

On 19 March 2018, Ciné-ONU screened 'Which Children Matter?' to mark the [International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination](#) and EU Roma Week from the 8th - 12th April. In this film, you meet Czech and Slovak Romani immigrant children, several considered ineducable by their own societies, as they thrive in a new school, in a new language, in an equitable environment in the UK. The film, which reveals how all children can reach their full potential, was screened in partnership with the [UN Human Rights Office](#), at [Cinéma Galeries](#) in Brussels.



The screening was preceded by a Facebook Live event broadcast on our [Cine-ONU Facebook](#) page. Head over to our Facebook page if you want to hear Jenne Magno discuss the discrimination against Romani children in education and how, in November 2007, the European Court of Human Rights found the Czech Republic had unlawfully, indirectly discriminated against such children in violation of the European Convention on Human Rights, and what has been done since.

The screening was followed by a conversation on the issues highlighted in the film. The guest speakers included: [Jenne Magno](#) (Director); [Jana Balazova](#) (DG Justice, EU Commission), [Andor Urmos](#) (DG Regio, EU Commission); [Claude Cahn](#) (UN Human Rights Regional Office for Europe); moderated by [Deborah Seward](#) (UNRIC).

The discussion centered initially around Director Jenne Magno's reasons for pursuing this film

and topic. She mentioned inspiration from John Amos Comenius, a 17th century Moravian philosopher who advocated for universal education, which in turn had led her to be interested in why a disproportionately large percentage of Romani children were incorrectly considered ineducable in mainstream schools, and sent to schools for the mentally challenged or educated with a reduced curriculum. It was this rampant discrimination that led her to seek to, 'debunk some of these negative myths about Roma that are so deeply engrained in society'. Ms. Magno went on to highlight that, 'otherness has been feared throughout history; I think competition increases the otherness. But the question is: what do we do about it?'



Speaker panel pre-screening discussion - Deborah Seward, Jana Balazova, Claude Cahn and Jenne Magno.

Later, the discussion did indeed shift to what is being done by the international community in order to tackle this problem. Mr. Cahn explained to the audience that, during a research trip in Ostrava between 1998-99, it was found that 17,000 Czech children went to school every day without seeing or interacting with a single Roma child. He mentioned that this research was key to bringing about litigation efforts and, 'that's why we need to focus on inclusive education, bringing ALL children together: to prepare us for the diverse societies in which we will live'. Jana Balazova, representing DG Justice at the EU Commission, further explained that following recent litigation efforts the Czech Republic is, 'in a transition period of two years to try and implement new inclusive education policies'. Hopefully, these efforts will begin to initiate a significant shift, both in the implementation of inclusive education policies as well as effecting change on a societal level as well, reducing this widespread and ingrained discrimination.

Yet, despite these efforts, Ms. Balazova and the rest of the panel were keen to stress that there are wider societal problems that contribute to the persistent discrimination. She noted that, 'the problem is wider than just education. These children come from extreme poverty, a much worse socio-economic background, so the situation is very complex and much harder to tackle'. Moving forward, Mr. Urmos suggested that effective change can still be achieved and that 'The European structural funds are there, and we need to use them'. Ms. Magno reiterated that, 'The time is now to take a look and really monitor what is going on. People are trying to implement real legislative frameworks to combat this discrimination'. Interestingly, she compared teachers to doctors, and asked the audience 'should teachers take an oath to protect the children they teach?'



In summary, the panel were in consensus, inclusive and equitable education is a human right and must be respected across the globe. Indeed, Mr. Cahn fittingly concluded, 'Celebrating diversity, education and culture are central to our human rights. How can we combat discrimination? One way is to work on the next generation'.

- Check out our Flickr Photos from the event [here](#) .
- For more information about the film, [click here](#) .
- To download the handout, [click here](#) .
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