

**Notes on Professor Vladimir Smekal's session:**

**Integration of socially disadvantaged population groups in the Czech educational system**

*Notetakers: Fiona Prendergast/Tracy Part*

The temperament of a person is important for their learning. The Roma cognitive style is one where time is not an important concept. By 11, Roma children cannot tell the time, so they arrive at school later, and are impatient with long lessons. This is due to the nomadic tradition, and the need to change the environment.

*'Time bids only to gadjee.'* 'Gadjee' meaning 'foreigners', and meaning that Roma children and adults do not have the same perception of time as non-Roma.

There is also a general lack of empathy. Fiona wondered what might be the reasons for this.

Due to the history of repression, it is difficult to become part of mainstream life, and therefore of education as well.

This is due to cultural and historical factors and traditions.

There is inter-group solidarity. In the family, children up to the age of 6 don't need to work and so don't necessarily attend school and miss the early years of education. Gifted Roma children develop their musical skills.

52% of Roma children are in schools for the mentally retarded.

45% are in mainstream basic (middle) school.

1.7% are in special needs schools – for the visually and hearing impaired.

However, a positive point is that 30% of parents want their children to attend basic school (mainstream, as opposed to special schools) for a better education.

The use of the Indian tale, Mahabarata, has been used in a game with Roma children to good effect in their learning.

Training is needed for both the Roma, and adults in general, as to how to spend leisure time constructively. Boredom is one issue faced by Roma.

Educational recommendations include focussing on the improvement of provision for both the mother tongue and Czech, and to have a positively stimulating learning experience.

The Roma are well informed of their Rights but not always of their Duties.

There is no reason to prevent Roma from learning maths – only that you should change teaching techniques to engage the learners.

Monica Heynen noted that the situation is similar to that of the travellers in Ireland. She noted that one issue with travellers is that traditionally they worked as craftsmen, e.g. tinsmiths, and that these trades have now died off, leaving them with time on their hands. Monica noted that travellers, like the Roma, also do not participate well in mainstream society, partly because they do not see it as necessary.