

Segregation in Czech Republic Called “Unlawful”

Budapest, 23 June 2011. In observations published this week, the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child has called on the Czech Republic to end “systematic and unlawful” segregation and discrimination directed against Roma children, and “de facto exclusion” of children with disabilities from mainstream education.

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Right to education for all: historic and holistic recommendations

30 June 2011

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The Open Society Foundation's Justice and Disability Rights Initiatives, the European Roma Rights Centre (ERRC), the League of Human Rights (LIGA) and the Mental Disability Advocacy Center (MDAC), which together made a joint submission to the committee, welcomed its strong support of the rights of all children to have access to good quality, inclusive education.

The committee noted that despite its previous recommendations, and a judgment from the European Court of Human Rights, “there continues to be serious and widespread issues of discrimination, particularly against the minority Roma children in the [Czech Republic], including the systemic and unlawful segregation of children of Roma origin from mainstream education”. It called on the government “to expeditiously take all measures necessary to ensure the effective elimination of any and all forms of segregating children of Roma origin”, noting particularly the need for a detailed timeline and defined benchmarks in implementing reforms.

The committee noted with serious concern that the “de facto exclusion of children with disabilities from mainstream education remains the norm”, as schools are permitted to refuse access to mainstream schooling on the basis of insufficient material resources. With parents left to fill this funding gap, it went on to criticize the “inappropriate transfer of the onus from the State to parents to fund their children’s education in a free public school.” It called on the Czech government to ensure the provision of adequate financial, technical and human resources for schools to effectively provide mainstream education for children with disabilities. In doing so, the committee referenced Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, synthesizing its recommendations on the education of children with disabilities with this convention for the first time.

This was also the first time Roma and disability rights organizations have pursued joint advocacy on the right to education for children in the Czech Republic. The strength of the committee’s concluding observations reflects the benefits of this holistic approach, and their references to civil society “and children themselves” being involved in and consulted on policies for implementation of the convention is welcome encouragement and acknowledgment of civil societies pivotal role in monitoring children’s rights.