RAISE – WP 1
Practices and Narratives of Boundary-making in Everyday Life Institutional Settings
Country Report- Hungary

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1. Introduction

Our research is a part of a project entitled Recognition and Acknowledgment of Injustice to Strength Equality (RAISE). The larger project seeks to reduce structural racism and xenophobia by creating recognition among people and the institutions they operate in and study underlying boundary-making processes that reproduce structural racism.

The present report summarizes the most important findings of the ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Hungary in the framework of WP1 of the RAISE research. The research, entitled: Practices and narratives of boundary-making in everyday life institutional settings, aimed to uncover boundary-making processes in urban and rural communities and the consequences of these processes for individuals and the community as a whole. The significance of studying boundary-making processes and social constructions of group demarcations is that they largely contribute to the reproduction of structural racism and xenophobia. We presumed that parenting is an everyday practice that is situated at the intersection of private and institutional settings, and thus is a suitable context to study boundary-making processes. By gathering experiences of boundary-making from a diverse population around parenting encounters in the context of institutions (child health facilities and school for young children), it may be possible to uncover dynamics of belonging and exclusion as experienced by parents of young children as well as their roots and consequences.

To study the broader research question of the project, namely factors and processes of boundary making in communities, the research team focused on the interactions of parents in an institutional setting, namely kindergarten in the Hungarian case. Kindergarten in Hungary is a compulsory and free child-care institution for young children aged 3-6 (occasionally 7) years. There are catchment areas for each kindergarten run by municipalities, that are obliged to take all children in the given area. However, parents may opt for a kindergarten outside the catchment area including municipality, private or religious institutions. By situating the research in an everyday institutional setting, we hoped that both meso-level (institutional) and micro-level (individual) interactions and processes will become visible.

To elaborate on the main research question the research team formulated several more specific questions that guided our fieldwork and interviews:

- How do parents construct/maintain/ reinforce/experience boundaries as parents in encounters with other parents and with professionals?
- How do parents experience that they and/or their children are confronted with boundaries based on their ethnic/social/religious background or on other aspects?
- How do parents and professionals construct boundaries between various groups of parents and/or their children?
- How are these boundaries perceived, communicated, and materialized?
- What are strategies to challenge or to adopt to these boundaries?
- What intersectionalities can be observed in boundary making?
- What are the consequences of boundaries in local communities and for the parents, children?
- How do these boundaries play into structural and institutional discrimination?

The report is structured as follows: first we present the source of our data, aspects of site selections and other methodological challenges we encountered during the intensive fieldwork. In section three we present the analysis and results of our research in the three sites along a few key concepts to the RAISE WP1 research: construction, hierarchies and intersectionality of boundary making, paternalism and the significance of actual and symbolic whiteness for both civil and institutional actors. Then we turn our gaze towards experiences and mechanisms of personal, institutional, and structural discrimination and explain how discrimination based on race, ethnicity or social status operates in our fields. We introduce the concept of discrimination trauma, when describing how recurring experiences of discrimination affect young children and their parents. In the final section, we dedicate special attention to how gender, ethnicity, and social class intersect and incarcerate Roma women in a subordinate position in the private and institutional contexts. In the final section, we conclude with summing up the most important findings.

2. Research Context

Hungary, located in Central and Eastern Europe, is a medium-sized country of roughly 9.6 million people with a strong centralized political system. Since 2010, the governing Fidesz party has entrenched its power through constitutional and institutional reforms, fostering an illiberal political climate marked by nationalism and state paternalism. While Hungary is officially secular, Christianity, particularly Catholicism and Calvinism, plays a significant cultural and institutional role, especially in education and social services.

Socio-economic inequalities are pronounced, with stark divides between urban and rural areas. Budapest and parts of Western Hungary are relatively affluent, while the North-East and South struggle with poverty and limited access to quality public services.

The Roma minority, estimated at 8–10% of the population, faces systemic marginalization, especially in education, housing, and employment. The Hungarian education system reveals the mechanisms through which inequality is maintained. Free school choice combined with parental flight from ethnically mixed or poorer kindergartens results in de facto segregation, especially in rural and small-town contexts.

In recent years, public discourse around social inclusion has been heavily shaped by nationalist and anti-migrant rhetoric, which further complicates the position of marginalized communities. Although Hungary has a relatively low immigration rate compared to other EU countries, the political climate has emphasized ethnic homogeneity and cultural conformity. In this context, even long-established minorities such as the Roma face pressures to assimilate or remain symbolically and socially excluded. These narratives are often mirrored in local institutional settings, where the burden of adaptation is placed on minority families rather than institutions undergoing reform.

3. Methodology

3.1. Site selection

In Hungary, there is a significant difference between urban and rural conditions in terms of the social composition of the population. There are certain regions where rural settlements are characterized by a

high ratio of disadvantaged, socially deprived population, including also Roma [1] people. During the selection of research fields, we looked for sites where Roma people comprised a significant part of the population but did not form a majority. In agreement with colleagues contributing to WP1, we adapted the research design to the Hungarian context and decided to do the research in kindergartens managed by local municipalities. The reason for this decision was that in Hungary newborn centers do not exist (as in the Netherlands or Belgium), while primary schools are highly centralized and, based on colleagues' experiences, the centralized administration (under the direct control of the government) will not likely grant permission to researchers to approach schools or parents.

It is important to note that in Hungary there is a free school and kindergarten choice system, although, since 2015, children have been required to attend kindergarten from the age of 3. Municipal kindergartens have designated catchment areas from which they must admit children, but if there are available spots, they can accept children from outside their district. Church-run and private kindergartens, however, have more discretion in admissions. This freedom of choice allows for selection at the kindergarten level, leading to some kindergartens having a high concentration of disadvantaged children, often of Roma origin. Or alternatively, these kindergartens may become exclusive institutions for the local elite, where disadvantaged children are excluded.

The research design included a rural and an urban setting in Hungary. We selected a village in Northern Hungary (referred in the interviews as NH_rural) as one rural site of our research, where about 20 % of the population is Roma. While the school is almost completely ethnically segregated (as the locals call it, a 'gypsy school'), the kindergarten is mixed ethnically and socially, estimated with about half of the children of Roma heritage (an estimation by the mayor and the kindergarten principal). Furthermore, the village runs a so-called Sure Start program, serving children under 3 years of age and their parents. Both Roma and non-Roma parents attend the program. (more description of the Sure Start program in the next chapter)

First, we conducted a detailed interview with the mayor of the village which gave us an insight into the life and challenges of the village community, the characteristics of the population and the conditions that are relevant for the research. She helped us to get access to the kindergarten and the Sure Start program, where we were able to meet parents. We were able to make participant observations in the Sure Start program, where we participated in two morning sessions (3 hour/ session) and engaged in conversation with parents, with teachers, observed their interactions with each other and the children. We also made some observations in the dressing room of the kindergarten, since we were not allowed to take part in the daily routine of the kindergarten. Teachers thought it would disturb children to have other adult

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[1] In Central and Eastern Europe (CEE), the largest racialized minority is the Roma community, often referred to as "Gypsies," though this term is considered pejorative and outdated. Their identity is complex and situative, varying depending on context, and often shaped by a history of marginalization and discrimination. In Hungary, there is a tendency among the majority population to blur the lines between the Roma's low social status and their ethnic background, leading to widespread prejudice. This phenomenon can be understood through the lens of "racialization," where social inequalities and poverty are attributed to ethnic or racial characteristics rather than to structural or socio-economic factors. The Roma are often stereotyped as being inherently "different" or "inferior," which reinforces their marginalization and limits their access to education, employment, and social services. This has resulted in the Roma being stereotyped and facing severe socio-economic disadvantages, including unemployment, poor housing, and limited access to education and healthcare. Despite a long history in Hungary, the Roma continue to experience significant exclusion and discrimination. (Ladányi-Szelényi, 2006; Kovats, 2003; Kertesi, 2005)

people in the room they didn't know. But we were allowed to sit in the dressing room, where parents picked their children up, dressed them, engaged in conversation with other parents, with their children and with the kindergarten teachers. We spent 3 times an hour with such observation in the rural site but were not allowed in any of the urban site to enter.

Interviews were conducted with both Roma and non-Roma parents, all of them women. We managed to conduct interviews with kindergarten teachers, who were at the same time also parents of children living in the village, so they spoke not only as kindergarten teachers but also as parents.

Furthermore, following up on the information collected in the rural site, which revealed strong ethno-social segregation due to white / middle class flight at the level of primary school and since we were unable to get access to the local school, we approached another site in Northern Hungary (referred to in the interviews as NH_u), covering a typical case of ethnic segregation both in its kindergartens and schools through white flight. This site is a local urban center, with several schools and kindergartens also serving the population of neighbouring villages, where the quality of educational institutions and the level of ethno-social segregation is extreme. Non-Roma and lower-middle class Roma parents flee the settlement's educational institutions (kindergarten and school) and enroll their children in the closest urban kindergarten. As we will describe in the analysis, we see the process of white-middle-class flight from local institutions as very important in terms of institutional boundary-making, and therefore included some interviews, even if they come from another field. We interviewed four Roma parents, one non-Roma grandmother and one non-Roma kindergarten teacher from the urban church-run kindergarten to provide a better education for their children, at the cost of daily commuting from a segregated village.

