

SPECIAL SCHOOLS FOR SPECIAL CASES?
THE ORIGINS OF ROMA CHILD SEGREGATION
BY STATE-SOCIALIST EDUCATIONAL AND FAMILY
POLITICS IN EASTERN SLOVAKIA

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It is remarkable how many Roma children in Eastern Slovakia attend special education schools. According to non-governmental organizations, this is due to their ethnic status, not to their individual capabilities. The argument is that normally-gifted Roma children are systematically assigned to schools for the handicapped because of entrance examinations which do not take into account their ethnic background, and that this leads to a de-facto segregation along ethnic lines in the Slovak educational system. This allocating practice is attributed to having originated under communism, i.e. explained as a fault inherent in the old system. But setting up special education schools had not initially been aimed at segregating Roma children. On the contrary, these pupils were to be specifically assisted so that they could be transferred to regular schools as soon as possible. But paternalistic integration policies, combined with great discrepancies between central decisions and their local realization, through the years perverted what was meant as temporary support into a permanent segregation without a legal foundation, legitimized by pseudo-scientific arguments.