains that zero grades in all three surveyed schools are ethnically homogeneous – Roma, despite the fact that all schools (although in Blue ES only a limited number) also have non-Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment and with special upbringing and educational needs (also children with the need for delay of their school attendance are coming there). It should also be noted that not all Roma pupils are recommended for the zero grade and due to an absence of the formal concept of assigning pupils into classes, it depends on the school, or its leadership authorities, whether they will create a "Roma class" from the zero-grade graduates, or will split children into multiple classes.

Martin (director of Red ES) replied to the question on the next assigning of Roma pupils from zero to first grades: *"Some of them go to white classes."*

Directors define "white classes" as follows:

- *standard class* (Júlia, director of Green ES),
- *class of non-Roma children* (Patrik, director of Blue ES).

Only few Roma pupils (none from the settlement) attend those classes. Each of the surveyed schools has white classes. They dominate in Red ES (which is logical, given the low proportion of Roma pupils in school), although *"There are two or three Roma pupils in each class"* (Martin). Other Roma children are concentrated in Roma classes. Also in Blue ES, despite the low number of non-Roma in school, there are classes with predominantly non-

²⁶⁰ Kusá, Z. – Rusnáková, J. – Kostlan, D. 2011. *EDUMIGROM – Zistenia a odporúčania Slovenskej republiky. (Findings and recommendations of the Slovak Republic)*. Bratislava : SAV, 2011.

Roma pupils. *“...but neither one is a pure white class, because there are two, three, four, six Roma pupils.”* (Patrik). According to Patrik, it is a consequence of a demographic development in the municipality and the efforts of non-Roma parents, as well as the lack of the pre-school preparation of most Roma pupils, or their school unpreparedness. *“Thirteen white and seventy-two Roma pupils go to school. Thereof three or four go along with them.”* (Patrik) Other Roma children are included in zero grade and they continue in upper grades in unchanged team.

So Roma children with better academic progress, and according to parents also from better families, attend “white” classes along with non-Roma classmates. Only Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment remain in zero grades and Roma classes. The result of such strategy is that Roma children from SDE – low motivated from home with a lower educational results – don’t have better motivated classmates (nor Roma, nor non-Roma), who would motivate them to better performance. This means that they are being educated in ethnically homogeneous classes and also come from similar (poor) social background – let’s call this state a double separation caused by the system setting. By this procedure, the school only deepens their disadvantage arising from the environment, in which they grow up.

As we have already mentioned in the second chapter, specialized classes within elementary schools are the specific problem within the educational system. These are opened by each of three monitored schools for pupils with mental handicap and only Roma pupils visit them.

7.2 Opinions of directors and teachers

With the exception of Dana (Blue ES), neither one of the pedagogical participants admitted in interviews the possibility that zero grade may be discriminatory. They argued by the need of training and preparation for the further education of children and by the need of removing the language barrier (if a child acquires the Slovak language, he/she has greater chance to communicate with non-Roma classmates). Hana (Green ES) sees no problem in concentrating Roma pupils in one class, as they live in the same Roma

settlement: *"...They live in the settlement, so why couldn't they be together in one class?"* Dana thinks that zero grade is segregate and she also doesn't see its effect in promoting the further integration (in upper grades) of its graduates. She did not want to comment more on this topic.

Reactions of directors of surveyed schools on the question of possible discrimination, or segregation practices regarding to Roma pupils and pupils from SDE in zero grades, is illustrated by the testimony of Júlia (Green ES): *"They should leave us alone and not say that this is discrimination, they should listen to those people who really work hard over the years. Because it certainly is not about the discrimination, it is definitely about the effort to help this ethnic group. (...) Anyone who wants to look for discrimination will be able to find it everywhere."*²⁶¹

They explained us that the ethnic homogeneity of children in zero grades is more-less a secondary consequence of setting the educational system. Patrik (Blue ES) complements Júlia, *"...also in relation to the zero grade and segregation. (...) Because there are only Roma pupils. But that's our Slovak and Czech specificity. Kindergartens didn't have an educational programme for the pre-school education until now. And even if they were capacitively able to accept all children, our kindergarten would have to be gigantic. Children still wouldn't come to school so prepared as the school prepares them in the zero grade."*

Patrik also explains that due to the fact that the majority of Roma children from settlement in the municipality of Modrá do not even pass one year of kindergarten before entering the elementary school (and home environment does not prepare them for the successful participation in it), most of them need a programme, which would prepare them for their further education. Also Júlia agrees with that. The only such programme is the zero grade. The second possibility – under exceptional circumstances – is the delay of the school attendance, but in case of Roma children from the settlement, this opportunity does not make sense (directors consider it counterproductive), because a child "only" remains another year at home and "loses" that year.

²⁶¹ Although Júlia denies the discrimination by referring only to Roma pupils when talking in the context of zero grades, she indirectly confirms the existence of classes, in which Roma children are taught separately from non-Roma.

“You know, before 2000, before the Education Act applied, a parent could leave his child at home – if a child didn’t pass the school maturity test – without having any support in examination. They simply asked for a delay and got it from the school director. But now they must put a child either to zero grade, or to pre-school facility. But the pre-school facility is not mandatory and rules of this game apply equally to Roma and non-Roma parents. (...) When they are asking for a delay and have the confirmation from the paediatrician, a child does not enter the first grade, but the zero grade, or kindergarten, which is not mandatory. The enforcement of attending is close to zero. (...) And Roma children would stay at home.” (Patrik, Blue ES)

School unpreparedness is uncommon in non-Roma pupils. All of them attended kindergarten before entering an elementary school and therefore the delay of attendance (in case of child’s unpreparedness) is more effective and used – a child goes back to kindergarten for one more year. *“Non-Roma child goes to kindergarten for one more year. And the system is so beneficial that the state pays to them for second time as well, because already there the fees are paid by the state.”* (Patrik, Blue ES)

Only Roma pupils remain in zero grades. The question is why Roma parents don’t have an opportunity to enrol their children in local kindergarten, or why the leadership authorities of kindergarten do not accept children from the settlement. The director of elementary school argues by the lack of capacity and disinterest of parents (“Roma” kindergarten was cancelled a few years ago). Several parents, however, told us that they wanted to sign up their children to kindergarten and they even tried several times (two or three times), but the director did not accept them for the capacity reasons. There is less than ten Roma children in local kindergarten nowadays and none of them is from the settlement.

Júlia and Patrik agreed that if Roma children are ready for school, they include them to the first grade. *“Each of the directors will push forward a child who is truly able to move forward. (...) I rather put them as an example. (...) In any case, it cannot happen that a child who is better comparing to others, would be forgotten somewhere. I am talking about Roma children. That cannot happen because it is a positive example.”* (Júlia, Green ES)

But on the other hand, it is not cost-effective for school to open the first grade with a lower number of pupils. It's better to include them in the zero grade, where the school receives a higher amount of money per each pupil under more favourable coefficient: *"Because when I open a mainstream first-grade class, I won't do it with sixteen children, because it means a financial loss for me. Let's face it; it is also about the money. (...) Zero grade is a container, substantive and emergency, that's true."* (Júlia, Green ES). This fact may also contribute to an unfair inclusion of Roma children into zero grades.