The urban site of the research is a prosperous, agricultural town in central Hungary, the South Great Plain region (referred to in the interviews as SGP). The town has a significant Roma population, as well as labour migrants with Roma origins from Romania, Ukraine and, most recently, a few labour migrants from the Global South appeared in the local economy (agriculture). The town operates three kindergartens. We interviewed the principals of the three kindergartens and four parents. The parents we interviewed showed a very interesting case of boundary-making and situational ethnic identification. Locals, as well as kindergarten teachers, spoke of the parents as Romanian and Ukrainian. But the conversation later revealed that the children from Romania and Ukraine were in fact, Hungarian-speaking Roma. Even though the parents spoke Hungarian and had a Hungarian ethnic identity, they identified themselves as Romanians or Ukrainians in the local setting, and never mentioned about their Roma background. They represent a unique case of intersectionality of ethnicity, race, language and country of origin.

There was one setting where the research ultimately failed. We were planning to research a suburban district in Budapest, where Roma and non-Roma live in mixed communities. Although we had access to the district administration and the director of a kindergarten and were able to interview them, we were not able to approach the parents at all, since no one responded to our call for participation in the research. We visited playgrounds to observe interaction between children and between parents, but since we did not have children, very soon parents singled us out and expressed their discomfort about us being there.

For further details about the sites, see Appendix 1.

3.2. Data and methodology

In terms of number and composition of interviews the fieldwork data comes from:

- 4 stakeholder interviews in urban settings (plus 4 more stakeholder interviews were conducted in Budapest, but we could not get access to the parents in this district)
- 6 stakeholder interviews in rural setting
- 4 interviews with non-Roma and 4 with Roma parents in urban settings
- 4 interviews with non-Roma and 6 with Roma parents in rural setting.

We treated ethnicity based on the self-identification of the interviewees.

3.2.1. Interviewees

Roma parents in the rural area were aged between 20s to mid-30s. All of them had low levels of education, none of them had a high school diploma and most of them did not even complete vocational school. Several mothers had dropped out of school because of early pregnancy (at the age of 15-16). All our interviewees in the rural field lived in poverty, many of them worked in public employment schemes. Due to their low level of education, lack of professional experience and care duties for their children, they couldn't find jobs in the primary labour market. Factory jobs in the primary market were incompatible with care duties, since most of the jobs accessible for the low-educated required 12-hour shifts and a long commute from their village. Most of the fathers were compelled to take on jobs with such conditions: long shifts, long commute, and thus, mothers were left alone with child-care and home-duties. Non-Roma parents who lived in the rural field were older, in their mid-30ies and early 40ies, had at least a high school diploma and tended to belong to the lower-middle or middle class, locally.

Urban mothers who identify themselves as Romanians, but whom the kindergarten teachers identified as Roma, are women living in lower middle-class position, with low education levels. Since they did not identify as Roma in the interviews, they were classified as non-Roma, but boundary-making mechanisms are very similar to rural Roma women.

There were also many lessons to be learned from the interview's circumstances. As part of our interviewees were socially marginalized women with low levels of education, and most of them young women, the interview situation itself presented many challenges. Since some of the interviews were conducted through the municipality and others through the kindergarten, the very location of the interview (kindergarten or municipality) could be a source of stress for our interview-partners, despite all our effort to make it comfortable (tea, refreshing drinks, biscuits; introducing ourselves as peer mothers). The only exception was the NH urban site, where the interviews were organized by a colleague, who has long-term contacts (over a decade) and is trusted by local Roma. Here we met the interviewees in a café, in this sense it was the most relaxed interview setting. However, not only the location but also the social distance assumed by the interviewees was a challenge in terms of how much trust they would have in us. Furthermore, most young Roma women rarely have an opportunity in their lives to talk about their feelings (see the analytical chapter on this), thus not only the circumstances but also the interview situation and the fact being asked questions about their lives, their parenting practices might have been unusual for them. Perhaps one of the best indications to this is that almost no one spoke about their

ethnic identity at first, and only after a while, when they relaxed and started to trust us, did they speak about their ethnicity or relationship to Roma. With some interviewees we did not reach this point but everything they told us about their lives and conditions indicated that their environment considered them to be Roma.

The fieldwork was completed during the autumn and spring of 2023/24. Interviews were transcribed during March and April and the preliminary analysis started in mid-April.

3.2.2. Analytical strategy

Our method of working was as follows: we recorded the interviews and transcribed them in full, ensuring that all relevant content was preserved in its original wording. We then highlighted the most pertinent quotes and added commentary for each interview. Next, we created an Excel spreadsheet where we identified the most relevant concepts for the Hungarian situation based on the Core Concept paper, placing the corresponding parts of each interview into columns according to these core concepts. The selected concepts also became the subheadings of the report, which allowed us to analyze the interviews systematically in our final report.

In this paper we refer to our interviewees including four identificatory of the interviewee: the region, the type of site, ethnicity and social role. For example (NH_u_NR_p) stands for a non-roma parent in the urban site of North Hungary.

4. Empirical findings

4.1 Construction, hierarchy, intersectionality of identities and boundaries

A key concept in the RAISE project and for its ethnographic research component of workpackage 1 is boundary-making. The research in WP1 aimed to empirically analyze narratives of boundary-making in everyday life and in institutional settings of child-care (kindergarten in Hungary) and understand the complexities, hierarchies and ideas around boundary-making as they function in practice as well as their consequences for individuals and local communities.

Our fieldwork found evidence for boundary-making processes and acts in every aspect of everyday life and institutional practices in all of the three fields. We will try to structure the nature and the significance of these boundaries and show their hierarchies and intersectionality in this section.

4.1.1. Structural boundaries

The most evident and explicit institutional boundary constructed in all the sites we visited has been the ethno-racial segregation of students perceived as Roma in educational institutions. However, the type (level) of institution when segregation occurs depends on the context of educational supply and inter-ethnic tension in the given localities, as well as related municipal policies.

Although our fieldwork focused on kindergartens, institutions that most typically serve children of all backgrounds in a socially and ethnically integrated set-up in Hungary, the next level of the educational career of a child, primary school and even lower secondary school is more likely to segregate Roma and low social status children from the white middle-class. This is an institutional boundary that is difficult to

break, even for middle-class Roma families and requires agency, financial means, and mental distancing from the community. In all of the three sites we encountered ethno-social segregation but at different levels of education: in the NE urban setting as early as kindergarten, in the NE rural setting kindergarten was still mixed but the elementary school was already segregated, and in the SGP even primary schools were mixed and segregation occurred at the lower secondary level.

In the urban site of North-East Hungary ethno-social segregation on the institutional level occurred as soon as kindergarten (from the age of 3), where non-Roma parents and parents of middle-class Roma families commute to the closest urban settlement's religious kindergarten to opt-out from the local ghettoized kindergarten. Attending a kindergarten maintained by the church does not imply the actual religiosity of the family: it is a way (and the only way) to escape low-quality segregated education. This requires a significant investment on the side of parents since they have to commute with their little ones daily, in the morning and the evening for over an hour. Still, they think this is the only guarantee that their children don't get marginalized. *"We spend appr. 100 Eur / weekly on petrol and costs related to the daily commute. … It is very difficult, so that we need to spend that money, that we could well spend on the kids"* (NE_urban_RP1) When asking why they commit to such investment one parent formulates: "*Although I am Roma too, but not everyone is like me. They (referring to others in the town, where they live) are stuck in the stone age, and live that ugly archaic lifestyle. Their lack of hygiene, the way they behave, they have the lice… only a handful of normal kids attend that kindergarten. Most of them are backward (visszamaradott), or search what they can take away from the others, how can they beat up the other*". (NH_urban_R_P_1) It is obvious that the mother replicates the stereotypes about marginalized Roma, irrespective of the fact that she speaks about 3–6-year-old children. They can afford the daily commute because the fathers' working abroad, in Germany or Austria on constructions or factories, and thus their financial situation is significantly better than most Roma's in their town.

In the rural site in Northern Hungary, children attend kindergarten in mixed groups but as soon as they reach primary school an explicit process of ethno-racial segregation starts: Roma children stay in the village's primary school and non-Roma parents enrol their kids in the neighbouring town's catholic school. This is the strategy of the otherwise pro-integration, tolerant kindergarten teacher, too. This is a phenomenon, that we refer to as split-mind/split consciousness of institutional actors, that we will describe later in this paper (part 3.4). It is very obvious, that institutional setting matters a lot: if there is an institutional option for ethno-social segregation, middle-class and non-Roma parents go to great length to enrol their children into a school devoid from Roma and/or socially marginalized students at an early age.

