

7. CASE STUDY: THE EDUCATIONAL SITUATION IN THE REVÚCA DISTRICT



As our quantitative, data-driven analysis has shown so far, statistics can illuminate important processes, yet their analytical usefulness remains limited for certain topics. In many cases, interpretation, and especially identifying causal correlations, is difficult without qualitative methods and field experience. We sought to address this gap in part by examining Hungarian public education in Revúca District. We are of course aware that, in terms of Hungarian public education in Slovakia as a whole, the findings presented here are not representative. Even so, the results of this qualitative research complement the nationwide data analysis

effectively and help clarify the mechanisms behind certain phenomena.

Our fieldwork⁵³ covered the Hungarian-inhabited settlements of Revúca District. By “Hungarian-inhabited,” we mean settlements in which, according to the census, the share of Hungarian native speakers reaches at least 10% of the local population. On the basis of this criterion, the study included the town of Tornaľa as well as 15 additional municipalities. In what follows, we refer to this study area as the Tornaľa micro-region, since it essentially consists of Tornaľa and its catchment

area within the district. The research was carried out in spring 2025, and its primary aim was to track ethnic, linguistic, and demographic processes among Hungarians, including questions related to schooling. We complemented the questionnaire survey with expert interviews conducted in Hungarian-medium educational institutions in the district.⁵⁴

The Hungarian-medium educational network in Revúca District is relatively stable. No educational site has closed in the past 15 years, although Tornaľa has experienced institutional restructuring: A new

kindergarten run by the Reformed (Calvinist) Church was established, and the Hungarian-medium grammar school was closed, though the local vocational school still offers Hungarian-language programs.

Hungarian-medium kindergartens operate in five municipalities through six institutions (in Držkovce, Gemer, Gemerská Ves, Otročok, and two kindergartens in Tornaľa). Hungarian-medium primary education is also available in five municipalities: Držkovce and Hucín host primary schools with Grades 1–4, while Gemer, Gemerská Ves and Tornaľa operate fully organized primary schools with Grades 1–9. Among these, Hucín and Gemerská Ves have Hungarian sections within a larger institution, whereas in the other three locations the Hungarian-medium primary school is an independent institution. At the secondary level, the only school in the district that also opens Hungarian-medium classes is located in Tornaľa (the Tornaľa Vocational Secondary School).

From the perspective of ethnic socialization, the kindergarten and primary school levels are of particular importance. In the Hungarian-medium kindergartens, the number of children enrolled has increased by 60% over the past 15 years, while enrollment in Hungarian-medium primary schools has stagnated. This also suggests that the position of Hungarian institutions in

Figure 12: Ethnic composition of children attending Hungarian-medium kindergartens in Revúca District, 2010–2024

