ADC Memorial – Statement Item 2

The segregation of Roma children in Russian schools remains one of the most serious problems faced by the Roma minority in Russia. Separate educational system for children in the so-called "gypsy classes" or even "gypsy schools" remains a common practice in many regions throughout the country, in cities and rural areas. Only a few schools made efforts to overcome segregation and introduced an approach based on integration. The research carried out by experts from ADC Memorial in winter and spring 2017 revealed that out of 11 schools in different regions of the country, only three of them have mixed classed for Roma and non-Roma children. In the other eight schools, there are special "gypsy classes" for Roma children.

Segregation in Russian schools takes different forms: for example, a large number of Roma children are placed in special remedial classes for children with mental disabilities. This is done on the ground of tests that are required only for Roma. The results of these tests are the same for all the children: it is "social deprivation" and "bilingualism". Roma children are not only segregated in the classroom in the so-called “gipsy classes” but quite often their also exist separate playgrounds and canteens. In one of the schools in the Volgograd region, the director said that he was very proud that Roma children go to separate classes and canteen but also that Roma children use different cutlery than non-Roma children.

In this segregated educational system, teachers have lower expectation for Roma children or do not believe in their capacity to learn. They give them very basic assignment, arguing that Roma children do not want and will not learn. In all the schools we studied, only a few children reached 7 or 8 grade. According to teachers, there are no cases when children graduated from 11th grade studied further. To explain this low level of education teachers often use absurd statements about the nomadic way of life of Roma people and their national traditions. Such arguments are completely false since Roma in Russia settled more than 70 years ago and that the so called “traditional roma” did not receive education at all.

The experience shows that segregation in no way helps to fill the gap between Roma and non-Roma children in the sphere of education for a potential integration in an ordinary class. On the contrary, segregation leads to a low level of education, discourages children to integrate an ordinary class and as a result, most of them leave school without receiving any education at all, remain illiterate and do not have the most basic scientific knowledge. This primarily affects their integration in society and is one of the main reasons for their plight. State representatives justify segregation by the fact that it is agreed with Roma parents. This statement is unacceptable insofar as nobody –including parents- can violate children’s rights.

Because of their lack of education, Roma children cannot enjoy their social and economic rights and protect them. They cannot find a job and it affects all other spheres of their lives. Finally, this is the reason for their complex discrimination.

We believe that it is necessary to stop segregation of Roma children in schools; to create opportunities for pre-school education of Roma children, organize and finance additional classes of Russian language; include at least some degree of Roma in the school curriculum; To create opportunities for teaching adults who did not receive education on time.