In the other urban site in the South-Great Plain (SGP), the municipality is dedicated to maintaining an ethnic and social mix in its kindergartens. While teachers are dedicated to social inclusion from Roma and socially deprived families, they encounter initial distrust from white middle-class parents "*non-Roma parents are often afraid to enrol their children. I often meet with parental request to group the kid into a non-Roma group. I tell them that trust me, there is no such thing here (as segregated group) and trust me, there will be no problem…. And later, when they see it works, they accept it*" (SGP NRT_1) At the level of primary schools, however, some parents start to commute their children to the neighbouring town's private or catholic school, but many stay locally, at least for the first four years of elementary school.

4.1.2. Everyday practices

Ethnicity has surfaced as an important boundary in almost every interview in all of the fields. Roma – non-Roma divide is extremely strong, but also complex. As one of the researchers said "Boundaries drawn by non-Roma is a 10m high wall". Roma – non-Roma boundary is so strong because anti-Roma racism is generally accepted, and racist remarks, opinions, and behaviour is not even recognized as racist, not even by institutional actors, who are forerunners of social inclusion in the local context. We encountered, what the literature refers to as 'normalization of racism'. The significance of race, more specifically skin-color, tone of the skin was especially prevalent in the North-East urban field. All Roma parents formulated their distance from other Roma (and closeness to the white middle-class) by emphasizing that their kids' skin colour was light: "*How is my kid different from them [referring to non-Roma kids in the kindergarten]? My kid is equally nicely dressed, she is white, not black*. […] *but all the same she is white and one can't recognize her she is Gypsy by skin tone, it is visible since I have darker skin*" (NEurban_RP2). Another parent emphasizes the significance of skin-tone; her child's father has darker skin since he is Spanish and this is what the child has inherited: "*It is a bit unfortunate; she will be identified as Gypsy, because she inherited the darker tone of her (Spanish) father. He could have gone as a Gypsy for sure. They use to say that the Spanish have Gypsy roots, too*" (NEurban_RP_3_4_5)

However, while ethnic boundaries are clear and decisive, they are also complex and hierarchic. One of the complexities concerning ethnicity relates to the internal hierarchies within the ethnic group referred to as 'Roma'[2]. For example, in the North-East urban field the strongest boundary expressed by interviewed Roma parents was not between Roma and non-Roma, but between "dögös" (scavenger / foxy/trash) Gypsies and the 'normal ones', those adopting to society. Dögös (trash) is a complex concept widely used in this (and only in this) area of the country, referring to a mix of status, living conditions, way of life, and behavior(al norms). "*it is important to make a difference between the better types and the trash [of Gypsies]*" (NH_U_RP1) When trying to disentangle the meaning of the concept, we found that Roma people in poor, marginalized, segregated setting, living in substandard conditions are referred to as "dögös". However, the most important trait for the strong boundaries are behavioral:

"*Those "dögös" (trash) Gypsies are ugly. The are tricky, filthy, they steel and burgle, they inflict conflict and use drugs*" (NH_U_RP_2)

…Dögösök" are the lowest of the lowest. It is enough to enter that street. When 2-year-old kids are left alone on the street, that is trash parenting."

…and their behaviour in the shop! You just hear them come and go, and swear a lot. Their way of talking is just awful. ... and we use the bus to commute, and that type of behaviour is very evident and unpleasant on the bus, too" (NH_U_ P_rnr_3_4_5)

A similar boundary constructed combining ethnicity, status, living conditions, way of life and behaviour was expressed in other fields of our research. In the rural setting a locality component was included (in addition to behaviour, status and living conditions). A strong boundary has been drawn between 'our Gypsies' and "Gypsies in the other village" who were seen inferior expressed in terms of behaviour and

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[2] (not everyone, seen as Roma identifies the same way)

way of life rather than race. "*our Roma have always been a bit different, than those in the neighbouring villages. … despite their [referring to local Roma] low education, their behaviour, their style and habits that they inherited show that they live at higher standards than other Gypsies in the area.*" (NH_R_I_nr1) In this account, an intersectionality of locality, status, education, and ethnicity draws the symbolic and hierarchical boundary, between us, our Roma and Roma in other settlements. When inquiring how Roma in other settlements are she refers to asocial behaviour, mainly: "*they still keep the habit of gangs. The culture they bring include loud noise, loud music, and large parties*" (NH_R_I_nr1)

Finally, in our third field, the mid-sized town in the Great Plain area, yet again offers an example for the internal boundaries of Roma population drawn along a combination of different traits. Here we found a very complex scenery of ethnicity including country of birth, nationality, citizenship and mother tongue. As described in the introduction, in addition to a sizable locally traditional Roma population of the 'Gypsy town', immigrant Roma emerged from the Hungarian-speaking parts of Romania and the Ukraine. They are Hungarian speakers, with a mixed and a unique situational identity. They came to work in the town's agriculture and later small industry many years ago, some of the lived there for over 15 years. The boundary between these groups is even stronger than between Roma and non-Roma. Since our interviews covered only 'immigrant Roma of Romanian descent' we don't have sufficient information to map the complexity of these ethnic boundaries, but we can say for sure that they are very strong. In the effort to distance themselves from local marginalized Roma, immigrant Roma do not identify themselves as Roma or Gypsy, but rather as Romanian. This is done even though their mother tongue is Hungarian, they were identified as Hungarian speaking Roma/Gypsy in their locality of origin and also by the institutional actors in their present locality. They came to Hungary explicitly, because the disadvantages and discrimination they had to endure as Hungarian-speaking Roma in Romania. Yet, they make a great effort to distance themselves from local Roma, and when they do so, they explain it in terms of behaviour and criminality: "*there is a part of the town here.. where it is dangerous to go. Even the police prefers not to enter there. Here it is called the "Gypsytown". Local Gypsies live there*" (SGPurban parents 1-2) "*This is a segregated area in all aspects. Not even those, who live there, want to leave that part of the town. There was a time, when a few had the opportunity to move to houses in the center of the town, but they returned. And the Hungarians always point to that part of the town if anything negative happens; and they point to the Hungarians*" (SGP_U_nr_I1_2)

In sum, we can see, that while ethnicity is a strong boundary in all the settings, there are even stronger boundaries when ethnicity is combined with behaviour, life-style and segregated living conditions. In all three fields this combination was referred to differently, had different kinds of embeddedness, but everywhere Roma ethnicity combined with behaviour and life-style proved to multiplicate the existing ethnic boundaries.

4.1.3. Expression of boundaries

There is a long list of traits along which boundaries are expressed and explained in the accounts of our interviewees. Since our fieldwork was constructed in a way to reflect institutional settings, these boundary-making traits have been most typically formulated with reference to the kindergarten.

For institutional actors the most important trait for boundaries was whether parents adapted to the norms and regulations set by the kindergarten. These included punctuality (whether parents arrived by

the expected time, which is usually 8:30 am in the morning and 4:30 pm in the afternoon). This was a strong expectation and failure to meet it was translated as inadequate parenting and crossing norms. Even in cases, when the reason for arriving late were understood and acknowledged, lack of punctuality did not change the fact that a boundary needs to be respected by all means.

"I tell you an example: there was a parent who preferred to arrive around 9am; but we have to report the day's attendance to the kitchen by 8:30 am, and this is the time when I close the doors.

..but what if there are serious barriers to the parent to arrive early: for example the father works and she has 4 children to attend to. One needs to be at school by 8am, the other is ill, yet the other needs breast feeding and it is cold and raining outside etc.?

We are flexible, and learned over the years that if the roads are muddy and wet in the winter, and they didn't come, they will be here next day. We know these are the one-day absences." Still in the next sentence she reveals that adaptation to norms is key and the flexibility she mentioned is very limited „ *We need to report the lack of attendance to the family support services after 5 days of absence, after 10 days the guardianship authority (gyámhatóság) needs to be notified and after 20 days of absence (in a year) the family allowance will be revoked"* (NH_U_nr_I1)

Personal hygiene and clothing is another norm that was translated into a strong boundary by institutional actors. Children are expected to be dressed neat and clean, and preferably in cute clothes. Both teachers' and parents' accounts point to the symbolic significance of clothing and its boundary making role. 'Proper' clothing of children becomes understood as a sign of acceptance and subordination to 'white' middle class norms and expectations and as such becomes a visible boundary.

As one of the kindergarten teachers in the rural site of North Hungary tells about the boundary drawn between Roma in their own village and Roma in the neighbouring village is that parents take attention to the hygiene and dressing their kids: "*We have very neat children here. They are so pretty. And you cannot find anything to comment on their clothing or hygiene. There are of course a few exceptions, but the vast majority dresses really nice, in a cultured way. They are very pretty and the parents pay attention that their kids come nicely dressed to the kindergarten, so that they won't be different from the others"* (NH_R_nr_I2)

Similarly, in the South-Great Plain urban site, when identifying what makes the immigrant Ukrainian Gypsies different and not accepted by the community dressing of children is mentioned as a significant trait and visible boundary: "*Ukrainian children appeared in our kindergarten last year…. They were disordered (rendezetlen), dirty (tisztátlan) and persistent (követelőző)… you know, even among the Gypsies there are some, who are clean and neat and well dressed"* (SGP_teacher_3).