7.3 Opinions of parents

According to the Education Act, the legal guardian of a child is supposed to decide, whether a child with delayed school attendance will attend kindergarten or zero grade. Parents of pupils from Blue ES said that they did not have that option. Whereas putting their children to local kindergarten is problematic for them, they agree with their inclusion into zero grade. They perceive the whole issue very pragmatically – if kindergarten (for various reasons) does not accept their child, zero grade is the second best alternative, and according to all parents present at the focus group, it is also a necessity (more on benefits and effectiveness of zero grade in chapter 6 *Benefits of zero grade*). In the past, there were two kindergartens in the municipality. One of them was attended by Roma children only, but director claims that it was cancelled due to the lack of interest of Roma parents: *"Many people were trying to find out why Roma parents don't enrol their children in kindergarten. Well, since they are home and they cook, they won't pay to kindergarten for lunch and plus the fee to the municipality. (...) There was a Roma kindergarten in Markušovce as well – it was terminated."* (Patrik, Blue ES)

We have submitted to parents a fictional story²⁶² (with questions) on the possible discrimination and everyone expressed their opinions. The discussion

²⁶² The story went as follows: *Anička is attending zero grade and one day, a visit from Bratislava came to their school. One visitor came to have a look at the zero grade and saw that there are only Roma children. He met the parents and asked them if they know why there are only Roma children in zero grades, and if they do not mind.*

developed on the topic of zero grade (as an appropriate or less appropriate alternative to kindergarten), on advantages/disadvantages, on causes and consequences of ethnically homogeneous education in zero grades, as well as in upper grades of school.

Michal and Pavol tried to sign up their children to kindergarten several times, but they were never successful. Michal claims and expresses his dissatisfaction that it's because they are Roma: *"So why? Probably because we are gypsies. (...) I think that only two % out of hundred get accepted."* He is glad that his children attend the zero grade, because they would not be able to handle the school without training.

Director of kindergarten told Pavol that the kindergarten has reached its capacity, she has no free place and he should wait one more year. Such response was given to him twice already and for the third time; a child has been included in the zero grade. Pavol doubts about the truthfulness of the director's words, but he is not sure: *"I don't know if it's true or not."* Most of the parents confirmed the negative attitude of the leadership authorities of kindergarten towards the inclusion of Roma children.

Several parents expressed dissatisfaction with the fact that their children don't have non-Roma classmates in zero grades, or in upper grades of school. They thought about disadvantages that arise for them: *"It bothers us. Because everyone is dividing Roma and white. There is a difference, because when they are together, for example Roma, they mostly speak Roma language at school. If there were at least few white children among them, they would speak in Slovak."* (Izidor)

There are only few ethnically mixed classes at school. Viola thinks that only Roma from richer families can get to such classes: *"Do you know which kids they choose? Richer ones."* Katarína responds to her assertion by the argument on the overall low number of non-Roma children in school. Also the school director expressed himself to this topic in the interview: if the school is attended by approximately eighty % of Roma pupils, it is not possible to compile all classes mixed. According to him, the preponderance of Roma pupils is caused by demographic development of the population in the municipality and by the effort of non-Roma parents to enrol their children to schools in the

nearby district towns, in order to avoid classmates from segregated Roma settlement. In spite of that, they think that the school places only Roma from “better families” into the mixed classes.

Ivana has a contradictory view on that matter: *“It bothers us a little, but we also don’t mind. They don’t want to accept our children between white ones.”* She has a son on the second stage of ES in a class, where only Roma pupils are. Although she is aware of the benefits that the ethnically mixed collective could bring (for example, higher motivation from non-Roma classmates, improvement in the Slovak language, etc.), she is concerned about the poor inter-ethnic relations, which might hurt her son: *“I don’t need it anymore. They can keep on going to school with the same classmates as they do now. I don’t want them to go between white children anymore. (...) Because white people always curse the Gypsies.”* According to Ivana, the inter-ethnic relations in school have deteriorated. In times, when she was attending school, she had non-Roma classmates and had no conflicts.

Viola also notes the inter-ethnic conflicts (others agree): *“They swear at our kids (note: she means non-Roma), that they are dirty and smell bad.”*

According to Michal, non-Roma children could serve as a good example for Roma pupils: *“Those children would see an example from white children at school. It would be a little better for them. They would see how to act, behave and such stuff.”*

Viola also thinks the same thing: *“Teachers think that our children disturb. If our children went to school with the white children, they would know how to behave. They would take an example.”*

More people have expressed resignation and the adjustment with the current state. *“It’s like that. It has been like that from the beginning and it will always be like that. We are Gypsies, we will be Gypsies and we can’t change that. It will always be like that.”* (Michal)

7.4 Opinions of experts and representatives of schools with a long tradition of zero grades

Most experts admit the possibility of discriminatory behaviour of schools when placing pupils in zero grades.

Zelina (university professor, recognized authority in the field of pedagogy and psychology) refers to the Education Act, which does not mention the ethnicity of a pupil: *“If there were only Roma pupils placed, that would be considered as discrimination, but that’s not stated in Act No.245/2008 Coll.”*

Porubský considers as decisive the intention, which the school pursues by the establishment of zero grades. *“If the school pursues an intention “...not to ‘bother’ the school by these pupils, then there are signs of discrimination. (...) No matter how “nice” the zero grades are.”*

Rosinský and Kubánová consider the form of education as discriminatory in case of assigning pupils to zero grades based on the ethnicity (they allow such option in practise): *“Zero grade might be discriminatory in cases where there are, due to the ethnic reasons, involved children who could handle the first grade in mainstream class with an appropriate support.”* (Kubánová) *“Zero grades can be discriminatory only in cases where children are placed there for their ethnicity, not according to their real needs.”* (Rosinský)

Kovářová also states “wrong” reasons for placing a Roma child in zero grade: *“In case that Roma children in the municipality don’t have an opportunity to attend a kindergarten for various reasons – capacity of kindergarten, negative attitude of leadership of kindergarten, unwillingness of the founder, disagreement of non-Roma parents, all those children are placed in zero grades. In such case, this is segregation.”*

Kosová and Šándorová perceive signs of segregation due to the social background, or the combination of ethnicity and social background. According to both experts, zero grade in practise is designed only for untrained or unprepared children from socially disadvantaged environment and not for all children, who would need such form of compensatory education. *“Zero grade becomes secondarily segregation in practise, due to the fact that it is designed only for children from socially disadvantaged environment, as the children*

without a pre-school training are ‘sent back’ to pre-school facilities (based on the delay of compulsory school attendance), while Roma children are included in zero grades immediately, without the pre-school preparation.” (Kosová)

“I consider as discriminatory the fact that according to the legislation, only children from SDE are enrolled in zero grades.” (Šándorová).

Representatives of elementary schools with a long tradition of zero grades (mostly members of school leaderships authorities responded to our surveys) are with the exception of two respondents against the labelling of zero grades as discriminatory. But the truth is that in principle, they don't think about any adverse consequences of segregated education in their replies (several admit that in their schools, zero grades include only Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment). They argue primarily by the need of “compensation” for absent training in kindergarten (zero grade is needed in case no pre-school preparation is available), by its effectiveness in promoting children's adaptation to the school environment (*“Without its completion, such child is unable to participate in the educational process.”*) and by the development of their cognitive, communication and other skills and the success in the first grade (*“It greatly helps children. A child who comes from such surrounding (...) has no chance to handle the first grade.”*). From this point of view, zero grade can be considered as help in the subsequent integration of pupils during their further functioning in school.

Two respondents don't consider zero grades as discriminatory, because the child's inclusion in it requires the consent of legal guardian and expert opinion.

The ES director in the district of Rožňava explains that the public may consider zero grades as discriminatory:

- if they are not sufficiently informed,
- if the school communicates poorly with target groups,
- due to an ignorance of the issue,
- with an aim to gain “political capital”.