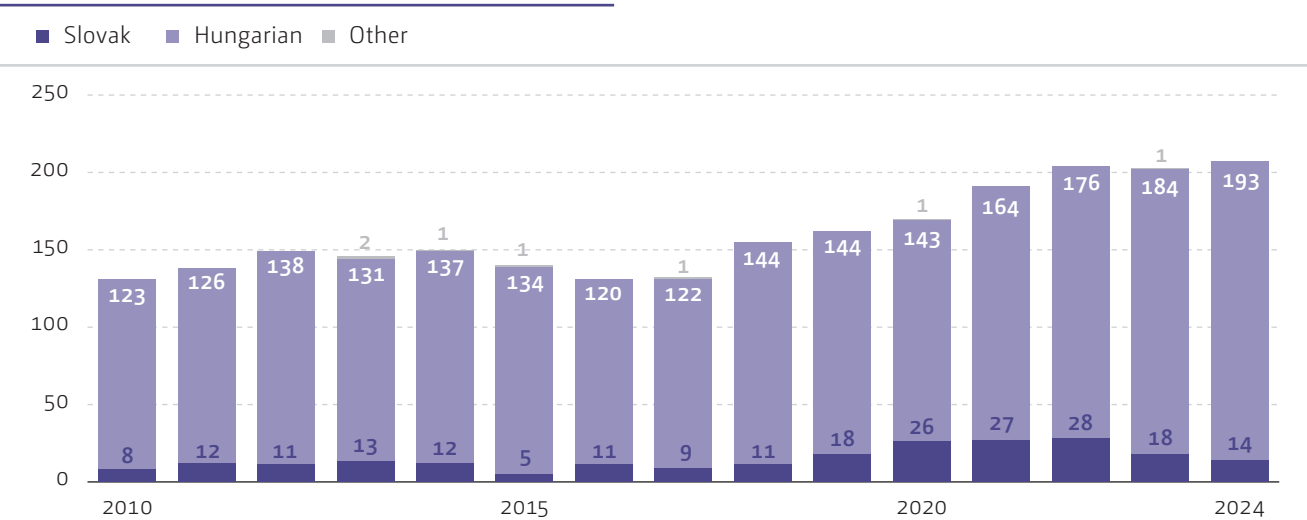
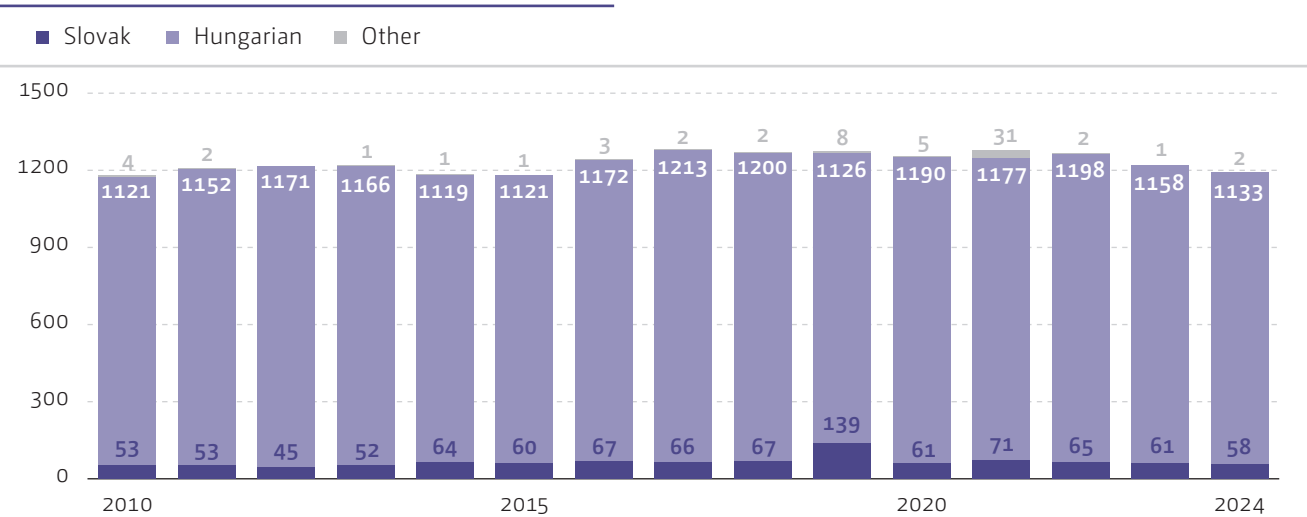


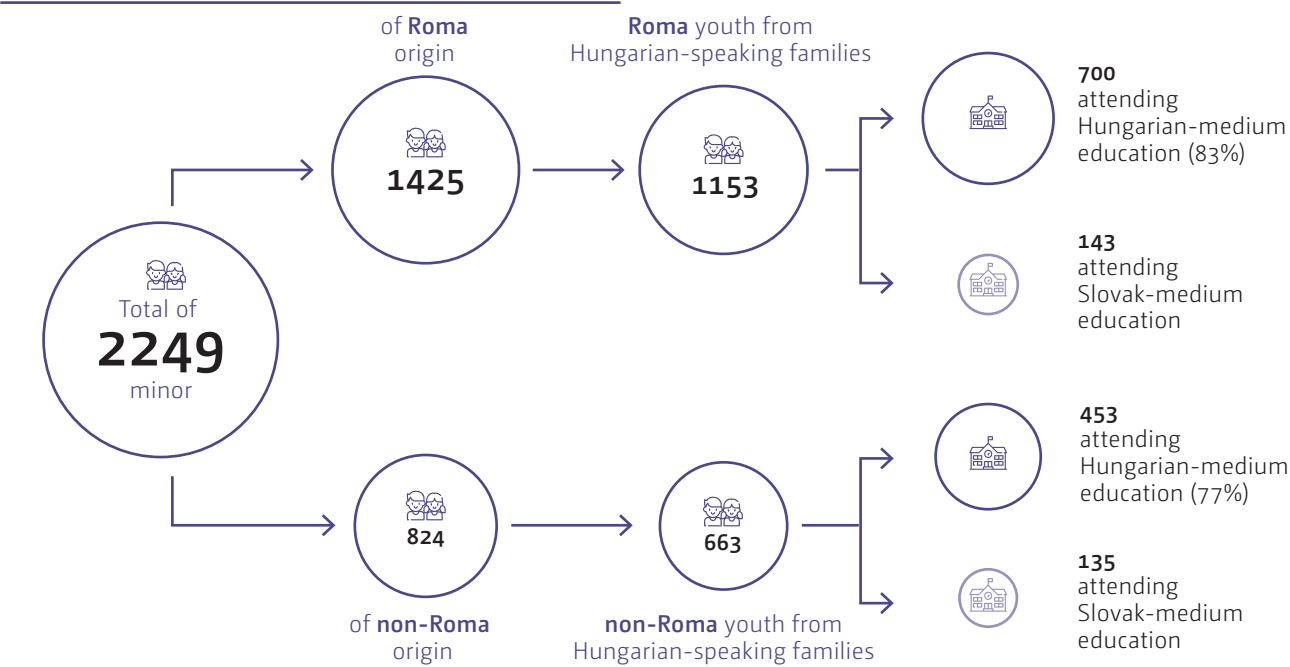
Figure 13: Ethnic composition of students attending Hungarian-medium primary schools in Revúca District, 2010–2024