When asking teachers what being properly dressed entails, they list cleanness, lack of stains on clothing and specific clothing items, for example winter clothing including pricy items such as "winter coat, winter hat, anorak, winter boots" – even, when winters in Hungary are rather mild and teachers don't take kids outside when it is raining or cold, anyways. However, teachers finger-point at Roma children as an excuse to not take kids out of the building in bad weather (meaning cold or wet) inflicting a conflict between non-Roma middle class and Roma parents. In their account there is little reflection on the barriers of poor

parents with lack of financial means, poor housing conditions, and multiple kids to provide with good clothing unless it is a story about their paternalistic support or an act of solidarity by non-Roma parents: "*you know, there is always collection of secondhand clothes going on (ruhagyűjtés)….We receive clothes from the child support office that we give away to families in need. Also, in the kindergarten, it may be observed that there are parents, who appear time by time with a bag of clothing that their child has outgrown and give it to their classmates, or to us to give it to those in need*" (SGP_urban_kg_1_2)

Roma parents understand these expectation and their symbolic meaning very well and go to great lengths to meet them, even when their financial means are scarce. They understand that failure to dress their kid 'perfectly' is translated into becoming an outcast; they know that unless they don't meet the expectations of kindergarten teachers concerning dressing and keeping the personal hygiene of the 3-6 year-old kids will bring about them being judged and excluded. Roma parents internalize these expectations and when we asked to describe good and bad parenting they all mentioned dressing kids properly. Only one Roma parent, a 'migrant' Roma parent originally from Romania site explained "*I talked with mothers and they all mentioned that abiding to the local norms means to dress our kids properly, in nice cute clothes. Yes, but how should we do that if we don't have the money to buy nice, trendy clothing? We try to dress our kids properly and buy everything they need, but we only have one kid. What should others with multiple kids do?*" (SGP_RParent3)

As a kindergarten teacher accepts, meeting standards of the institution representing white middle-class norms, Roma parents often overdo clothing: "*I often say that some of our Roma kids are dressed even nicer and in more expensive clothing than some of the Hungarian ones*" (NH_rural_kg_principal)

Closely linked to clothing another boundary signifier is smell. There is extensive literature how smell serves as a boundary-maker in cross-cultural settings. (for example Synnott 1991) Smell in our sites is closely linked to extreme poverty and marginalization, sub-standard living conditions, with lack of certain utilities and thus lack of proper cleaning and washing capacities for clothes and heating with burning inappropriate (and thus smelly) stuff (including rubbish). "*They burn their clothing and you can smell that on their clothes: where they come from, what they heat with*" (NHrural teacher) A Roma parent tells 'they are smelly' when explaining the boundary between themselves and the 'trash' Gypsies in our Northeast Hungary urban site.

One of the teachers says that smell is such a strong boundary maker, that it works even among young children: „*Children don't recognize the difference in skin colour. But they recognize smelliness… They make friends with whomever they like to play. It may occur – though infrequent – among older children that if one of their mates has a strong smell due to neglect and poor hygiene, that they refuse to play with him/her. 'I won't play with you because you are smelly' – they would say. They are upfront and tell why they won't play with the other*" (SGP_U_nr_I1_2)

Alongside dress-code and personal hygiene, behavior was identified as the most important trait of intersectional and hierarchic boundaries. Non-Roma parents and institutional actors (teachers, principals, and the mayor) all emphasized that behavior is a signifier of who belongs. Behavior encompasses many things: proper speech devoid of vulgarity, being respectful with others (especially representatives of institutions), keeping the quiet of the neighbourhood, and not partying and disturbing others. Occasionally, it included reference to participation in the labour market, work and work ethics as well as

to lifestyles and way of life. In many of the encounters, we heard arguments about the boundaries built along lines of addiction (alcohol and drugs) and related aggression and criminality. These behavioral patterns obviously have an internal hierarchy starting from respectfulness through lifestyle to the extreme end of addiction and related criminality.

In the NE rural site, it has been emphasized that "*our Roma work. Women with little children work locally in the public works program, and those who are more mobile, with older kids and the men, all commute to work in factories or constructions.*" (NE_R_nr_I2) When identifying boundaries, they emphasize the difference between those who are engaged in the labour market, and those who live on welfare (typically Roma in the neighboring village). The later are also loud, and disrespectful, party all the time, do not follow the rules etc. "*but they are not thoughtful of their two Hungarian neighbors and create a civilized environment around their house […] The culture they bring … it is important for them to be noisy, the loud music, the large parties. Well, here this is still atypical, in our village they try to live their (social) lives and pursue events in a cultured form. Without noisy/messy parties (dáridó)*" (NE_R_nr_I1)

While in the NE rural setting the boundaries linked to behavior were rather mild (especially when considering locals), they were very harsh in the two urban settings. Boundaries here were drawn along lines of ethnicity, social strata, race (i.e. skin color) and housing segregation. Here our Roma parent interviewees described harsh instances of behavioral disruptive behavior including alcohol and substance addiction, related aggression, neglect of children and criminality.

Food and speech/ accent were mentioned as a boundary-maker only by 'immigrant Roma' in the South Great Plain. One of the mothers, originally from Romania explains how difficult it has been for her, that her child wouldn't eat anything in the kindergarten: "*My daughter didn't want to eat anything at the school, because we have a totally different way of cooking. She would often cry. And the teachers told me to toughen her up.*" (SGP_parent1_2) They also noted that the way they spoke, their accent made it evident that they come from Transylvania and that there was a hierarchy of dialects:

"*We are Romanians, we came from there and they accepted us even though we don't speak the same way as they do here.*

How do you speak in comparison to locals?

I am not sure. They speak nicer, they have a different accent. And then, there are things for which we use different words, too" (SGP_parent1_2)

4.2. Expectation to assimilate, whiteness and paternalism

We dedicate this section to explaining institutional actors' and white middle class's expectations towards Roma to assimilate to their norms and lifestyle and how these expectations lead to what we refer to as institutional paternalism.

The culture and norms of the white middle-class is understood by all actors, including teachers, Roma and non-Roma parents as the one to adapt to. None of the interviewees questioned the supremacy of these norms and the need to adapt to them, to assimilate. When non-Roma as well as Roma interviewees explained boundaries all of them referred to behavioural elements seen as white middle-class norms. When Roma parents explained internal boundaries (and related hierarchies) between themselves and the

'bad' or 'trash' Roma, they referred to the same norms. They argued that the reason for social exclusion was due to the lack of assimilating to these norms, while their own social exclusion was explained by being homogenized with the 'trash' Gypsies. It has not occurred to any of our interviewees that different cultures may co-exist and be respected. Somehow, the strong agreement of the superiority of white middle-class norms, resurfacing in parenting styles and the need to adapt to these by all members of the community seemed as a basic cohesive power of the community.

A direct consequence of this is the paternalistic attitude of kindergarten teachers when they talk about their role to teach parents.

"*As pedagogues, our duty is to be flexible and to be able to communicate with both parents from the elite and find a common tone with the very young, uneducated Roma parents. So, this is part of our profession, to find the tone. Evidently, at a very different level, one needs to talk with those completely differently, but there are some, who understand. But there are some, who need to be treated in a way that she understands that this is an institution where rules, norms, habits need to be followed, and it is not her role to define these. It is not that she can come and go as she pleases, be absent whenever she pleases. It was difficult to make some parents understand. […] We teach them. […] When a mother arrives, she needs to learn that there is a system here to adapt to. I keep telling my colleagues that 'We are the institution here. It is not us to adapt to the parents and families, it is their duty to adapt." (*NH_R_nr_I1)

A very similar attitude was explained by the kindergarten principal in the urban field in South Great Plain. However, she did not restrict such paternalism to low-educated Roma mothers, but also to the local elite. The focus for her was behaviour of parents and their demand to be included in institutional processes:

"*There is a great level of disrespect. We work on that a lot and strive for more respect, and there are instances when we need to call the parent to come for a meeting and talk the kindergarten house rules through. Even though these rules are shared and explained at the start of each year, but many are just not interested ….*

Is this typical for the Roma families, or more general?

More general. Families in good social/financial conditions are not exceptions. Sometimes they feel that they have the right to intervene in how we discipline/ treat their children here." (néha úgy érzik, hogy joguk volna beleszólni a gyerekeik nevelésébe) (SGP_U_nr_I3)

A kindergarten teacher of another institution in the same locality reveals pedagogical technique she uses with parents that are the same as she applies with children to the extent that it is difficult to disentangle when she speaks about her routine with children or with parents (it is the parents she talks about):

"*It is very difficult to find the way to parents. But it's worthwhile. I keep on telling my collagues that if we find something they do that we can praise, they will bring the starts from the sky. If I tell them a few good words and tell the criticism after, they will listen to me. While they are in the kindergarten, they still have this drive to adapt. […] We can manage them while still in kindergarten. The accept*." (SGP_U_nr_I_1-2)

Such white middle-class paternalism has a long tradition in Hungary, going back at least a century. It goes to great lengths, including boarding schools starting from the age of 6 (primary level) for socially disadvantaged children living in socially destitute poverty, whose parents are seen as unfit for parenting

because of their poverty. These institutions have been abolished several decades ago, but nostalgy to these are still vivid. The mayor of the rural settlement that served as our field explains about her big plan to transform part of the primary school's recently refurbished building (serving children aged 6-14) to such a function for children of Roma and socially destitute poverty in the area.