She considers as a mistake, *“...that zero grades are presented as education possibility for Roma pupils only.”*

Šándor Fibi²⁶³ (ES Dunajská Streda, expert in the field of National Education) comments on shifting the issue of zero grades “on the side-lines”. He sent us his opinion as a school representative. According to him, zero grade is often misused as a mean for generating financial funds for schools and therefore, there are included also children who meet the requirements for school maturity: *“Seems like it has been degraded to one of the successful methods of obtaining more funding for schools, as a large number of schools include children to these classes according to their own decision; even in case when a child, assigned to the first grade, in all indicators meets the requirements of the school maturity.”*

He considers solving the specificities of children from SDE as a specific problem and is convinced that *“...the vast majority of their handicapped condition could be eliminated, if the state created such conditions, that each child would have to compulsorily attend the kindergarten for at least six months before entering the first grade of an elementary school.”*

The director of a private secondary school (gymnasium) in Kremnica, Ján Hero (recognized authority in the field of Roma education) recommends to keep the zero grade (to improve the legislative and implementation conditions), but admits that it can be discriminatory in case *“...that it is implemented unskilled or in a poor quality – when not implemented in poor premises, when a teacher is not qualified and is not equipped by needed didactic and teaching aids and other matters of educational process and management.”*

Table 35 Segregation in zero grades

Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment do not attend mixed kindergartens, or don't attend kindergartens at all for various reasons. The result of the lack of training in kindergarten and, at the same time, influenced by disadvantages arising from the environment in which they grow up, is their school unpreparedness.

Zero grades in all schools are ethnically homogeneous – Roma.

Only children from socially disadvantaged environment are included in zero

²⁶³ We state his name because he is considered as an expert for the national education.

grades.

Above mentioned facts cause that low motivated Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment with lower educational results are being educated in joint classes, without better motivated classmates (Roma or non-Roma). These classes are homogeneous ethnically, as well as by the social background of pupils – double separation.

Class collectives of zero grades often remain unchanged in upper grades as well – the separation of pupils deepens.

On all surveyed schools, there exist so-called white and Roma classes.

The school does not align the disadvantage of pupils arising from the environment, in which they grow up – on the contrary, the school deepens it by their separation (systemic disadvantage).

8 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR TEACHING PRACTICE

8.1 Brief summary on conclusions

Before going into the suggestions and recommendations of our participants, we would briefly summarize the main findings of the research.

- There are Roma children who for various reasons, did not attend kindergarten, or attended segregated (Roma) kindergarten. There are Roma children, who could not attend kindergarten, despite the efforts of parents (for capacity reasons, due to the reluctance from leadership authorities of kindergarten to accept Roma children from segregated settlement).
- A large proportion of Roma children who come from segregated settlements and did not attend kindergarten (or attended kindergarten for one year only, or attended segregated kindergarten), come to school unprepared/immature and do not speak the Slovak language. These children, without the minimum pre-school preparation, such as zero grade, fail in the first grade.
- Zero grade is the best existing (in the opinion of several experts and parents, the only existing) compensatory tool/programme of education for Roma children, who are unprepared for the school education and for various reasons are unable to attend kindergarten. Currently, there is no other optimal (better) alternative for these children.
- A negative consequence of education in zero grades is the concentration of children with the same social background and ethnicity into common classes and their separation from other pupils of school. In case of continuing of zero-grade graduates in unchanged class group in upper grades (which is commonly done in practice), the segregation tendencies deepen and such strategies contribute to the deepening of the gap between pupils of different

ethnicity and socio-economic family status. Such behaviour is not the way to inclusion. On the contrary, it contributes to their social isolation.

- In each of the surveyed schools, there exist so-called Roma and white classes. In Roma classes, Roma children with lower educational results and from socially disadvantaged environment are being educated (for example in Red ES we are talking about remedial classes, in which most of the zero-grade graduates continue). White classes are attending non-Roma pupils and several Roma with a better academic progress and better socio-economic family background.
- Assigning pupils to classes is not primarily based on their ethnicity, or their social background, but by setting of the system due to living conditions of families of children (such as unavailability of kindergarten) and by the contribution of school strategies, zero grades are ethnically and socially homogeneous. The result of such system setting and strategies of schools is the fact, that Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment – children low motivated from home with a lower educational results – are being educated in common classes without the presence of better motivated classmates (Roma or non-Roma) with a better academic progress. The school and the educational system thus only deepen the disadvantage of children – this situation can be described as a double separation (ethnic and social).
- Benefits of zero grades have been identified by participants in relation to Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment (mainly from segregated settlements). These children did not receive the training in kindergarten, or attended kindergarten for one year only, or attended segregated (Roma) kindergarten and they come to elementary school unprepared (with a language barrier). Benefits of zero grades consist mainly of: the child's adaptation to school environment, removing the language barrier of Roma children, an acquisition of skills needed for the further education, higher success rate of graduates in the first grade. By this, zero grade contributes to an increase of chances of a child to succeed at school

(at least to acquirement of ISCED 2 level). Participants were not able to specify the direct impact on the pupil in upper grades.

- As the zero grade is the only programme of compensatory education offered at the entry to ES, for many children it represents the “rescue” possibility in order to avoid their transfer to specialized class within ES, or to a special elementary school.
- Pedagogical participants identified the following barriers to achieving a better success of Roma pupils at school: lack of training in kindergarten (or training in segregated kindergarten or insufficient/short training), language barrier (related to the environment, in which a child is growing up) is not removed in kindergarten and a child comes to school without the knowledge of the Slovak language, low motivation in family, lack of support from parents, loss of motivation (by the influence of older siblings and friends) by the transition to the second stage, poverty and dependence on social allowances, high numbers of missed lessons (excused), low (or no) opportunity to get an employment, demotivation resulting from the educational system. Among the system constraints, they have identified the following: methods of funding of pedagogical assistants, methods of financial remuneration of teachers working with children from socially disadvantaged environment, numbers of pupils in classrooms, low capacity of kindergartens (low availability, or unavailability of training opportunities in kindergarten for Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment).
- Other obstacles in education of Roma pupils, identified by the research:
 - concentration of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment into joint classes,
 - selection of pupils based on the educational results and socio-economic background (existence of so-called Roma and white classes),
 - continuation of education of the majority of zero-grade graduates in special education and remedial (specialized) classes – identified on one of the three surveyed schools (Red ES). In this case, zero grade loses its

importance and the strategy of assigning its graduates to upper grades suggests a need to monitor / control the accuracy of diagnosis of these children.

8.2 Proposals for increasing the efficiency of the education of Roma pupils and changes in the organization of zero grades as proposed by participants

Proposals in the following three subsections are stated in the way as they were presented by experts and representatives of schools.

- create conditions (founder and kindergarten) for at least half-day operation of kindergarten for children of unemployed parents at least the last year before entering an elementary school (it can eliminate the relevance of zero grade),
- provide a pedagogical assistant in each grade, attended by children from SDE and marginalized Roma communities,
- improve the legislative and implementation conditions of zero grades,
- change the method of funding of pedagogical assistants (under current methodology, schools cannot provide a sufficient number of assistants),
- reduce the number of pupils in classes (if the normative per pupil is not increased, a school “can’t afford” to open a class with a lower number of pupils than twenty).

8.3 Proposals for alternative forms of education

- compulsory pre-primary preparation in kindergarten (advantages: natural environment with peers, with more and less skilled children, physical conditions, learning from each other, playing as a basic form and method of learning of children in the pre-school age, qualified teaching staff, the existence of compensatory programmes),
- introduction of pedagogical assistant at least in the first, up to third grades, where there are children from SDE and marginalized Roma communities,

- innovation of a child-oriented pedagogical approach of teachers (support the unique personality),
- adjustment of curriculum,
- the use of experiential learning,
- enhancing cooperation with a family,
- introduction of a new job – assistant, who shepherds children to ES,
- special schools only for children with mental disorders,
- changes in legislation (zero grade not to be intended primarily only for children from SDE),
- establish supportive teaching,
- promote national education,
- implement an all-day educational (upbringing) system,
- inclusive school,
- replace the option of delay of compulsory education with automatic inclusion of a child to pre-school class in kindergarten or to zero grade,
- create quality educational services (guidance systems, social and pedagogical assistance).

