

Hot meals for hard cases

(<http://www.economist.com/node/17039101>)

On every social index, from income to life expectancy, from illiteracy to health, from criminality to child welfare, the Romanies do worse than any other European group. They are not just poor, but also persecuted. In some countries even allegations of forced sterilisation persist, amid official denials.

The plight of Europe's Romanies is grave, but it is not hopeless. Given the opportunity they can thrive just like anyone else. Some are doing well in America. Aspects of their culture certainly hamper efforts to improve their lives. But a much bigger problem is the sense of despair and exclusion that makes going to school or seeking work seem a hopeless waste of time.

The place where the EU and member governments can break the cycle is education. Many Romani children attend school patchily if at all. Those figures are static or in some countries worsening: given the demography (Romani families are usually large), improving schooling is a matter of urgent European self-interest as well as of principle.

Integrating Romani children into mainstream education is going to be hard, given a history of humiliation in the classroom. A child who has never used indoor plumbing or seen a book is easily mocked. Many Romani parents believe their children should be earning, not learning. The cost of books and uniforms and the difficulty of getting to class are barriers, too. By the time formal school starts, at six or seven, it may be too late. Integration begins with good nursery education.

But experience in Romania suggests that Romanies can be persuaded to send their children to school, and that governments can help. A first step is to end the discrimination that persists in many countries. Hot meals, food vouchers, subsidised shoes and uniforms and even making child-welfare payments conditional on attendance all help. Such measures cost little money. It's not cash that's needed, so much as ingenuity and willingness.

Questions

- 1) Explain the meaning of 'amid official denials' (lines 6 and 7)
- 2) What is, according to the article, the biggest obstacle to Romani integration?
- 3) Explain the meaning of 'patchily' (line 15)
- 4) What do 'those figures' (line 15 and 16) relate to?
- 5) Paraphrase 'Integrating Romani children into mainstream education is going to be hard, given a history of humiliation in the classroom' (lines 19 and 20).
- 6) Paraphrase 'A child who has never used indoor plumbing or seen a book is easily mocked' (lines 20 and 21).
- 7) What is, according to the article, the answer to the problem of Romani integration?
- 8) What incentives for the Romani does the article propose in order for them to accept steps towards closer integration?
- 9) What is needed to put these incentives in place?
- 10) Explain the title of this article (line 1).
- 11) What is your opinion on the Romani integration?

Vocabulary

plight (line 8) – a condition, state, or situation, esp. an unfavorable or unfortunate one

persuade to (line 26) – to make believe by appealing to reason or understanding; convince; to talk somebody into something

subsidised (line 29) – paid for by and authority, usually a national government (subsidy = a grant or contribution of money).

conditional on (line 30) – imposing, containing, subject to, or depending on a condition or conditions; not absolute; made or allowed on certain terms

You can find additional explanation and more examples to help you understand and use English words and phrases at <http://dictionary.reference.com>, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/>, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/> or <http://www.ldoceonline.com/>

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