"*I think the road we defined is great.*

And what is that road?

It's a boarding school. Because half or even larger part of the students are Roma, and the disadvantages they struggle with in their families can be reduced if they wouldn't go home every day, to drop back to their family standards. Instead, there would be a boarding school, where they can stay for the night or the entire week, and could go home when they want to. They would stay with teachers, who take attention to them all the time, educate them continuously, and would take them to theatre and sport events during the weekends" (NH_rural_mayor)

Such nostalgy or demand to take over the function of raising children and educate them according to white middle class norms was not unique. A kindergarten teacher in the urban site in the South Great Plain gave account of similar thoughts:

"*There are lots of secluded farms in this neighbourhood. In the old times there was a dorm for children in kindergarten; children from these farms were collected and brought to the town accompanied by teachers; it as more orderly, clean, the children were tidier back then. This is not anymore the case*" (SGP_kgteacher 1-2.)

These nostalgia and plans remind us (the researchers) of the great assimilation projects in a number of countries (Native Indians in the US, Aboriginal in Australia, or Gypsies in Central Europe) that by taking children of certain native minorities, regarded as backwards or inferior hoped to achieve complete assimilation of the younger generation.

4.3. Parenting

Our interviews spoke to parenting styles and practices in many ways.

Firstly, we learnt a significant amount about institutional actors' expectations of good parenting. These accounts were rather similar across the three sites, most typically formulated along lines of adapting to institutional regulations (such as being on time in the morning and when picking up the child), and mainstream (white majority's) norms (related to personal hygiene and clothing). These have been described earlier in section 3.1. When talking about how Roma parents' parenting is different from non-Roma parents a lot of controversies have been mentioned. On the one hand, a recurring topos was that Roma parents do not discipline their children and allow them to do whatever they want to: this equally includes the extremes of spoiling the child and neglecting them.

"*It is typical of the Romanians (Roma in the context) that they treat their kids as little Gods -.. because s/he was told at home that s/he was the king.. and when arrived to the kindergarten s/he stood in the door of the room at the age of 6 and told me "Ms Ági , today is going to happen what I want!*" (SGP_kgt_1_2).

Less explicitly in the rural setting but similar accounts were brought up: "*it is typical of the Roma that they want to live according to their own rules and bring those in the kindergarten*". (NH_rural_kgt1)

The attitude to" allow everything to their child" is a frequent myth about Roma parents and teachers point out that if they have money (on pay-days) they buy them whatever they ask for, even if it is not healthy or rational, like candies, chocolates or expensive clothing. Such behaviour – conspicuous and luxury consumption patterns - is well described in the literature on destitute poverty (for example Kochuyt, 2004; Miller, 2001; van Kempen, 2004) still our interviewees never linked it to social conditions, but to some kind of Roma cultural traits.

The same behaviour, however, is translated to extreme negligence if the subjects of the conversation are Roma outside their school, or village: "*The problem is that these children irrespective of whether they come from Romanian or Ukrainian family is that they come from circumstances, where there are no rules, no hygiene etc.*" (SGP_U_nr_I3) Negligence of Roma parents go to great lengths when they talk about the Roma in the next village or ones that are not "their own' (meaning not in their institution or settlement): "*they don't care, they let the kids play on the street with cars; feed them only around paydays and then when all the money is spent on drugs and alcohol, or who knows what in just a few days the kids are hungry.*" (NH_R_nr_I3 about the next village)

It is interesting to recognize, however, that such harsh opinion is never about the Roma with whom they are in direct contact, probably because they, themselves feel responsible for the children in their institution. They may think that it could be translated as a sign of institutional incompetence if such occurrences would happen under their watch (see also section 4.2 on institutional paternalism).

The outcome of the same non-controlling parenting style however is translated into positive, when talking about Roma children in their kindergarten. The following quote, full of ethnic stereotypes, illustrates how the same parenting style of non- or limited controlling disapproved so much in other contexts becomes positive: "*Yet, I think Gypsy children are sweet and resourceful. There are very few of them who would need a diaper when starting kindergarten [at the age of 3]. They become potty-trained very soon and get on by themselves early. I love to listen to them, when they talk and open their eyes wide and explain me what the sure thing is. And when the music starts, they start dancing and the other parents [non-Roma] see this. They see that they are much more independent, resourceful compared to their own little helpless children, who needs to be dressed by the mother….*" (SGP_U_nr_I1_2)

When looking at parental accounts we see a very different story; that of extreme dedication and investment to make their children's life better. This is most explicit in the case of the North Hungarian urban setting, where all the parents we spoke to go to great lengths to afford their children to attend a school that offers a chance to exit ethno-racial segregation and the poverty cycle of extreme marginalization. The settlement where they live is socially deprived, ethnically segregated and its institutions are bellow all standards physically ("*the kindergarten is all right, just very mouldy, not very hygienic*" NH_U_r_P2) and in terms of pedagogic quality. Children, who attend those institutions have hardly any chance to continue their education beyond primary schooling. "*Only those children attend the local school, who cannot afford the daily commute*" (NH_U_r_nr_P3_4_5) resulting in extreme social and ethnic segregation. Conditions at the school are appalling, as described by one of the parents who couldn't

afford the daily commute "*The [former] head teacher is not worth mentioning, she was a total racist. She used to beat up the kids with a stick and dismissed. Only scrap teachers work there, who would not be accepted in other schools. For example an alcoholic teacher, who was formerly dismissed is now rehired. There are only two teachers there who are normal, worth a thing*" "*My daughter (12 years) can't even write her name properly. They don't teach her anything in that school*" (NH_U_r_P2)

These are the physical and human conditions from which parents try to save their children at all costs, including financial but also giving up their jobs to enable them the daily commute. This case is extreme in our fields, but not so much in the present Hungarian reality of extreme differences within the compulsory educational scenery.

The same accounts are found in the narratives of non-Roma parents, too, but less stressed, since their middle-class position makes it evident that they enrol their children in a "good school". But when they explain why to take the trouble of daily commute to a school in the neighbouring town, the most important argument is that they have better chances for a successful school career there.

Interestingly the 'good school', 'good kindergarten' in another settlement is a religious institution in both sites. Still, there is hardly any mention about this fact, or religion does not come up in the arguments about the choice of school.

Listening to Roma parents' accounts a different narrative comes into the light concerning the reason behind their parenting style seen as laissez-fair or non-controlling by the institutional actors. They give account of the strong drive to offer everything in their means to make their children's lives better than their own lives in which they experience(d) poverty, deprivation, and lack of essentials. Almost all Roma interviewees explained that their most important goal in life was to provide a better life and more opportunities to their children, than their own. "*I wish my child a better life. That s/he has everything s/he needs. A proper education. If only s/he will have a better life than we have*" (NH_U_rnr_P3_4_5) This drive includes reference to food (especially when parents have had, or are having regular experience of food deprivation), good schooling (especially if parents feel the lack of opportunities due to their own low education) and acceptance by the community (especially if parents have or had an experience of exclusion due to their ethnic or social background).

There is a certain area concerning which both Roma and non-Roma parents proved to be very controlling, though: friendships and social contacts. Irrespective of the settlement (field) all of them were very explicit about whom they don't want (or even let) their kids mingle with. For non-Roma parents and the few middle-class Roma parents in the NH urban as well as for the non-Roma parents in the rural field the very decision about educational institution was primarily driven by the composition of children, while Roma parents in socially marginalized position, without the means to choose institutions for their children try to control whom the child befriends with. These boundaries have been expressed differently, but the point was, especially when talking about older siblings, to prevent their children "getting into bad company".

A non-Roma parent formulated the boundaries being built along lines of ethnicity and race very explicitly:

"*I decided about the kindergarten based on its composition….the composition of children. You know, not only peasants live here [peasant = Hungarian], but the minority too [minority = Gypsies]. … in the past couple of years, the proportion in the local kindergarten was pretty good; the proportion between peasants and the minority. […]*

and why don't you enroll the older siblings in the local school?

Because the proportion is much worse there than in the kindergarten." (NH_T_nR_P6)

In all the fields we visited, while kindergartens are mixed and children are meeting and playing with each other, Roma and non-Roma children don't meet outside the kindergarten. They don't invite each other for birthday parties or play dates, at all. There is a very strong ethnic boundary in this respect. When non-Roma parents talk about friendships, they don't mind when their children mix in the kindergarten. But they do mind if this happens in schools: this is the reason for commute.