8.4 Proposals for changes in conditions of zero-grade education, leading to potential discrimination and segregation, as stated by the experts

- cancellation of preparatory grades on special elementary schools (include children only in kindergartens, or zero grades within ES),
- focus on more significant support of children already in the age of three, up to six years (for example, programmes for parents with children),
- elaborate the strategy of education of pupils from SDE throughout their school careers with the steps of their gradual integration (inclusion) into standard conditions of schools, with regard to their specific needs,
- not counting the zero grade into compulsory education (search for such variant, in which it will be possible, even without a compulsory pre-school education, to involve only those children who really need to zero-grade education. Formally it could be managed within the “delay”,

- not to include the educational content of the first grade of ES, but the specifically oriented educational content and development strategies,
- expand zero grades for all children, not just for children from socially disadvantaged environment. The question is, whether in such case, schools would be prepared for higher demands in education within zero grades, with regards to various special upbringing and educational needs of pupils and whether they have enough special pedagogues and so on. Another question is whether, with regards to the need for the written consent of parents on the inclusion of children to zero grades, parents would be willing to educate their children without prejudices and discrimination in classes, where children from segregated Roma communities are involved.

8.5 Our proposals

The fundamental and perhaps the most serious problem in the Slovak republic is the solution of poor social, economic and educational level of members of the Roma minority and especially those marginalized Roma, who live on the margins of society in segregated Roma settlements and urban concentrations. We believe that also positive systemic changes in upbringing and education, among other things, will contribute to the solution of bad social situation of the Roma and their poverty. Based on the theoretical processing of our study and research findings, led by the effort to fully address the issues, we have formulated recommendations and divided them into two levels:

- I. level: theoretical and philosophical (conceptual, systemic) recommendations
- II. level – practical, applied recommendations

I. level – theoretical and philosophical (conceptual, systemic) recommendations

In the first part we have formulated recommendations and propose solutions that could substantially contribute to systemic changes, not only in the educational system, but also in the approach of the whole society towards the members of Roma minority. We're convinced that it is not possible to solve

problems in the education sector unilaterally, isolated, without the context of societal issues, such as poverty, unemployment, social exclusion, discrimination...

1. As a priority, solve the social isolation of Roma living in marginalized Roma communities.

Reasoning

Based on studied literature, research findings and our own experience, we perceive the issue of Roma in Slovakia mainly as a social problem, not national, or ethnic (though, of course, that is also present and important). The priority of our society must be to tackle isolation (marginalization) of Roma. It is necessary to focus on the solution of (multi-generational) poverty in Roma settlements, their social dependency and consequently the segregated educational system of SR. We find it unacceptable that the state does not use a human capital of Roma within the society (also for them and for their families). It will be necessary in the future to solve the inhuman marginalization of Roma and use their potential (social, professional, educational...). Subsequently, this process would also help to solve the segregation in the educational system. Emphasis must be placed on the civic principle, not ethnic (we can draw inspiration from many developed European countries – Spain, Belgium, Germany, France...). World Bank (WB) and UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) implemented in 2011 and 2012 the expert analysis of the functioning of the social system of SR, including the system of assistance in material need, activation of long-term unemployed, the labour market and state social benefits, as well as the research of the living conditions in marginalized Roma settlements and the economic costs of social exclusion of their inhabitants. Today it is clear that our social system is “leaky” and unsustainable in a long-term. It also covers a large number of people who don’t need social benefits. According to the Director of WB for the Eastern Europe and the Baltic Countries, Peter Harrold, the research conducted in Slovakia

found some shocking information.²⁶⁴ For example, 62 % of recipients of benefits in material need are individuals without children. Only 3 % of these recipients represent families with more than four children, *which is contrary to the belief that the benefits are received mainly by inhabitants of Roma settlements*. The economic productivity per capita is in regards to an average member of the majority at the level of 25% of the world's richest countries. "The average economic activity of Roma is at the level of 25% of the world's poorest countries. Thus, SR is wasting with the labour potential of a large part of the population in a long-term and could significantly grow rich through their economic involvement. Employment of Roma in Slovakia is the lowest in among the European countries. Roma do not participate in the economy of the country at all, they only draw benefits from it. It costs us about 3,1 milliard EUR, which is 4,4 % of GDP."²⁶⁵

According to Alekos Tsolakis from the European Commission (EC),²⁶⁶ Slovakia is one of the main reasons why EC is interested in Roma, whose discrimination is only a partial cause of an overall problem, which needs to be comprehensively addressed through the social and economic development. EC took the initiative and asked member states to participate on the inclusion of Roma and begins to map the poverty in Europe. The Roma Integration Strategy is problematic as well in terms of thinking. This policy should be developed without emotions, and not just with a feeling that we are civilized Europeans.

2. Gradually change the Slovak legislation towards an inclusive education, thus towards the education method in mainstream schools, the essence of which is the right of every child (also Roma) for quality education, placing the emphasis on the removal of barriers in education that prevent from an equal access to

²⁶⁴ Contribution of Peter Harrold, World Bank. *The conference on the social system and the Roma community*. Bratislava. Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR. 27. 2. 2012. <http://www.tasr.sk/23.axd?k=20120229TBA02278>. 1. 3. 2012.

²⁶⁵ Contribution of Lucia Nicholsonova, MPSVaR SR. *The conference on the social system and the Roma community*. Bratislava. Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR. 27. 2. 2012. <http://www.tasr.sk/23.axd?k=20120229TBA02278>. 1. 3. 2012.

²⁶⁶ Contribution of Alekos Tsolakis, Eureau Commission. *The conference on the social system and the Roma community*. Bratislava. Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the SR. 27. 2. 2012. <http://www.tasr.sk/23.axd?k=20120229TBA02278>. 1. 3. 2012.

education and an automatic right of a child to attend a mainstream elementary school, education of all children together.

Reasoning

The Slovak Republic has committed itself to meet the international conventions, according to which it is not possible to continue in the segregation system of our education in the future:

- *The conclusions of the conference in Salamanca* (7th to 10th June 1994), where participants have committed to implement the action programmes for the support of inclusive education for all pupils.²⁶⁷
- *The Lisbon strategy* (European Council of 23th and 24th March 2000 in Lisbon), which, among other things, committed the European countries to ensure the availability of quality education for social (minority groups, long-term unemployed, graduates, seniors) or physically handicapped and the elimination of discrimination.²⁶⁸
- *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with disabilities* from December 1, 2006, provides the right for physically disabled people to be inclusively educated, so particular states are committed to transform their educational system, to fully comply with conditions necessary for the implementation of inclusive education to practise. On March 9, 2010, the National Council of the Slovak Republic approved the proposal of the Government to ratify the United Nations Convention, thus Slovakia joined 81 countries that have already ratified the Convention.²⁶⁹
- *UNESCO – Political guidelines for the inclusion of education in relation to 48th International Conference on Education, entitled *Inclusive education: the Way Forward*. UNESCO defines inclusive education as the process of responding to the diversity of needs of all pupils, through increasing their participation in education. „Perceiving the education from inclusive*

²⁶⁷ *The Salamanca Statement and Framework for Action on Special Needs Education*. http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF.

²⁶⁸ *The Lisbon Strategy*. http://circa.europa.eu/irc/opoce/fact_sheets/info/data/policies/lisbon/article_7207_sk.htm.