the district is relatively stable: the nationwide decline in the number of children has affected these institutions only moderately. Based on our findings, the underlying driver appears to be above all the growing number of Roma children.

Official data, however (both nationally and also in this region), do not help to clarify this issue. School statistics indicate that there are practically no children of Roma ethnicity in the district. As a result, the figures provide a picture on ethnic distribution of children only in Hungarian–Slovak terms. In the case of kindergartens, for example, the data show that in the late 2010s, when the number of kindergarten children began to rise dynamically (a trend to which the compulsory final preschool year introduced from 2021 also contributed), the share of ethnic Slovak children began to increase in Hungarian-medium kindergartens. More recently, however, more than 90% of children are again registered as ethnic Hungarian (Figure 12). The main explanation for the relatively high share registered as Slovak is that among the villages in the study area only Licince and Hucín have Slovak-medium kindergartens. In the other villages, local provision exists only in Hungarian, although in practice this often takes place in linguistically mixed ways. To a lesser extent, another strategy also appears, typically linked to mixed families: parents enroll children in Hungarian-medium

Figure 14: Educational pathways of minors (under 18) in the Tornal'a micro-region, 2025



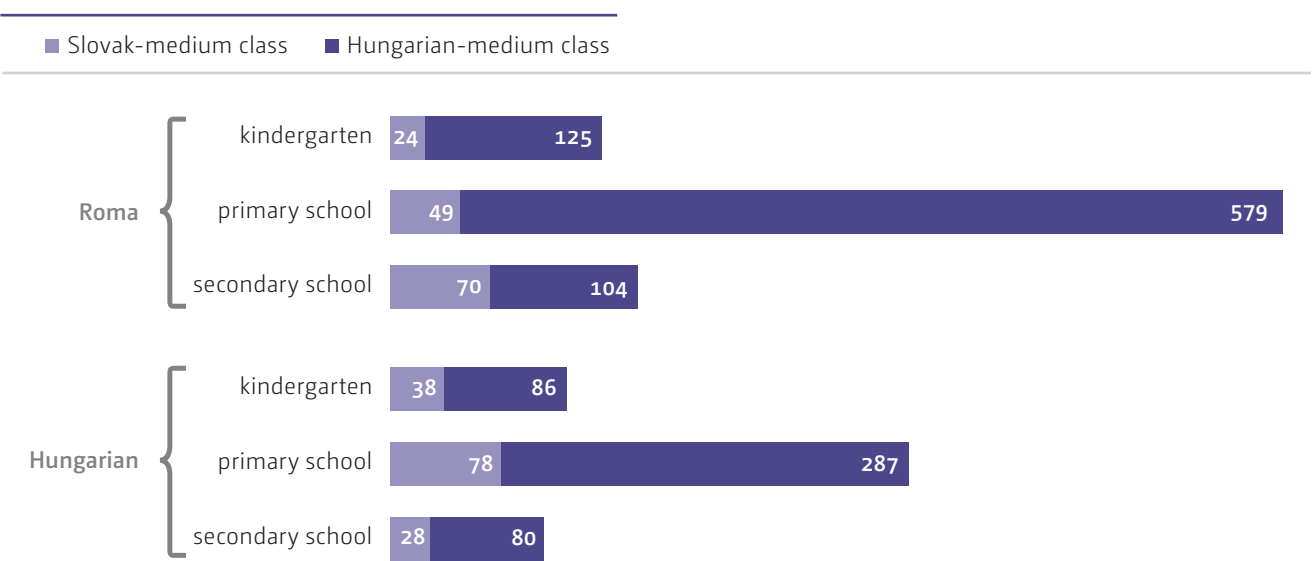
kindergarten, but when it comes to primary school, choices tend to gravitate toward the state language as the language of instruction.⁵⁵