"*Yes, I mind the composition of children in the local school. That's the reason for me to enrol him in the school at S.. […]*

And why do you think parents take their children to the school in S?

Because they don't want their children to attend the school with those wild kids. When a small child, a Gypsy, starts growing and reaches the age of 12-13, they become very wild, aggressive. Well, non-Roma can be also wild, … most of the time it is up to the family, the parents." (NH_R_nr_P7)

Roma parents set the boundaries friendships elsewhere, since interethnic friendships are out of scope. They explained behavioural patterns, engagement with the school and family background as markers of acceptable relationships.

"*Should be able to behave well; should not swear, should be polite, should not drive my son into problem*" – lists a Roma mom the traits of an optimal friend for his 12-year-old son (NH_U_R_P1)

The following quote, from a Roma mother, living in poverty herself, in a marginalized, segregated setting illustrates how strong boundaries she draws to prevent her daughter to mingle with what she sees as dangerous friendships. These boundaries are drawn along intersecting lines of ethnicity, social marginalization, asocial behaviour and race: "*I would not allow her to make friends with anyone. There are dirty, crap Gypsies (dögösek, koszosak). I wouldn't let her spend time with those. […] even though I feel for them, it is not their [children] fault. I just don't want her to become like that. […] I feel for those kids, I do but told my daughter: 'don't even go near to them! Don't!' But I feel sorry for them, I even give them clothes or food sometimes. But I don't want my daughter to make friends with them because of their parents.*" (NH_U_r_P2)

Parents' accounts prove that ethnicity is a strong boundary for interpersonal relations beyond institutions, even at a very early age. Non-Roma parents and Roma parents striving for middle-class status organize their children's lives according to the company they perceive as suitable for their children and enrol them in a school and after-school activities in institutions that no Roma or a few middle-class Roma attend.

Roma parents in socially marginal positions try to control their children's friendship and interpersonal relations very strongly, in order to prevent them from what they see as a "bad company".

4.4 Discrimination

As the concept paper puts it, structural discrimination arising from social constructs defines group boundaries and becomes ingrained in laws, policies, and cultural norms. This form of discrimination becomes institutionalized, influencing various societal systems, including education, housing, health, and more, leading to persistent inequalities. It operates both through explicit institutional policies and through the actions of individuals, consciously or unconsciously reinforcing these group distinctions. The perspectives on discrimination to those of "voyeurs" and "walkers" in a city: voyeurs see uniformity from above, while walkers experience the nuanced realities, including hidden inequalities. To fully understand discrimination, both perspectives are necessary. The complexity of discrimination in super-diverse contexts means for example the cities with varied demographics where despite the diversity, there remains a significant segregation, with individual interactions often reflecting deeper societal divisions. This situation is illustrated by the misconception among school children that Europeans are predominantly white, ignoring the actual demographic diversity and migration trends within Europe.

One of the biggest lessons from the interviews with parents is that almost all of our interviewees generalized and distanced themselves from stories of discrimination. We only met one interviewee who reported specific instances of discrimination. This mother, from the NH urban site, repeatedly mentioned that her dark skin caused others to perceive her as a "Gypsy," but noted that her daughter was "luckily" seen as white until they saw her with her mother. This mother, who spoke most openly about her experiences of discrimination, was introduced to us by a colleague who is an anthropologist, which helped establish a trusting relationship from the start. This may partly explain why the other parents we met— who were connected to us through the kindergarten teachers or the mayor—found it more difficult to open up her experience of discrimination. As a result, we often had to 'read between the lines' to recognize that they, too, experienced discrimination.

Her daughter eventually stopped going to dance classes because of the discriminatory experiences.

"The dance classes were for gentlemanly children who are rich. My daughter is white, and she doesn't look like a Gypsy, but they can tell I am. The dance teacher told the children to treat her well, but the child sensed that they were not approaching her and not befriending her". (NH_urban_20231025_Roma mother_2)

In Hungary, where many Roma live in severe poverty, discussions about discrimination often blur the line between discrimination based on ethnicity and poverty. Our interpretation is that these aspects are inseparable in how Roma are perceived and the resulting discrimination. The NH urban mother herself alternated between attributing discrimination to her ethnicity or poverty, depending on the context. This aligns with the concept of intersectionality, where multiple factors contribute to an individual's experience of discrimination. She was the only interviewee who explicitly described discrimination as a negative experience, which led her to avoid leaving her daughter alone in places without other Roma

children. This concern was highlighted by her reluctance to send her daughter to a better school in a nearby town or to continue her dance lessons, fearing isolation and the trauma caused by discrimination.

"If I had the money, I would take my daughter to (the city) so she wouldn't have to go to the local Gypsy school. But I can't let my daughter go alone with strangers anymore, only if other Gypsy children from (the small town) go with her, because the discrimination at the dance school has really broken my daughter." (NH_urban_20231025_Roma mother_2)

Her example illustrates how experience(s) of discrimination traumatizes the child and the parent: having been bullied and excluded from the group for being Roma became a very strong limitation to further ambitions to fight the cycle of segregation and exclusion. Even though her dream is to become a professional dancer, and according to the teachers she is exceptionally talented, the daughter explicitly refused to go to a 'white' school or to an extracurricular activity (dancing class) where other children were from the white middle-class. She didn't want to expose herself to such humiliation again. However, staying in her present context – segregated school of substandard quality – also means that it is unlikely that she will graduate and have a career as a dancer. For the mother it is an equally traumatizing experience and dilemma: she either forces her daughter to pursue studies in an emotionally and psychologically traumatizing context with the hope that she fulfils her dream to become a dancer or accepts that this would be a too high price for a dancing career.

Regarding her experience with structural and personal discrimination, she was also unique in expressing outrage about discrimination in the labour market. While all Roma interviewees reported either being unemployed or stuck in precarious temporary jobs, she was the only one who felt exploited, saying, "*We are being worked to death for starvation wages, while the educated get paid well for doing nothing*."

When telling about working conditions, some parents framed the same experience not as discrimination, but as a point of pride, noting that the greenhouse where they work can reach temperatures of 70-80 degrees Celsius when they pick strawberries—work that the locals are unwilling to do. Their situation is complex because, although they came from Romania as guest workers, they also face discrimination as Hungarian-speaking Roma.

"*Working in agriculture is difficult. It's hard to work in a plastic tent all day when it's 70-80 degrees Celsius. You might get paid, but if you get sick or ill, you don't receive anything, and you even have to pay for the doctor*." (SGP_urban_20240228_parents_1_2)

She linked her lack of education, which "makes her feel bad," to structural discrimination. She worried about the quality of education for her daughter and was frustrated that Roma children often receive substandard schooling. She pointed out that a conscientious parent would utilize the free school choice to move their child out of a low-quality, segregated school, but she couldn't afford to do so due to financial constraints.

"*Let's not even talk about the headmaster—she is a blatant racist. She came from (a city) to the local school, because she beat the children with a spatula, so she was fired and now she is in our school (small town). This school, where my daughter goes, is now only taught by careless teachers. Some of them are*

alcoholics. There are two teachers who are normal. My daughter still can't spell her name properly and I don't really see my child learning anything." (NH_urban_20231025_Roma mother_2)

Hence some Roma interviewees did not mention discrimination at all, or if they did, they did not describe it as their own experience. For instance, when asked about the local school, known for its segregation, Roma parents reported hearing negative things about the school and even bad treatment from teachers, but they always referred to other children, not their own.

"*I notice that teachers look down on Roma, Roma are the bad and undemanding ones, Hungarians are the good, the beautiful and the smart ones. So, I always tell them that you should be good, and you should be one of the good children.*" (NH_rural_20231108_Roma parent_3)

Interestingly, while non-Roma parents and teachers had a very low opinion of the local school, Roma parents seemed satisfied and did not complain about the segregation or the quality. This is notable because, when asked whether it was better for Roma and non-Roma children to attend school together, Roma parents generally agreed that inclusion was preferable, even though they seemed resigned to the segregated schooling their children received.

Social positioning and social hierarchy are crucial concepts in understanding intergroup relations within social psychology. These ideas explain how individuals and groups interact based on their perceived or actual status within a social system (see: Dovidio, Gaertner, & Kawakami, 2002; Fiske, 2010; Jost & Banaji, 1994; Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006; Sidanius & Pratto, 1999). A recurring theme among Roma parents was the distinction they made between themselves and other Roma, whom they looked down upon as "lower" or less responsible. This did not seem to be seen as prejudice against non-Roma but rather as an internalized hierarchy among Roma themselves. In this way, all Roma interviewees reported feeling some form of discrimination, but their frustration was directed more towards other Roma rather than non-Roma.