²⁶⁹ *Convention on the Right of Persons with Disabilities*. http://www.zpmpvrsr.sk/dokum/dohovor_OSN.pdf.

perspective assumes that the system failure will be considered as a problem instead of individual failure. “ (UNESCO, 2009).²⁷⁰

- *Constitution of the Slovak Republic* no. 460/1992 Coll., II. Head of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, Economic section, Social and Cultural Rights, Art. 42, which guarantees the right for education to everyone. The concept of inclusive education is a state commitment, which derives from the International Human Rights Agreements. Inclusive education is not to be confused with desegregation or mechanical integration of different groups of pupils.
- *Membership of the Slovak Republic in the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education* (Government Resolution No. 682 of November 2, 2011), allowing us to be a part of an international professional platform supporting the development of inclusive education.²⁷¹ The core philosophy of the agency is the inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (also Roma pupils) into schools of mainstream education.
- *Conclusions of the International Conference: Assumptions on inclusive education in Slovakia* (8th November 2011, Bratislava), representing the commitment of the Slovak Republic to prevent all forms of discrimination, with special focus on selected target groups, especially Roma children, children with disabilities, children from minorities, children from socially disadvantaged environment, as well as children of foreigners.²⁷²

In this context, it should be noted that in an inclusive school in the area of formal education, there is no place for the ethnicity of its pupils. It is not important or significant, whether the pupil is Slovak, Roma, or different nationality. Emphasis is placed on the personal development of each pupil regardless of their ethnicity, religion or social status. Ethnicity (also Roma) has room in the area of informal education – in beyond-classroom, after-school and

²⁷⁰ http://www.ibe.unesco.org/fileadmin/user_upload/Policy_Dialogue/48th_ICE/Press_Kit/Interview_Clementina_Eng13Nov.pdf.

²⁷¹ *Negotiation of the Government of the Slovak Republic* 2. novembra 2011
http://www.rokovania.sk/File.aspx/ViewDocumentHtml/RokSub1378?listName=RokovanieSubory&prefixFile=rs_

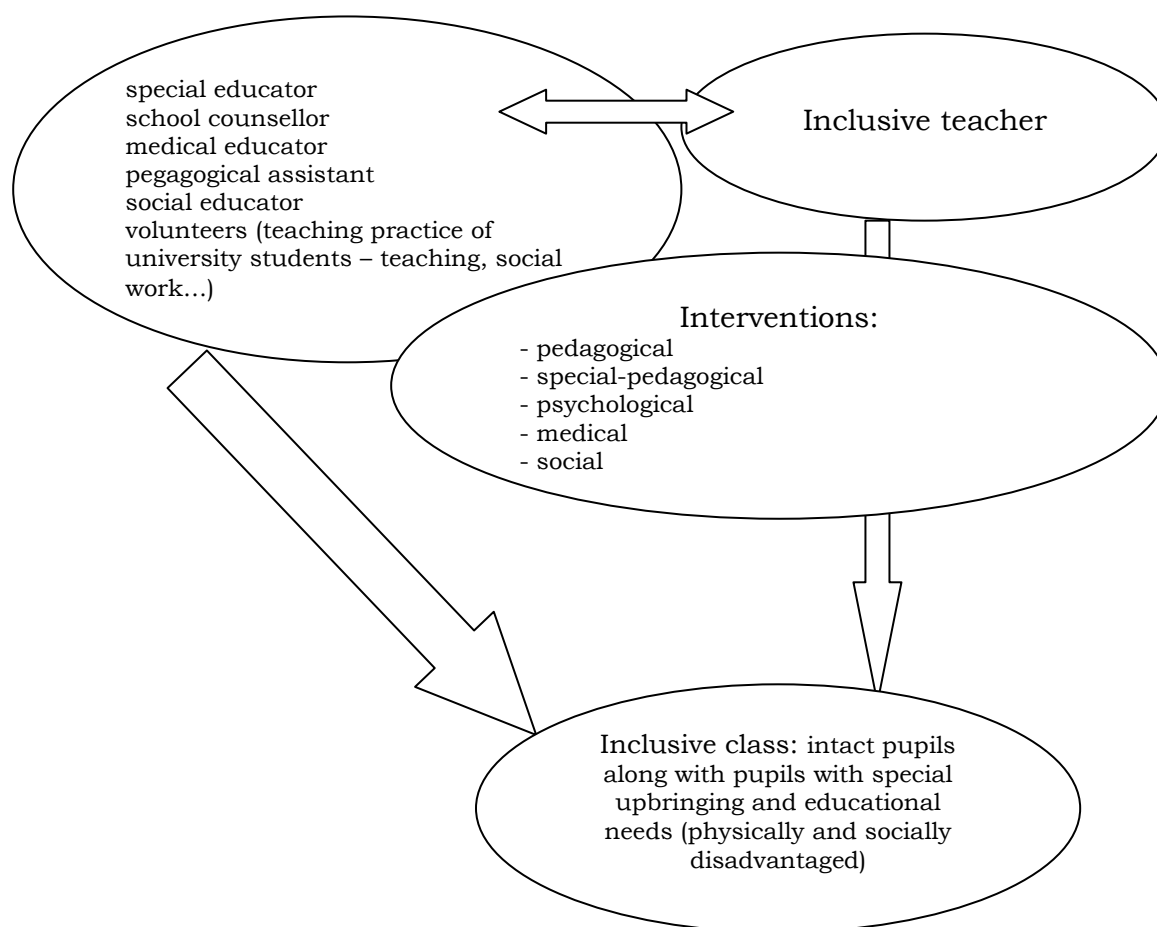
²⁷² *International conference on inclusive education* 2011. [Http://www.governance.sk/index.php?id=1826](http://www.governance.sk/index.php?id=1826).

in leisure activities of children in school clubs, leisure centres, elementary schools of art and other cultural and community (additional) facilities.

Dušan Čaplovič, the Minister of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic, currently expresses the political support for the idea of inclusive education. In public speeches, he stresses the need for the establishment of the so-called common schools for all children and pupils in Slovakia modelled according to the educational system in Finland.

We have observed certain elements of building an inclusive educational environment at the Elementary School in Prešov on Matice slovenskej 13 street in June 2012. At this school, we were impressed by the work of the school leadership and pedagogical (also professional) staff in the area of education of pupils with special upbringing and educational needs – services provided for disabled pupils and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (Roma pupils). For example: education of pupils with specific developmental learning disorders, education of pupils with impaired communication skills, therapy for pupils, *EEG Biofeedback*, implemented by qualified special educators, school counsellor, speech therapists. We appreciate the new, humanist-oriented approaches of school staff in terms of ideas: *Otherness is normal*. It would certainly be interesting to carry out the project at this school – experimental verification of building an inclusive school (school environment) and a new profession “Inclusive teacher” (modelled on the Belgian school system). We present the basic philosophy in the following figure.

Figure 1 *Inclusive class*



3. *Reconsider the system of special schools for pupils with mental retardation (with mild mental disability); gradually inhibit their high number with an aim of their total abolition.*

Reasoning

Special schools are attended by a large number of Roma pupils, which contributes to their segregation. It is necessary to use the experience from abroad, for example from Belgium, where there are no special schools of our concept, but the problems are solved by the system of *supportive education* (*Förderpädagogik*). Supportive education is focused on disadvantaged pupils (including gifted, disabled), who are educated in mainstream schools in the main educational stream, but their acceleration is performed through various forms by the experts in schools, leisure centres and other facilities, which

should help to overcome their handicaps – in their cases especially the language barrier of immigrants. When considering the application of this system to Slovakia, we are limited not only by financial point of view, but also by the involvement of the municipality, town and volunteers to activities helping socially and physically disadvantaged children. It works as follows: a child who is having problems and is diagnosed in psycho-medical centre, goes into the evidence of the supportive education institution. Integration educators take over this child and on the basis of individual upbringing programmes (IVP), they work on his/her acceleration, so that the pupil can handle the standard school requirements. It is a broad concept of supportive pedagogy – its definition, field work, education of professionals, change of the theory and its relationship to an inclusive, integrated concept of education of children from socially disadvantaged environment (marginalized Roma communities).