A similar pattern can be observed in Hungarian-medium primary schools as well, although here the share of students of Hungarian nationality is even higher, at around 95% (Figure 13), and, with the exception of a single year, no major changes can be identified over time. Official data further indicate that in Revúca District approximately 10% of Hungarian children

attend Slovak-medium schools. The figures therefore suggest that the situation in the district is more favorable than the national average. It is nonetheless clear that Roma children do not appear as a distinct category in primary-school statistics either.

Our data collection aims to provide a more detailed and nuanced picture. According to the fieldwork data, in 2025 a total of 2,249 minors (under age 18) lived in the Hungarian-inhabited settlements of the district. Of these, 272 had not yet reached kindergarten age, 48

Figure 15: Distribution of children from native Hungarian families in the Torna'a micro-region by ethnic group, by educational level and by language of instruction, 2025



were no longer in education, and in 133 cases the language of schooling was unknown. Among those under 18, the share of Roma youth was 63%, compared to 37% non-Roma. A total of 1,822 minors came from families in which Hungarian is the primary language used; among them, 64% were Roma and 36% were non-Roma. Consistent with the high number of Roma children who do not speak Slovak, Hungarian-native Roma children are more likely to choose Hungarian-medium public education (83%) than non-Roma Hungarian children (77%) (Figure 14).

The figures make it clear that in the Torna'a micro-region the Hungarian educational system is attended mostly by students of Roma origin. For this reason, it is essential to analyze the data for Hungarian-native children by distinguishing between Roma and non-Roma background. Figure 15 shows the distribution emerging from our survey between Roma and non-Roma children by education level and language. It is visible that while 58% of kindergarten children in Hungarian groups are Roma,⁵⁶ the corresponding share at Hungarian primary schools is 63%.⁵⁷ This difference does not arise

because the proportion of non-Roma Hungarians is higher among kindergarten-age children than among school-age children, but because Roma families typically enroll children in kindergarten only in the final year before primary-school entry (i.e., in line with the legal minimum requirement), and not earlier.

Taking a closer look at the kindergarten level, it is useful to compare the official data with our field data. According to official statistics, in the 2024/25 school year, 56 out of 247 ethnic Hungarian kindergarten (23%) attended Slovak-language kindergarten groups, and in total only one child was registered as Roma (Table 11).⁵⁸ This is, interestingly, largely consistent with our own survey results shown in the previous figure: 22% of children from families using Hungarian as the primary home language attended Slovak kindergarten, although official data are reported by ethnic affiliation and by institution location, whereas our survey is based on family language use and children's place of residence.

The picture is further nuanced by information obtained in interviews with institutional leaders. For example, according to official data, of the 33 children in the Hungarian kindergarten in Gemerská Ves, 28 are registered as Hungarian, even though these are mostly

Table 11: Ethnic composition of kindergarten groups in the Tornaľa micro-region by language of instruction, 2024/25

Municipality	Language of instruction	Total number of childrenw	Ethnic affiliation			
			Hungarian	Slovak	Roma	Other
Tornaľa	HU	75	74	0	0	1
Tornaľa	SK	116	54	59	1	2
Tornaľa	HU	38	33	4	0	1
Gemerská Ves	HU	33	28	5	0	0
Gemer	HU	24	22	2	0	0
Držkovce	HU	17	17	0	0	0
Otročok	HU	20	17	3	0	0
Hucín	SK	16	0	16	0	0
Licince	SK	21	0	21	0	0
<i>Total</i>		360	245	110	1	4

Roma children. For the 2025/26 school year, of 32 children enrolling there, 30 are of Roma origin, and one each are non-Roma Hungarian and Slovak. Some kindergartens have also faced difficulties since kindergarten attendance became compulsory from age five, which has created capacity problems and complicated day-to-day operation. Kindergartens often operate at full capacity and are frequently unable to accommodate commuting children. Using the Gemerská Ves kindergarten again as an example, of last year's 20 graduating

children, 14 enrolled at age five for the mandatory final year. Another major issue concerns segregation. In the mixed Slovak–Hungarian kindergarten in Tornaľa, it is clearly visible that the Slovak-medium groups (at least at the central site) have no Roma children, whereas in the Hungarian groups Roma children already form the majority. In part due to demographic change, i.e. the rapid increase in the number and share of Roma children, segregation within Hungarian groups has weakened, since previously it was more common to have