There was an NH urban mother who told me that she had to take her son out of the small-town school because he was being excluded and bullied for being better off than the other Roma children. She said, "My older child started school there and attended for two years in first and second grade. He did well in school, but he was constantly bullied for it. He was also bullied because he wore nice clothes." (NH_urban_20231025_Roma mother_1)

A separate group of interviewees consisted of mothers from the SDP urban site who had moved from Romania to Hungary over a decade ago. Although these mothers did not identify as Roma, the kindergarten teachers regarded them as such. Even though their mother tongue is Hungarian, most people identify them as Romanians, and they identify themselves as Romanians. This is noteworthy because Hungarians in Romania often feel offended when they are perceived as Romanians rather than Hungarians. Although these mothers did not report experiencing direct discrimination, they face challenges from being grouped with other "Romanians" or guest workers. This categorization, along with their lack of acceptance by the local community over many years, suggests that they are experiencing discrimination, even if they do not openly express their feelings about it and seem resigned to the situation. This observation highlights a perceived hierarchy where being Romanian is considered a safer status than being identified as Roma.

Non-Roma institutional actors, many of whom were also parents, exhibited a sort of "split consciousness" during the interviews. While they did not report negative experiences with Roma children or parents in their professional roles as kindergarten teachers, directors, or mayors, they expressed reluctance to send their own children to schools with many Roma students. When asked why, they cited prejudiced beliefs about cultural differences, unruliness, and poor behavior, despite lacking personal experience of these issues. This contradiction is evident as they acknowledge the problems of a selective education system and express pride in educating Roma and non-Roma children together yet personally choose to avoid schools with high numbers of Roma students. They do not see this as contributing to educational segregation, instead viewing it as a way to ensure quality education for their own children.

4.5. Intersection of ethnicity, gender and social class: Roma mothers

Although the interview questions primarily focused on social group dynamics, particularly on how Roma and non-Roma interviewees perceive each other and how they experience their own and their children's positions in institutions, the interviews also revealed other important aspects of the situation of Roma mothers. Consequently, we decided to write a separate chapter on the situation of Roma mothers.

The intersection of traditional gender roles, racializaiton and poverty profoundly impacts the lives of Roma mothers, particularly in terms of family responsibilities and labor market opportunities. In Roma communities, traditional gender expectations assign women the primary responsibility for managing the household and caring for children. This burden is significantly magnified by poverty, with poorer families requiring even more intensive domestic labor from women. As a result, Roma mothers often find themselves fully occupied with family obligations, leaving little room for other activities. This is further amplified by processes of labour exploitation and dependency due to which many Roma men are forced to find work and income abroad and leave family and responsibilities related to children to women.

These traditional roles also contribute to early school leaving and the early onset of motherhood, which further restricts Roma women's opportunities. With limited education and the demands of raising children from a young age, Roma mothers face substantial barriers to entering the labor market. When they do seek employment, they are often confined to part-time work in the secondary labor market, such as "közfoglalkoztatás" (public works programs), where wages are low and job security is minimal and do not advance a job career.

However, immigrant Roma women present a notable exception to this pattern. For these women, survival often hinges on taking on precarious and physically demanding jobs. Their challenging economic circumstances compel them to prioritize work over starting a family until they achieve a certain level of existential stability. If they do have children, they may rely on support from extended family members either in their country of origin or in Hungary, allowing them to continue working. Thus, while traditional gender roles and poverty generally limit Roma women's labor market participation, the experiences of immigrant Roma women highlight the ways in which extreme economic necessity can alter these dynamics.

Almost without exception, all Roma mothers spoke of a kind of social isolation. It was striking that when asked who they keep in touch with or if they have friends, almost all of them said they do not, and that

they only keep in touch with their immediate or extended family. Many of the NH village mothers came to this village when they started a family and have no outside contacts at all—only family members. "Well, I'll be honest, I don't go out much; I'm with my sisters-in-law more. I don't have that kind of close friendship" (NH_rural_20231120_Roma parent_2).

In this respect, the SGP urban migrant worker mothers were an exception, as they often have closer relationships with other migrant workers from Romania. Some even live in the same neighborhood, so their network of relationships extends beyond just family members. What is striking about them is how little local contact they have. Over the decades, only the mother from Romania, who is not of Roma origin, has managed to make friends with people in the city. She arrived with her parents and attended secondary school here. Her boyfriend, who is not the father of her child, is also a local.

Another theme that came up almost without exception in the interviews was how much they regretted not finishing school. Almost all of them started to study a profession in secondary school after grade 8 (they went to a vocational school without earning a baccalaureate), but they had to drop out because of childbirth or poverty. "I met the children's father and left school." This is partly explained by the fact that girls growing up in more traditional Roma families are not allowed to date boys, and if they do have sexual relations with boys, let alone get pregnant, they have to move in with the boy and get married, if not formally, then informally.

It is interesting to note that if anything, the "fate of Roma women" elicited the most empathy from institutional actors. For example, the mayor of the NH village said that Roma women come to her asking for money for contraceptive pills because they no longer want to have children, and they ask her not to tell their husbands.

To take another example, the kindergarten teacher showed empathy towards a Roma mother who had never had the opportunity to have fun freely. One of the kindergarten teachers also told us, "There was one time when one of them looked good, and I said, 'Oh, you look like you could go to a disco.' 'Oh, I'd love to; I've never been before in my life,' she said. Although she's not such a young mom anymore, because I think she's closer to thirty than twenty. But then she's had children in a row." (NH_rural_20231120_kindergartner teacher_non roma parent_1)

This, of course, has not prevented institutional actors, as we have mentioned before, from viewing these same Roma mothers as irresponsible or unfit to parent in other contexts.

Although the Roma women in the interviews did not explicitly express that they live in isolation or lack external contacts outside their families, factors such as exclusion, societal prejudices, and the segregated educational institutions they often attend all contribute to making inclusion difficult. Therefore, we want to emphasize that it is not simply their own traditions that hinder inclusion, but rather the combined effect of many factors.

5. Conclusion and practical recommendations

The boundary-making as a core concept in the RAISE project focuses on how boundaries are constructed, maintained, and experienced in everyday life and in institutional settings like kindergartens in Hungary.

The research identifies various boundaries based on ethnicity, social status, behavior, and institutional norms, highlighting their complexity, hierarchy, and intersectionality.

The most visible boundary across all research sites is the ethno-racial segregation of Roma children in educational settings. This segregation manifests differently depending on local educational structures and inter-ethnic tensions. Even though kindergartens are generally mixed, as children progress to primary and secondary schools, segregation becomes more pronounced, especially for Roma and lower-status children. This is evident across different sites, with some parents going to great lengths (e.g., commuting to distant kindergartens) to avoid sending their children to local kindergartens.

Ethnic identity, especially the Roma-non-Roma divide, is a significant boundary. Anti-Roma racism is normalized and often unrecognized, even by those, for example the teachers, promoting social inclusion. Within the Roma community, internal hierarchies further complicate boundaries, with distinctions made based on behavior, living conditions, and skin tone. Boundaries are drawn between "acceptable" Roma who conform to societal norms and those seen as "trash" due to their behavior or living conditions. These internal divisions are strong and often surpass the divide between Roma and non-Roma.

Boundaries are expressed through expectations of conformity to middle-class norms, such as punctuality, personal hygiene, and appropriate clothing in kindergartens. Failure to meet these norms leads to stigmatization and exclusion. Behavior, for example, is a crucial boundary marker, with non-Roma and institutional actors expecting proper conduct, respect for others, and avoidance of disruptive behavior. This includes participating in the labor market and maintaining a quiet, orderly lifestyle. Smell, food preferences, and speech accents are also mentioned as markers of difference, particularly for Roma immigrants who struggle to fit into local norms.

The expectation for Roma communities to assimilate to the norms and lifestyle of the white middle class, a process that leads to what we call "institutional paternalism." The white middle-class culture is universally recognized, even by Roma, as the standard to which everyone must conform. Roma parents themselves internalize these norms, creating internal hierarchies where those who fail to assimilate are deemed "trash."

Kindergarten teachers display a paternalistic attitude, believing it's their role to teach parents—especially Roma parents—how to adhere to institutional norms. This attitude extends even to non-Roma parents, indicating a broader issue of paternalism within the education system. Teachers often approach parents in the same way they manage children, using praise followed by criticism to enforce compliance with these norms. There is historical and ongoing nostalgia for boarding schools in Hungary, where disadvantaged children, particularly Roma, were isolated from their families to be raised according to white middle-class standards. This reflects broader assimilation projects seen globally, where children from marginalized groups were removed from their communities in an effort to integrate them into dominant cultures.

Regarding the differing perceptions and realities of parenting styles between Roma and non-Roma communities, the interviews highlighted significant tensions and contradictions.

Institutional actors, such as teachers, have clear expectations of "good parenting," often aligned with white middle-class norms (e.g., punctuality, hygiene). Roma parenting is often stereotyped as either overly permissive (spoiling children) or negligent (failing to discipline or provide). These perceptions are not typically linked to the socioeconomic conditions of Roma families but are instead attributed to cultural traits. But interestingly, while Roma parenting is often criticized, there are instances where the same behaviors are praised. For example, Roma children are seen as more independent and resourceful in kindergarten, a trait positively compared to the perceived helplessness of non-Roma children.