We agree with the application of the affirmative action, which is applied for example in Belgium (also Germany) in relation to pupils coming from migrant families, but also in relation to pupils with special upbringing and educational needs. Positive discrimination in the Slovak republic is prohibited by the decision of the Constitutional Court of the SR, which examined, on the initiative of the Minister of Justice of the SR, the compliance of Section 8 of Act of the National Council of the Slovak republic No. 365/2004 Coll. On Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination (Antidiscrimination Act) with the Constitution of the SR.

It is necessary to build the whole educational system in Slovakia on the strong pillars of democracy, integration and the civic principle. It's not right to solve an approach to pupils with special upbringing and educational needs through special schools, but with the so-called supportive pedagogy for pupils outside the educational mainstream (*Förder Pädagogik für behinderte Kinder*), as well as the activity of the so-called integration teacher, as it is done in Belgian schools. We agree with the application of the so-called *Sonderpädagogische Förderung* (liberal translation: Special, particular supportive pedagogy), which is implemented in a wide network of various educational, cultural and social organizations.

These approaches can serve as an example to us and also a way to address the problems of socially disadvantaged pupils (Roma pupils). Establishment of segregated special schools (classes) for Roma pupils is definitely not a good solution for Slovakia. We should implement a lot of challenging points and positive ideas in our educational system, modelled on the Belgian educational system. But it's also true that we haven't encountered with an institute of zero grade in Belgium.

It will be necessary to diversify the educational work with socially disadvantaged children and pupils to many educational, cultural and social facilities with the multi-source financing and implementing of an affirmative action in relation to socially disadvantaged pupils (especially Roma). It is necessary to provide pupils with special upbringing and educational needs with the massive integration support in terms of the statement: *It is ok to be different*. The attention should focus on the gradual dampening of segregated school system and its change to international, democratic system, with direct involvement of families and community in the education of Roma pupils.

4. Amend the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education in § 27, Section 2, letter b); in § 95, Section 1, letter b); and in § 104, Section 1, letter b); Contribution for the Improvement of the Conditions for the Upbringing and Education of Pupils from Socially Disadvantaged Environment, which will be receivable not only by pupils from families, whose average monthly income for the last six consecutive months reached the maximum of the minimum subsistence, but also pupils, who will meet at least three of the seven criteria of characteristics of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment. This procedure is in accordance with:

- The Strategy of the Slovak Republic for the integration of Roma up to 2020,
- Mid-term Concept of the Development of Roma National minority in the Slovak Republic SOLIDARITY – INTEGRITY – INCLUSION 2008 – 2013,
- Decade of Roma Inclusion for the period 2005 - 2015 and intensions of the Roma Education Fund,
- Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 365/2004 Coll. on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination,

- Convention on the Rights of the Child,
- Concept of Upbringing and Education of Roma Children and Pupils including the development of secondary and higher education,
- Legislative intent of the Act of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak republic on Socially Excluded Communities.

Socially disadvantaged environment – basic characteristics (criteria):

- family, in which pupils live, does not fulfil the basic functions of living (economic, upbringing, socialization, etc.),
- poverty and material deprivation of pupil's family (as defined in the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 599/2003 Coll. on Assistance in Material Need, as amended)
- lack of education of pupil's parents, or his/her legal guardians (if none of them completed elementary education),
- poor housing and hygienic conditions, in which pupils grow up,
- language, in which the educational process is under way, is different than the language spoken in the pupil's family,
- segregated Roma communities (e.g. marginalized settlements), in which the pupil's family lives,
- social exclusion of the community (e.g. settlement), or the pupil's family within the majority society (according to the Atlas of Roma communities).²⁷³

A person who meets at least three of the above mentioned criteria is considered as a pupil from socially disadvantaged environment.

Reasoning

Socially disadvantaged environment – is an environment that due to social and linguistic conditions insufficiently stimulates the development of mental, will and emotional characteristics of an individual; does not support their effective socialization and does not provide a sufficient amount of adequate incentives for the development of their personality. Socially disadvantaged environment causes a socio-cultural deprivation, distorts the

²⁷³ <http://www.romovia.vlada.gov.sk/3553/atlas-romskych-komunit-2004.php>.

intellectual, moral and emotional development of an individual, who we consider, due to these reasons, as an individual with special upbringing and educational needs.

Social environment is considered as a significant factor that affects the quality of education, including the education of Roma pupils, because socially disadvantaged environment does not provide sufficient incentives to meet those needs that are necessary for the proper upbringing of children. It is characterized by the lack of incentives for the optimal development of a child through somatic site, but mainly psychological. The pupil is in the lack of incentives for the development of cognitive skills, development of the senses, emotions and personality characteristics. This is caused by either lack of time for the child's upbringing, or lack of interest in his upbringing. This condition causes social and upbringing neglect of children growing up in such an environment, which creates problems already at the beginning of school education in the area of development of cognitive functions and knowledge, as well as problems with the socialization on one hand and difficulties in recognizing the existing social norms of the majority society on the other hand. Basic needs of a pupil from such environment are not met on an appropriate level and consequences of this psychological or cultural deprivation are reflected in underdevelopment of mental, social, emotional and professional site. Socially disadvantaged environment is understood as *a socially very specific environment that adversely affects a child, pupil*. We can also talk about an *environment disadvantaging a pupil, who lives in it and is formed by it*. "Socially disadvantaged environment" reflects the characteristics of an environment in dynamics, thus the possibility of changes. "Socially disadvantaged environment" reflects the characteristics of an environment in statics, in a certain fatalism, destiny, as if such an environment cannot be changed.

Subsequently implement changes in the Act of the National Council of the Slovak Republic No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education also to:

- Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 649/2008 Coll. of 17th December 2008 on the Purpose of using the allowance for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment,

- Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 306/2009 Coll. of July 15, 2009 on School Children Club, School Centre for Hobbies, Centre for Leisure Time Activities, School Farm and Centre for Vocational Practice,
- National Educational Programme for the first stage of elementary school in the Slovak republic ISCED 1 – elementary education in part 1.3.2 Upbringing and education of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment and to National Educational Programme for the second stage of elementary school ISCED 2 in the Slovak republic.

Subsequently, it will be needed to implement changes in the Act of the National Council of the SR No. 245/2008 Coll. on Upbringing and Education also to the Act of the National Council of the SR No. 544/2010 Coll. on Subsidies within the purview of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family of the Slovak Republic in § 2 and §4.

By analogy, in the future it will be possible to solve in this way also upbringing and education of Roma children in kindergartens.

5. Amend the Act of the National Council of the SR No. 245/2008 Coll. of May 22, 2008 on Upbringing and Education (Education Act) and Decree of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic No. 325/2008 Coll. on School Facilities of Education Consulting and Prevention (of August 6, 2008) so that centres of pedagogical-psychological counselling and prevention will be strengthened; and the action and workload of centres of special-pedagogical counselling within special schools will be reviewed and through this way stop the growth of private (often unprofessional) centres of special-pedagogical counselling, or even their abolition.