separate Roma and non-Roma groups. Some non-Roma families, however, respond to this changed situation by switching institutions or the language of instruction (or both). Institutional change does not necessarily involve language switch: in Tornaľa this dynamic took the form of opening a new institution, the Reformed kindergarten, which has no Roma children. Another segregation strategy among Hungarian-speaking non-Roma families is to enroll children in Slovak-medium groups. Among children attending the Slovak groups at the central site of the mixed kindergarten in Tornaľa, 41% are Hungarian. Among those progressing to school from Slovak-medium groups, however, only 11% continue their studies in Hungarian-medium primary education: an outcome that clearly channels Hungarian children toward an assimilation trajectory. It is important to note that enrolling Hungarian-speaking non-Roma children in Slovak kindergarten is not driven only by segregation motives: parents often cite the goal of improving their children's Slovak-language proficiency.⁵⁹

From the perspective of transmitting Hungarian ethnic identity, the primary-school level is of particular importance. According to official data for the 2024/25 school year, of the 1,255 students registered as Hungarian in primary education, 122 (10%) attended Slovak-medium schools/classes, while no student was registered as Roma (Table 12).

Table 12: Primary schools in the Tornaľa micro-region by language of instruction and ethnic composition, 2024/25

Municipality	Level of education	Language of instruction	Total number of students	Ethnic affiliation			
				Hungarian	Slovak	Roma	Other
Tornaľa	1–9	HU	794	775	17	0	2
Tornaľa	1–9	SK	387	100	282	0	5
Gemerská Ves	1–9	HU	232	209	23	0	0
Gemerská Ves	1–9	SK	183	17	165	0	1
Gemer	1–9	HU	126	120	6	0	0
Držkovce	1–4	HU	28	27	1	0	0
Hucín	1–4	HU	13	2	11	0	0
Hucín	1–4	SK	49	0	49	0	0
Tornaľa	SEN	HU	16	15	1	0	0
Gemerská Ves	SEN	HU-SK	30	10	20	0	0
Gemer	SEN	HU	13	10	3	0	0
Držkovce	SEN	HU	5	4	1	0	0
<i>Total</i>			1876	1289	579	0	8

Based on our survey, the situation differs remarkably, taking into account the methodological constraints already described for kindergartens. In our study, we found that 86% of families using Hungarian as the primary language at home choose Hungarian-medium primary education, which is lower than the 90%

suggested by official data. Within this, the difference by Roma background is substantial: 91% of Roma children attend Hungarian-medium primary schools, compared to 80% of non-Roma Hungarian children. This gap, namely the higher rate of Slovak school choice (language-of-instruction switching) among non-Roma

families, can largely be traced back to the “white flight” dynamic already discussed regarding kindergartens. Among Roma families, by contrast, the high rate of Hungarian-medium schooling is closely linked to very low Slovak-language proficiency.⁶⁰ In their case, Hungarian-medium schooling is therefore partly a structural constraint rather than purely a preference.

Beyond the overall Roma–non-Roma difference, a village–town contrast also emerges. Among Hungarian-speaking families, the share enrolling in Hungarian-medium schools is 80% in villages and 90% in the town of Tornaľa, based on children’s place of residence. This difference is best explained by demographic change: village schools increasingly become viewed as “Roma schools,” which (often regardless of their actual ethnic composition) are perceived by parents as not providing competitive knowledge, including the effective acquisition of Slovak.⁶¹ As a result, non-Roma families increasingly choose an exit strategy: they either change the location of schooling (typically sending children to Tornaľa)⁶² or change the language of schooling, often both.⁶³ This produces institutional segregation: in the Tornaľa micro-region, village schools are attended essentially only by Roma children, while the Hungarian school in Tornaľa still shows a relatively more balanced distribution (Figure 16), although segregation may appear between parallel classes there.