In comparison, the Roma parents, particularly those in marginalized conditions, express a strong desire to provide better lives for their children, emphasizing the importance of education, food, and opportunities. Despite stereotypes, they are deeply invested in their children's future and actively try to navigate systemic barriers, including poor schooling conditions.

Regarding the control over socialization, both Roma and non-Roma parents are highly concerned about their children's social circles, often drawing strict boundaries to prevent undesirable influences. Non-Roma parents, particularly those in better socioeconomic positions, often choose schools based on the ethnic composition of students to avoid their children mingling with Roma. Meanwhile, Roma parents, even those in poverty, are cautious about their children befriending others from more marginalized or socially deviant backgrounds. Furthermore, ethnic and social boundaries are strong, with little interaction between Roma and non-Roma children outside institutional settings like kindergartens. These divisions are maintained by both communities, reflecting broader societal segregation.

The structural discrimination, rooted in social constructs and institutionalized through laws, policies, and cultural norms, perpetuates inequalities in society. This form of discrimination affects various systems like education, housing, and health, often operating through both institutional policies and individual actions, sometimes consciously but often unconsciously. Most interviewees distanced themselves from or generalized about discrimination, with only one mother from an urban area explicitly discussing her experiences. She spoke of being perceived as "Gypsy" due to her dark skin, which led to discriminatory treatment in contexts like her daughter's dance class. This mother also linked her experiences of discrimination to both ethnicity and poverty, illustrating how these factors intersect. Her experiences of discrimination influenced her decisions, such as not allowing her daughter to attend a better school for fear of further isolation. She also expressed frustration about labor market exploitation, a view not shared by others, who instead expressed pride in enduring harsh working conditions.

The mothers' narrative reflects the concept of intersectionality, where multiple factors like ethnicity, poverty, and education shape discrimination. Their experiences highlighted the blurred lines between ethnic and socioeconomic discrimination. Some Roma parents differentiated themselves from other Roma, displaying an internalized social hierarchy rather than focusing on discrimination from non-Roma. One mother even withdrew her son from school due to bullying by other Roma children for being better off, showing how discrimination can occur within marginalized communities.

Regarding the perceptions of non-Roma interviewees, for example the kindergarten teachers and mayors, showed a split-mind/split-consciousness. While they did not report negative experiences with Roma children in professional settings, they were reluctant to send their own children to schools with many

Roma students, citing unfounded fears about cultural differences and behavior. This reveals an underlying prejudice that contributes to educational segregation, despite their professed pride in inclusive education.

Finally, the Hungarian speaking mothers coming from Romania, who did not identify themselves as Roma, experience subtle discrimination due to being perceived as part of a stigmatized group. Despite their identification as Romanians, they face challenges similar to those of Roma, highlighting a perceived hierarchy where being Romanian is seen as a safer status than being identified as Roma.

However, the interviews primarily explored social group dynamics, but they also revealed significant insights into the lives of these women. Roma mothers are heavily influenced by traditional gender expectations, which assign them the primary responsibility for household management and childcare. These duties are intensified by poverty, often leaving them with little time for any other activity. These roles contribute to early school leaving and early motherhood, limiting Roma women's educational and employment opportunities. When they do work, they are often restricted to low-paying, insecure jobs in the secondary labor market. However, it is important to emphasize, that the isolation of Roma women is not solely due to their own traditions but is influenced by multiple factors, including societal exclusion, prejudices, and segregated educational institutions. These combined factors make social inclusion challenging for them.

Unlike local Roma women, immigrant Roma women are often compelled by economic necessity to prioritize work over family, delaying motherhood until they achieve some level of stability. They may rely on extended family support to continue working if they do have children.

Many Roma mothers reported experiencing social isolation, with most maintaining contact only with immediate or extended family. This isolation is particularly pronounced among mothers who moved to rural areas to start families. In contrast, migrant Roma women, particularly those from Romania, often have closer relationships with other migrant workers, although they still have limited local contacts.

A common theme among Roma mothers is regret over not finishing school, often due to early pregnancy or poverty. Traditional Roma family expectations, such as moving in with a partner after becoming pregnant, contribute to early school leaving.

Institutional actors, such as mayors and kindergarten teachers, showed empathy towards Roma women, especially regarding their lack of freedom and opportunities. However, this empathy often coexisted with judgments of these women as irresponsible or unfit parents in other contexts.

Finally, we provide some practical recommendations based on the insights of this study:

1. Professionals (e.g., teachers) should be trained to recognize how seemingly neutral institutional norms, such as punctuality, hygiene, and clothing, function as boundary markers that exclude marginalized families, especially Roma. Awareness-raising materials should encourage self-reflection on how institutional expectations align with white middle-class norms and how these expectations may unintentionally stigmatize families living in poverty. Teachers and social workers should be supported in shifting from a cultural deficit view of Roma families to a more empathetic, contextual understanding of their lived realities.

2. The report highlights the importance of interpersonal trust between institutional actors and Roma parents, something often missing or fragile. Trust-building practices should include informal, non-judgmental spaces for dialogue, such as parent cafés, storytelling workshops, or participatory community events.

3. One of the most striking findings is the extent to which anti-Roma stereotypes are internalized. Materials (articles, podcasts, videos, education trainings, etc.) should include counter-narratives, for example, short audio clips or written testimonies from Roma mothers who challenge the stigmas they face, emphasizing their care work, aspirations, and resilience. By platforming these voices, these materials can humanize Roma parenting and disrupt dominant deficit narratives.

4. A core insight of the research is that most interventions target individual adaptation (e.g., teaching parents how to behave "properly") rather than questioning institutional practices. Practical recommendations should therefore include tools and checklists for institutional self-assessment: Are rules flexible enough to accommodate diverse family circumstances? Is there space for multiple cultural norms around parenting? Institutions should be encouraged to co-design routines and policies with parents, especially those from marginalized backgrounds, thus shifting the burden of adaptation from families to systems.

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7. Appendix 1

NH rural

NH is a rural village in North Hungary with a population of 1,489 in 2024, which is steadily decreasing. In the 2022 census, 95.9% identified as Hungarian and 8.8% as Gypsy[3], with some overlap due to dual identities. The region has struggled since the regime change, failing to keep up with national or European standards, particularly in Nógrád County, which is now the most underdeveloped in Hungary. Despite its proximity to Central Hungary, the village has seen significant decline, including a shrinking population. The village has one kindergarten and one school.

NH urban

Both municipalities are in the same district, with (the city) serving as the district center in Borsod-Abaúj-Zemplén county, historically centered on heavy industry. After the regime change, the county struggled with the collapse of industry and rising unemployment, leading to a population decline above the national average, especially among young, educated residents. The county now has a high proportion of disadvantaged people, particularly within the Roma community.

(The city) currently has 24,371 residents, a 16% decrease since 2011. The 0-14 age group makes up 12% of the population. The city has six municipally run kindergartens and two church-run ones. The Reformed Church kindergarten has the highest proportion of disadvantaged children.

In our case, families from nearby (the small city) prefer to send their children to an urban kindergarten in (the city), seen as higher quality. This has led to segregation, with (the small town's) kindergarten now attended only by severely disadvantaged children, while the urban kindergarten they attend also has the highest proportion of disadvantaged children in the city.

SGP urban

(The town) is geographically and logistically well-positioned, just 16 km from the county seat and 70 km from the capital, connected by a motorway that drives its economy. The town, with 11,000 inhabitants, has grown by 5.6% since 2011, and 16.8% of the population is under 14. The Roma population, including Romanians who arrived from the 2010s, is estimated at 10%. In 2022, 86.2% identified as Hungarian, 3.6% as Gypsy, 0.7% as Romanian, with small percentages identifying as other nationalities.

The town's economy, once centered on agriculture, is now diversified with stable heavy and light industries, food production, and construction companies. While some farms on the outskirts are still active, many have shifted to tourism, though equestrian tourism has declined.

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[3] It is important to note that the number of Roma reported in the census is consistently much lower than research estimates. This discrepancy is primarily due to their social status, as many people in prejudiced Hungarian society are reluctant to openly embrace their Roma identity. (See: Messing, V. (2014). Methodological puzzles of surveying Roma/Gypsy populations. Ethnicities, 14(6), 811-829. https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796814542180)

Housing segregation has worsened, particularly in "Gypsy Town," an area established alongside the municipality but now isolated due to environmental degradation and overcrowding. About 9-10% of the town's population, mostly Roma, lives here. Segregation has increased over time.

Romanian Hungarian-speaking Roma and non-Roma have settled in the town since the 1990s, initially for seasonal agricultural work but later buying homes. Recently, migrant workers of Roma origin from Ukraine, who speak Hungarian, have also arrived, though little is documented about their situation.

The town has one kindergarten and one school, with the kindergarten operating across three sites without ethnic segregation. Officially, few children fall into the severely disadvantaged (HHH) category. The relatively favorable educational situation is partly due to the absence of religious schools, which could otherwise promote selectivity and segregation. The town also benefits from employment opportunities and the lack of extreme inequalities, which help maintain a balanced educational environment.