

Goals and key aspects of the project

Race and class based segregation in Hungarian schools – following trends in the CEE region – has increased since the political changeover. Over 700 schools segregate Roma/socially deprived children at class and school level.

Traditional human rights litigation and advocacy based on individual rights protection has been unable to address this systemic problem. At the same time, domestic anti-discrimination law enacted in 2003 has opened the way for popular action, ie permitting our foundation to challenge in its own name segregation before courts and administrative bodies.

According to the Chance for Children Foundation's novel approach strategic cases have been taken without operating an individual complaint based selection process. Funds usually allocated for that purpose have instead been spent on aggravated advocacy efforts and community work ensuring that this endeavour would not remain an elite led reform but generate discussion at all levels of society resulting in an increased lobbying potential at community level. To ensure that litigation is not an end result, Roma community coordinators have been engaged to assist with fact finding and community action, eg. organise school enrolment, public hearings, press conferences and local lobby actions.

CFCF has carried out its activities on a project basis in selected localities, including **Csörög, a village 30 kms away from Budapest**. The project team is well experienced in community work, human rights litigation and possesses profound knowledge about education related government policies and administrative practices. Uniquely in the Hungarian rights defence context, it represents a common effort of minority Roma (Kati Sztojka and Juci Csík community coordinators, Zoltán Budai paralegal and Erzsi Mohácsi PR and communications) and majority non-Roma activists (attorney Lilla Farkas and volunteer András Ujlaky).

In order to make our project results sustainable and maintain community trust, we have trained community representatives in Csörög with a view to empowering their independent future action. CFCF has been empowering local Roma to assert their rights, to understand what segregation is doing to the present and the future of their children, to assist with collecting information, have their say in the (legal) strategy, to observe legal and policy processes and feed back outcomes to their communities, thus ensuring community control over our work. Community inclusion in the whole process has proved to be the most effective method of conveying the know how of challenging segregation at the local level. Inclusion is the precondition to any post litigation activity.

In Csörög CFCF community action has aimed at ensuring integrated education in the face of 'white flight' – when majority parents take their children away from Roma schools, ie to Vác instead of Sződ – and class level segregation – ie education in the big v small school buildings in Sződ. Our legal action here seeks to 'put a price' to segregated education by seeking damages for years spent in separate buildings.

Project implementation and results

The villages of Sződ and Csörög separated in 2002. Given that Csörög did not have a primary school, majority parents assisted by the mayor of Csörög enrolled their children in the town of Vác, where they received a warm welcome. Roma children on the other hand attended the school in Sződ, where based on a micro-regional agreement on public education

the mayor of Csörög secured places for them and where she ensured their travel free of charge. However, Sződ placed Roma children from Csörög in a segregated setting: first in the former communist party headquarters, and later in the so called small school building which in 2006 the National Health Authority deemed unfit for human habitation. In 2006 this finding prompted Roma leaders and parents from Csörög to seek help from CFCF.

Although CFCF was instrumental in prompting the Office of Public Education (PEO), the parliamentary commissioner for national and ethnic minority rights and the Office of Public Administration to launch investigations in the case, the situation could not have been resolved without CFCF's community engagement as at the end of the 2006/2007 school year no neighbouring village or town school wanted Roma children from Csörög.

On 10 April 2007 CFCF made an official report for petty offences to the PEO against the mayors of Sződ and Vác for discriminating while failing to accommodate Roma children from Csörög - with which they had previously signed a micro-regional agreement to provide public education. CFCF took a separate action against the school in Sződ before the PEO. In the 2006/2007 academic year the school in Sződ only managed to start the segregated class of grade six by allowing some children to pass summer exams from six subjects, while denying other children summer exams from two subjects. In July the PEO informed CFCF that it had terminated the procedure. As transpired, the PEO failed to obtain the documents and hear the parents. CFCF made a complaint asking for further investigation and requested the Minister of Education to review the PEO's proceedings.

In the summer of 2007 Vác's mayor publicly denounced CFCF for reporting him to the PEO and called on us to apologise. This was widely covered in the Hungarian press and gave CFCF the opportunity to make its standpoint clear in public and generate public support for its enrolment action.

