

**General Comment No. 3/2020. of the Minority Ombudsman
on incorporating the history of the Roma people in the school curricula in a more
professional and effective way**

The system of nationality public education institutions in Hungary – which is unique in Europe – ensures that members and the children of the nationality communities living in Hungary find, preserve and develop their identity by learning the language of the nationality, by learning in that language, and by learning about the history, spiritual and material culture of the specific nationality community.

As the thirteen ethnic communities recognized in Hungary are state-forming factors under the Fundamental Law, it is a natural need for students of non-nationality institutions to learn about the past and present of nationalities and the mutually enriching common history as well as our common artistic, cultural and social heritage. Incorporating the history of the nationality communities that live in Hungary, such as the Roma, into the public education system can be a special challenge for the developers of the National Core Curriculum, for textbook writers and for educators alike.

The general comment primarily focuses on the issues related to teaching the history of the Roma nationality, which is a special one in several aspects. In Roma communities, history and collective memory have been handed down from generation to generation through oral communication, thus the stages of their history have sometimes been incompletely or in some places incorrectly documented, and authentic expert reconstruction and historiography has begun and has been developed only recently. In addition, narratives about the Roma community, often prejudiced, exclusionary or hostile, need to be addressed critically and in a complex way, ensuring that the curricula of the subjects history and citizenship make it clear: the history of European societies have been shaped by the everyday acts and the attitudes of Rome people and Roma groups, too.

The primary purpose of issuing this general comment is to present to the Hungarian professional public Recommendation CM/Rec(2020)2 of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which provides guidance and concrete solutions for integrating Roma history and culture into school curricula and materials. The Council of Europe Recommendation is a unique collection of measures to be taken in this area and should therefore be brought to the attention of the professional public, decision-makers and the general public. The recommendation seeks to encourage the integration of Roma history, in particular the memory of the Roma Holocaust, into school curricula and materials in order to develop all pupils' historical awareness and contribute to the undertaking of Roma identity improving the and understanding of it, by building the culture of tolerance and respect in schools.

The document, adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which includes Hungary as well as a total of 47 European states, also proposes an appropriate framework for stakeholders, urging Member State governments to act, by taking due account of their constitutional systems and national, regional and local policies, circumstances and their responsibilities, in particular in the fields of primary, secondary and higher education, as follows:

- implement the principles and the proposed measures set out in the Appendix;

- draw the attention of Ministries of Education and other stakeholders, in particular national, regional or local education bodies, to this recommendation;
- translate this recommendation into the official languages of the Member States; and
- in five years' time, and at regular intervals thereafter, review its implementation.

In order to provide factual information and to reduce prejudice, it can be stated that the appropriate textbook presentation of the information about the Roma has already started in Hungary, although for the time being we encounter only a quantitative rather than a content-quality presentation of Roma history. The general comment is positive, hoping that ongoing processes have not been completed and that textbook developments will take into account the theoretical and practical proposals made in the international recommendation outlined in the general comment, as well as the constructive criticisms of the content and quality of textbooks on nationalities, including the Roma.

In order to learn about the real history of the Roma, it is worth supporting the recommendation of the Council of Europe on the need of appropriate trainings for teachers, educators, school principals and government officials responsible for education with the participation of experts and scholars of Roma history and culture.

The general comment includes the official Hungarian version of the Council of Europe Recommendation in full, as well as a detailed presentation of the Hungarian regulatory environment and practice of teaching Roma history and culture, together with scientific research and findings, and the activities of the ombudsmen and the deputy ombudsman.

The document calls on the Secretary of State for Public Education of the Ministry of Human Resources and the Deputy Secretary of State for Social Inclusion of the Ministry of the Interior to study the recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. It proposes to consider – in cooperation with the affected stakeholders, institutions and experts – the integration of the recommendation and its use in the National Core Curriculum, the framework curricula, the teacher trainings in higher education and in other extensions trainings, by adapting it to the Hungarian legislative environment.