Figure 16: Estimated number and proportion of Roma students in Hungarian-medium schools in the Revúca District, 2024/25

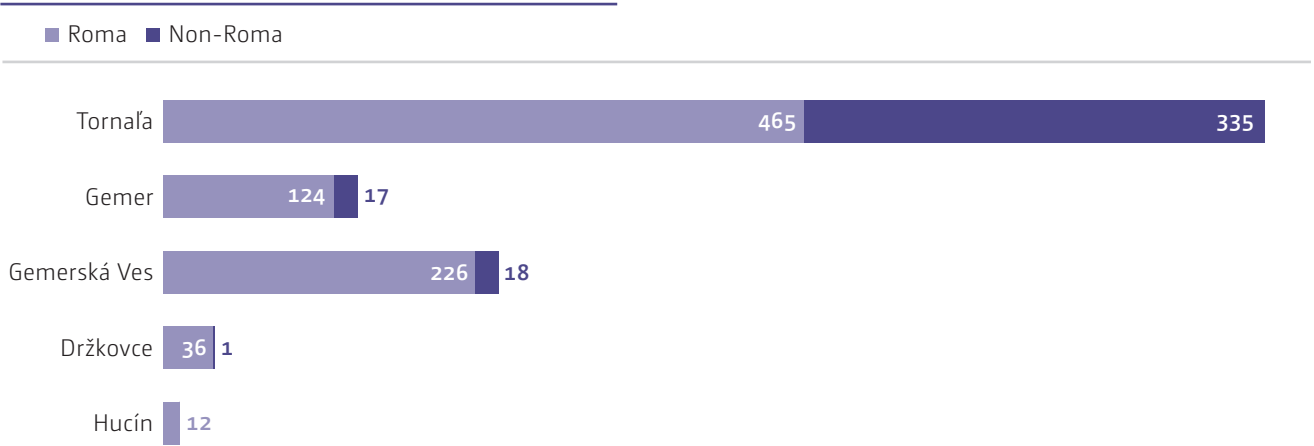
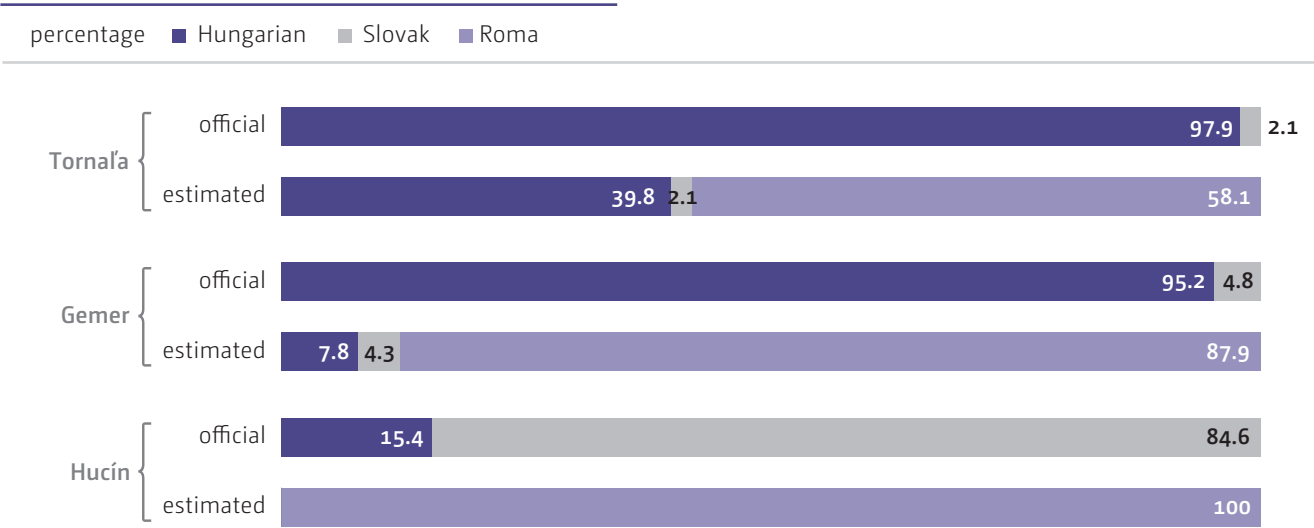
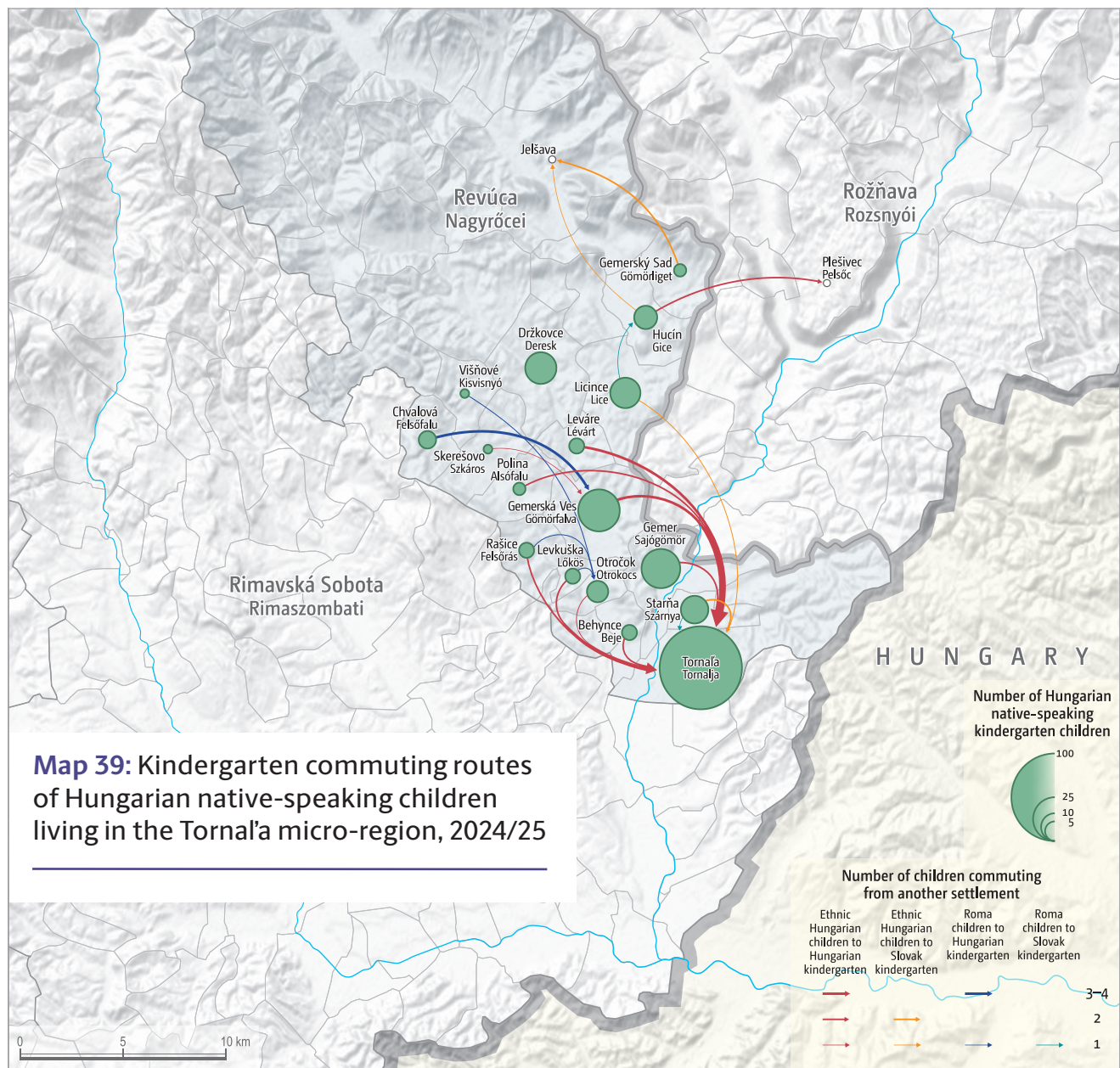