Reasoning

In our opinion, there are conflicts in the current legislation of the SR, adopted by the National Council of the SR, which are relevant to the solution of discriminatory phenomena in school and society. As an example, we state

conflicts concerning the Antidiscrimination Act²⁷⁴ in Article XV, § 32b, creating the space for special elementary schools, in which, in many cases, the Centres of Special-Pedagogical Counselling are established. Those centres provide services mainly to their school and then to others. In the pedagogy practice, it often happens that director of the Centre of Special-Pedagogical Counselling is the director of special elementary school at the same time (the same person) and he diagnoses a child and suggests his/her admission to special school and the same director decides about the admission of a child to special elementary school. This procedure ensures a sufficient number of Roma children and sufficient funds for special elementary school, attended only by Roma pupils in segregated conditions. In areas of the Eastern Slovakia, there is often a 100 % share of Roma, which does not contribute to improving the quality of inclusive pedagogy in schools.

The number of private Centres of Special-Pedagogical Counselling is increasing as well, and thus the possibilities of their inclusion to the network of schools and school facilities is increasing substantially, without an obligation of professional assessment of regional school offices. These offices, according to current legislation, reflect only exclusion from the school network. Therefore, we propose to strengthen the competence of regional school offices in the area of commenting on the inclusion of schools and school facilities into the network within its territorial jurisdiction.²⁷⁵

Target group of the Centres of Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention represent the children and pupils with developmental disabilities, behaviour disorders, sick and physically impaired, gifted children and children from socially disadvantaged environment (except for disability). The size of the target group assumes a reasonable number of professional staff, which is undersized in these centres (mostly in the Eastern Slovakia).

By the termination of the Centres of Special-Pedagogical Counselling and by the transfer of their competences to the Centres of Pedagogical-

²⁷⁴ Act of the National Council of the SR No. 365 of May 20, 2004 *on Equal Treatment in Certain Areas and Protection against Discrimination* amending and supplementing certain other acts (Antidiscrimination Act).

²⁷⁵ Act of the National Council of the SR No. 596/2003 Coll., § 10, Section 18 *on the State Administration in Schools and School Administration and on amending and supplementing certain acts*.

Psychological Counselling and Prevention, a unified functional and effective system of counselling school facilities in the SR would be created, under the principle of “one door”, where parents could solve problems of their children within one workplace, with qualified professional staff represented by special pedagogues, psychologists and other professional staff of the Centres of Pedagogical-Psychological Counselling and Prevention. We expect that this model would prevent the unjustified transfer (admission) of pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (from marginalized Roma communities) to specialized classes within ES and to special elementary schools for mentally disabled children.

II. level – practical, applied recommendations

1. Based on the processing of the theoretical part of the publication and the research results, *we suggest the establishment of zero grades in elementary schools, because in our school system, we consider them as a less bad solution (a worse solution is the inclusion of Roma pupils into system of special education). However, in practice, it is necessary to adjust the legislation and closer supervision of its compliance.*

We recommend to redifine:

- the characteristics of potential zero-grade pupils. In our opinion, the Education Act “uselessly” indicates, except for the school unpreparedness, also a pupil from socially disadvantaged environment, for whom the zero grade is intended. Then, in practice, there may be a misinterpretation in terms of – zero grade is only for pupils from socially disadvantaged environment (this sign often identifies with Roma pupils in practice).

We recommend to elaborate:

- methodical materials for zero-grade teachers (for example regarding Roma language), which are necessary for “less experienced” teachers,

- methodical guidance in the area of assigning of zero-grade graduates into upper grades (so that they are not ethnically or socially homogeneous).

We recommend to carefully control and monitor:

- the composition of pupils in zero grades (particularly in terms of ethnicity, but also the diagnostics of school maturity),
- inclusion of zero-grade graduates to upper grades (in terms of ethnicity, social background and the type of class – special, specialized...).

We recommend to search:

- such programmes for immature children, which will better meet the principles of an inclusive education, so that the zero grade is not the only alternative to special schools in practice.

We recommend to monitor:

- the effectiveness of zero grades through indicators based on the nationwide quantitative data (for example, the proportion of zero-grade graduates enrolled in the special elementary school, or specialized class in the following year; the proportion of zero-grade graduates who repeated a grade in one year of compulsory education...).

Reasoning

Zero grades are the only real form of compensatory education for pupils who, by the time of their entry to ES, do not reach the necessary level of school maturity. In the current educational system of the SR, it gives them a chance to remain in the main educational stream and it (effectively) prevents the redeployment of these pupils into the system of special education with a possibility of continuing in the education on ISCED 2, 3, 4 levels. Specialized classes and special elementary schools don't allow this possibility for pupils and graduates from specialized classes (schools) might achieve the education level ISCED 1 maximally. We consider the (often) segregation character, in terms of the ethnicity, but also in terms of the social background of pupils, as a negative aspect of zero grades.

2. To strengthen the position of pedagogic assistants (teacher's assistants), especially in the education of Roma pupils on the first stage of elementary schools with a particular emphasis on the zero grades.

- Deepen the theoretical knowledge in the field of education of Roma pupils through research projects (student's scientific professional study, rigorous studies and dissertations).
- In the study programmes of faculties of pedagogy, to strengthen the disciplines in areas of Romology, multicultural education, human rights education and effective teaching communication.
- Within a further education of teacher's assistants, to engage in an appropriate manner also teachers, who work with teacher's assistants in classes with a high number of Roma children and pupils.
- Provide financial means to enhance a professional staff within schools: school counsellor, school special educator, social educator.

3. To focus the pedagogical research at universities on the:

- education of Roma pupils,
- measuring the effectiveness of zero grades,
- measuring the effectiveness of the teacher's assistant profession,
- creation and implementation of the model of all-day educational system,
- implementation of the project "mental upbringing" according to experience from Belgium,
- support of the study programme of the pre-school and elementary education for socially disadvantaged groups at the universities (e.g. the accredited study programme *Pre-school and Elementary Pedagogy of Socially Disadvantaged Groups* within the Faculty of Education at the Catholic University in Ružomberok (branch in Levoča).

4. Introduce a compulsory pre-school preparation for all five-year old children at least one year before entering an elementary school.

5. Improve the availability of kindergartens for Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment, but also generally for all children. Build strong network of kindergartens and capacitively strengthen the existing schools.

6. Focus on improving the Slovak language in the process of initial education (in a zero grade or kindergarten) and in the first years of education in elementary school.

7. Another partial proposals and measures:

- introduction of *school social work* within the school educational environment,
- implement supportive education (tutoring) for Roma pupils with special educational needs in order to ensure their school success, to promote educational activities designed to prepare Roma pupils for secondary education (through teaching practice of university students in the school study programmes of education and social work),
- develop volunteering work possibilities in the school environment and Roma communities,
- improve the process of diagnostics of Roma pupils with an aim to prevent their unwarranted inclusion to special elementary schools for mentally handicapped individuals,
- organize preventive programmes focusing on the coexistence of Roma and non-Roma without conflicts, in relation to the education of pupils,
- support the organization of educational activities for non-governmental organizations dealing with the socialization and education of Roma pupils.

In order to improve the process of education of Roma children and pupils, we suggest applying the *following principles* in pedagogical theory and practice:

- Cooperation of schools with Roma families with full respect to their cultural diversity. It is important that Roma parents feel like an important part of the education of their children.

- Support of more intensive contact between schools and Roma community, in particular through the work of pedagogical assistant.
- Implementation of a multicultural approach in the education of Roma pupils, promote an inclusive school environment.
- Implementation of positive discrimination (affirmative action) in the employment of teachers and pedagogical assistants in favour of the members of Roma ethnic in the process of education of Roma children. The research implementation has shown that Roma teachers and Roma teacher's assistants represent a positive role model for children; they help to build a trustful relationship among Roma parents and thus a higher level of mutual cooperation.

CONCLUSION

The issue of education of Roma pupils currently belongs to, in the theoretical and empirical level in the field of pedagogy (and not only there), extremely current and debated topics.