By the start of the 2007/2008 school year, persuaded by CFCF community coordinators, the majority of Roma parents from Csörög opted to enrol their children to schools in neighbouring villages and mainly to the town of Vác. However, none of their chosen schools seemed open to enrolment. CFCF community coordinators assisted with the selection of schools, the preparation and submission of written requests of enrolment for all the 29 school-less children. The children were finally enrolled in schools in Vác (ten children in grade 4 and six children in grade 1), Sződ (11 children), and Sződliget (two children). In 2008 CFCF carried on with its engagement in enrolment. A dozen children were enrolled in Vác according to an enrolment plan devised and coordinated by local Roma mothers. In 2007/2008 CFCF assisted Roma mothers in Csörög in establishing the Chance for our Children Association for Desegregation.

CFCF carried out its own extensive fact finding into the fate of Roma children studying in Sződ between 1998 and 2005. It transpired that despite the efforts of half a dozen public authorities made over a year prior to the incidents in mid 2007, discriminatory practices that had availed in the so called small school buildings in Sződ until 2005 had not been discovered.

Based on its own fact finding CFCF agreed to take the case of six individual applicants and filed civil action for damages against the primary school and the municipality of Sződ. The six applicants had received inferior education, had been segregated into separate school buildings and later into a room in the main school building otherwise unfit for

education. To these applicants the school had denied the minimum conditions laid down in the public education act. The first trial in this case was held on 30 October 2008. CFCF provided extensive briefing, ensured that all our clients attended the first trial day to become acquainted with court proceedings. They will be heard in April 2009.

The Roma community in Csörög is an exemplary one to work with. The grassroots organisation Chance for our Children Association for Desegregation registered in May 2008 is advocating for their childrens' rights in an organised manner, and CFCF is following up on their activities and is providing continued support. Mothers from Csörög regularly take part in CFCF lobby actions and press conferences. In the 2008 summer camp organised by CFCF in Balatonmáriafürdő, ten Roma children just enrolled in secondary schools took part. In its communication CFCF has been promoting Csörög as a good practice example for community cohesion and community work in the fight against school segregation.

Financing and organisational aspects

CFCF office is based in Budapest and staff travel by car to localities outside the capital city. CFCF presently has one volunteer and employs eight people: four community coordinators, one paralegal, one lawyer, one financial officer and a director who is also in charge of PR and communications. CFCF selects the localities it works in on the basis of sociological research and a review of community leaders' indications.

The School Enrolment and Community Action in Csörög Project was in the main funded from an earmarked fund provided to CFCF by Sulinova Kht. in 2007. In the framework of this Community Pilot Program CFCF carried out community action projects in Csörög and another six localities. The Community Pilot Program covered the operational costs CFCF provided to the Chance for our Children Association for Desegregation in the sum of HUF 420.000 and part of the community coordinators' (Juci Csík and Kati Sztojka) salaries and travel expenses incurred in 2007 in the sum of HUF 420.000.

CFCF covered the rest of the costs from funding provided by the Ministry of Social Affairs under DEMNET I (NGOs and the implementation of the anti-discrimination act) in 2008. This Equal Access of Roma to Quality Education Program covered the costs CFCF incurred during 2008 by following up on its work commenced in Csörög in the framework of the Community Pilot Program. CFCF spent another HUF 500.000 for the salaries and travels of the community coordinator (Kati Sztojka) and the paralegal (Zoltán Budai). The costs of participation at the summer camp of ten Roma children and a mother from Csörög (Mrs. Zoltán Lakatos, Szilvi) totalling HUF 550.000 were covered from funds raised from private donors, eg the Hungarian Bank Association, the Polgár Foundation for Equal Chances, and the Hungarian Telecom Co. In total, CFCF spent HUF 1.890.000 (EURO 7.560).

Legal costs and PR and communication expenses have so far been covered from core funding received from the Open Society Institute. CFCF has not included these costs under local projects. However, it is noteworthy that from January 2009 CFCF has been able to exponentially raise its PR and communication expenses focussing on good practices – including the School Enrolment and Community Action in Csörög Project - under its Program on Community Action and Lobby for the Integration of Roma and Socially Deprived Children as funded from DEMNET II.