

## The last-chance school

**When a school went up in this poor Roma settlement in the north of Hungary, it offered the first chance for children and adults to learn to read and write and get an education**

Anikó Orsós is programmes assistant at the European Roma Rights Centre in Budapest. She was born in a Roma settlement in Hidas in south-west Hungary, where she was the first to finish secondary school. She and one of her brothers went on to university. The project she talks about is threatened with closure under the government's new budget measures.



**The living conditions in Sajókaza are among the worst in Hungary**

“Amrita Association is based in Pécs, in Baranya County in south-west Hungary, and helps young Roma people get into secondary school. Amrita set up a community house for this purpose, where support was given to Roma kids from the surrounding villages. Our project there allowed us to gain a lot of experience we were soon to use. Education is a long-term investment. It doesn't happen overnight and that's why we wanted to carry on with the same work elsewhere.

“The conditions of the Roma in Borsod county in the north of Hungary are pretty bad. In the village of Sajókaza they sleep crammed into one room – you couldn't call them houses – with no windows, no door, no running water, no electricity. The village has 1,000 Roma inhabitants and no roads. In 2007, we built a house and opened a school in the middle of the settlement.

“The Dr Ambedkar school, named after the Indian jurist, political leader, writer and Buddhist, gets money from a Buddhist foundation, the Dzsaj Bhím Buddhist community, and some from the state. We practise Buddhism in the sense that we promote tolerance and solidarity.

“The Romas' education level is the lowest in the country. Most adults haven't even finished primary school. This is a second-chance school, so we have children and adults sitting next to each other in the same primary school class. We aim high educationally, using a cooperative and flexible teaching approach. The Roma have been marginalised for so long they

desperately need a positive image of themselves. The Roma in Sajókaza have children very young so we set up a crèche/kindergarten to free them for study.

“The European Commission funded a two-year project, which ended in 2012, to help the most disadvantaged in the Roma community. In Hungary, if your parents haven't gone beyond primary school, you fall into the lowest social category. The funding for the project allowed us to train Roma mentors and to establish extra curricular programmes in 11 villages, where they helped families get the kids to school on time, take them home, and other practical things. In Hungary, if children don't go to school their parents can be jailed and the children put into social care. We've seen some crazy cases. “The positive thing at Ambedkar is that we've got non-Roma student from the village attracted by the quality of the teaching and attending computer classes, language courses and more. But these are difficult times. I have two big sons – one has applied for university, the other is still in high school – and I'm always afraid when they go out. Their father is Hungarian but they look Roma, and I am afraid they will get attacked.”

### **The European Social Fund**

*Most of the ESF funding in Hungary goes towards supporting growth and employment, and increasing the number of people in work, with particular attention on marginalised groups like the Roma.*