The basic objective of this study was to analyse some new approaches in the education of Roma pupils with an emphasis on zero grades in the process of primary education of Roma pupils. Through studying and analysing the selected literature, we have come to defining and clarifying the basic concepts and characteristics relevant to the education of Roma pupils.

The focus of the theoretical part of the study was the analysis of the current Slovak and selected foreign literature, with an aim to define the basic concepts related to the topic of the study, such as Acceleration Programmes, inclusive education, an overview of legislative regulations in the SR (in relation to the education of Roma pupils), the analysis of selected concepts and views on the system of education of Roma pupils in Slovakia and the characteristics of socially disadvantaged environment. We discussed in details the issue of preparatory grades in the Czech Republic and zero grades in the Slovak republic. We consider our analysis of approaches and researches (surveys) in the SR and abroad in the education of socially disadvantaged and pupils of zero (preparatory) grades as extremely valuable.

In the research part of the study, we presented the basic quantitative and qualitative findings in the field of education of Roma pupils (motivation and barriers), we presented the pedagogical programmes for Roma pupils and pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, the development and effectiveness of zero grades in the SR – especially in the Spišská Nová Ves district, school readiness of children from socially disadvantageous environment (diagnostics and re-diagnostics). A key part of the study is the evaluation of the contribution and effectiveness of zero grades, advantages and disadvantages of zero grades, the contribution of zero grades according to teachers, directors and parents of pupils, as well as the analysis on the success of zero-grades graduates. A significant part of the monograph was dedicated to a question, whether zero grade might be perceived as discriminatory. In

conclusion, we have formulated proposals for the increase of efficiency of Roma pupils' education and for changes in the organization of zero grade, proposals for alternative forms of education, as well as proposals for changes in the conditions of education in zero grades, which could lead to potential discrimination and segregation. The recommendations are divided into two levels:

- I. level: theoretical and philosophical (conceptual, systemic) recommendations,
- II. level: practical, applied recommendations.

We believe that our publication will be beneficial for the general public, as well as for the experts working in the field of education of Roma pupils.

SUMMARY

The publication represents a theoretical and empirical analysis of the zero grade as a compensatory educational tool for pupils who did not achieve the school readiness and come from socially disadvantaged environment. The authors' main intention was to study the zero grade in relation to Roma pupils. Accordingly, the structure of the publication, as well as the research was designed.

The theoretical analysis of heterogeneous specialized sources is presented in the first three chapters of the publication. In order to facilitate the reader's orientation on the topic and considering the complexity and the multi-dimensionality of the surveyed issue (low educational level of the Roma population, in comparison to the majority society, is a part of the complex of mutually connected problems), the first chapter offers a summary of definitions and determination of important terms. In the following sections, attention is drawn to the legislative standards, political documents and published opinions in relation to the education of Roma pupils. A separate section is devoted to an inclusive education. Authors identify themselves with the ideas of such education. The chapter concludes a critical view on the educational system in the Slovak republic (in particular segregation and discriminatory tendencies in the system).

The second chapter focuses on the approaches to the education of children from socially disadvantaged environment in the SR and abroad. Subhead 2.2 is an attempt to define the socially disadvantaged environment in all its complexity. The authors tend to the indication of "socially disadvantageous environment", especially because it reflects the characteristics of an environment in dynamics, consequently in frames of its change possibilities.

In the third chapter, the authors drew primarily from the practical experience of the zero-grade implementation (or its equivalents) in the SR and abroad; and from empirical sources.

Other chapters are devoted to their own research. The main objective was to "analyse the effectiveness of zero grades in the educational process of Roma

pupils from socially disadvantaged environment in selected schools.” Authors paid special attention to the potential risks of zero grade (with regard to the risk of creating an ethnically and socially homogeneous classes) and barriers in education of Roma pupils.

Based on the research results, the authors state that the Roma pupils face systemic, as well as the individual (in relation to the family background) barriers. The most serious include:

Lack of training in kindergarten (or training in segregated “Roma” kindergarten,

- language barrier,
- poor educational results due to imperfect knowledge of the Slovak language, a large number of excused missed lessons (especially on the second stage of ES), low motivation for education from home and the lack of home preparation, loss of motivation after the transfer to the second stage, poverty and social exclusion, concentration of Roma pupils from socially disadvantaged environment into common classes,
- systemic barriers: selection of pupils on the basis of academic progress, the methods of remuneration of pedagogical assistants, the methods of rewarding of teachers working with pupils from socially disadvantaged environment, low availability of kindergartens.

According to the analysis of published statements and the empirical findings to possible discrimination and segregation in the zero grade, the expert opinions can be divided into three streams:

- zero grade proponents refusing to discuss the negative consequences of this tool (mainly elementary school teachers),
- proponents of zero grades as the only existing compensatory educational tool (while there is no alternative in practice and kindergartens are not available for many Roma children), who admit the possible negative tendencies connected with the implementation of this tool (segregation, discrimination),
- zero grade opponents, who consider its negative consequences as dangerous and disadvantageous for the graduates in their further school career.

The authors discovered:

- Zero grades in all monitored schools are ethnically homogeneous – Roma.

- Only children from socially disadvantaged environment are being educated in zero grades.
- Above mentioned facts cause that low motivated Roma children from socially disadvantaged environment, with lower educational results are being educated in joint classes, without better motivated classmates (Roma or non-Roma). These classes are homogeneous ethnically, as well as by their social background of pupils – double separation.
- Class collectives of zero grades often remain unchanged in upper grades as well – the separation (segregation) of pupils deepens.
- In all school where the survey was conducted, separate classes of “white” pupils and “Roma” pupils were present.
- The school does not align the disadvantage of pupils arising from the environment, in which they grow up – on the contrary, the school deepens it by their separation (systemic disadvantage).

In the final chapter, the authors present suggestions and recommendations in relation to the research issue – proposals of the experts (scientists, experts from the practice, representatives of schools with a long tradition of the zero grades) and the authors’ own proposals. The authors divided their own proposals of an ideal inclusive educational system, focused on the development of the school system and on the elimination of negative effects associated with zero grades, into two groups:

1. philosophical – theoretical,
2. practical, applicable.

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DOČASNÉ VYROVNÁVACIE OPATRENIA Ministerstva školstva Slovenskej republiky s cieľom pripraviť dostatočný počet pedagógov vyučujúcich v rómskom jazyku (úloha č. 29 uznesenia vlády SR č. 278/2003), ktoré schválilo Ministerstvo školstva SR pod číslom CD-2004-7613/14980-1:097 zo dňa 28. 6. 2004.

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NARIADENIE VLÁDY Slovenskej republiky č. 630/2008 Z. z. z 10. decembra 2008, ktorým sa ustanovujú *podrobnosti rozpisu finančných prostriedkov zo štátneho rozpočtu pre školy a školské zariadenia*.

NARIADENIE VLÁDY SR č. 341/2004 Z. z., ktorým sa ustanovujú *katalógy pracovných činností pri výkone prác vo verejnom záujme a o ich zmenách a dopĺňaní*.

VYHLÁŠKA Ministerstva školstva Slovenskej republiky č. 649/2008 Z. z. zo 17. decembra 2008 o účele použitia príspevku na žiakov zo sociálne znevýhodneného prostredia.

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METODICKÝ POKYN Ministerstva školstva Slovenskej republiky č. 35/2011 na hodnotenie žiakov so stredným stupňom mentálneho postihnutia ISCED 1.

SMERNICA Ministerstva školstva Slovenskej republiky č. 10/2008-R z 28. augusta 2008, ktorou sa určuje *postup úhrady cestovných nákladov na dopravu žiakov základnej školy a základnej školy pre žiakov so špeciálnymi výchovno-vzdelávacími potrebami*.

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