Figure 17: Ethnic composition of the Hungarian schools/classes in Tornaľa, Gemer, and Hucín: official versus estimated data, 2024/25



The higher Hungarian enrollment rate in the town is therefore closely connected to the ethnic composition of Hungarian schools. According to locally collected data, this composition shows little similarity to the official statistics (Figure 17).

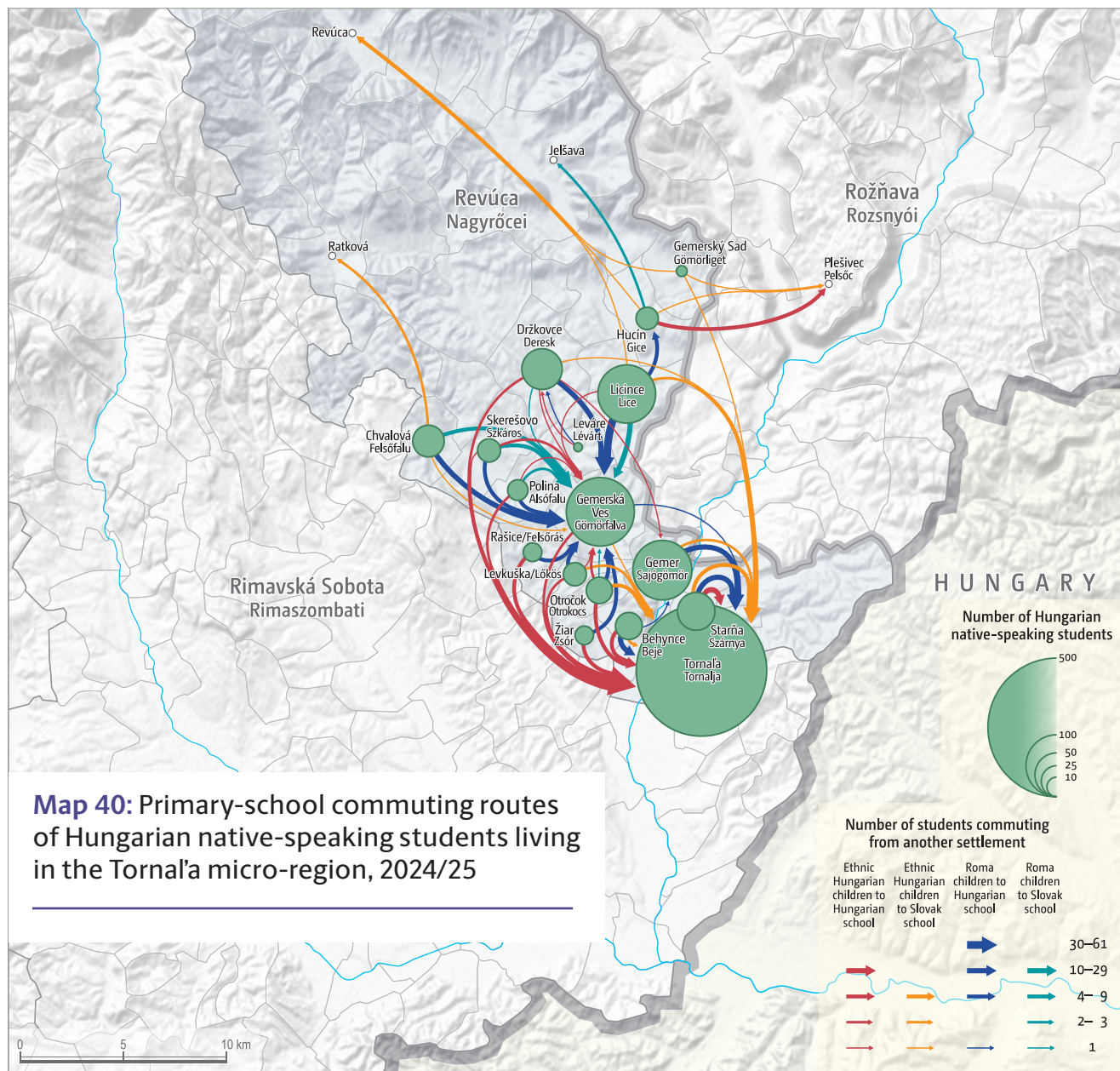
The segregation dynamics described above fundamentally shape educational pathways and catchment areas within the Tornaľa micro-region. Both our data and the expert interviews confirm that Roma families explicitly prefer the geographically (or temporally) closest institution (e.g., the school in Gemerská Ves), whereas non-Roma Hungarian children commute longer distances (primarily to Tornaľa, and from Hucín to Plešivec), often even when a kindergarten or school is available locally. In the case of Hungarian-medium kindergartens, it is striking that Hungarian parents, despite physical distance, primarily take their children to Tornaľa (Map 39). The map, which does not show children attending kindergarten locally, makes it clear that compared to Roma children, Hungarian-speaking non-Roma children commute in far greater volume. At the kindergarten level, however, commuting still involves relatively few children; the large majority attend kindergarten locally. Previously, the kindergarten in Otročok functioned as the villages’ “Hungarian” (i.e., non-Roma) kindergarten, while the kindergarten in Gemerská Ves had long been regarded as a “Roma”



kindergarten. In recent years, however, non-Roma Hungarian parents have increasingly avoided the kindergarten in Otročok as well.

The choice of Hungarian-medium primary-school classes shows the same pattern as at kindergarten: Hungarian Roma families choose primarily based on physical proximity, while institutional choice among non-Roma Hungarians reflects more complex factors. In their case, children commute to Tornaľa even from municipalities that do have a Hungarian-medium school (Gemer, Gemerská Ves) (Map 40). The school in Gemerská Ves functions as a local educational hub, due to the central location of the village within the Turiec valley. Students arrive there from most Hungarian-inhabited settlements of the micro-region. At the same time, it is clearly visible that Gemerská Ves attracts primarily Roma students, whereas Tornaľa draws mainly non-Roma Hungarian students.

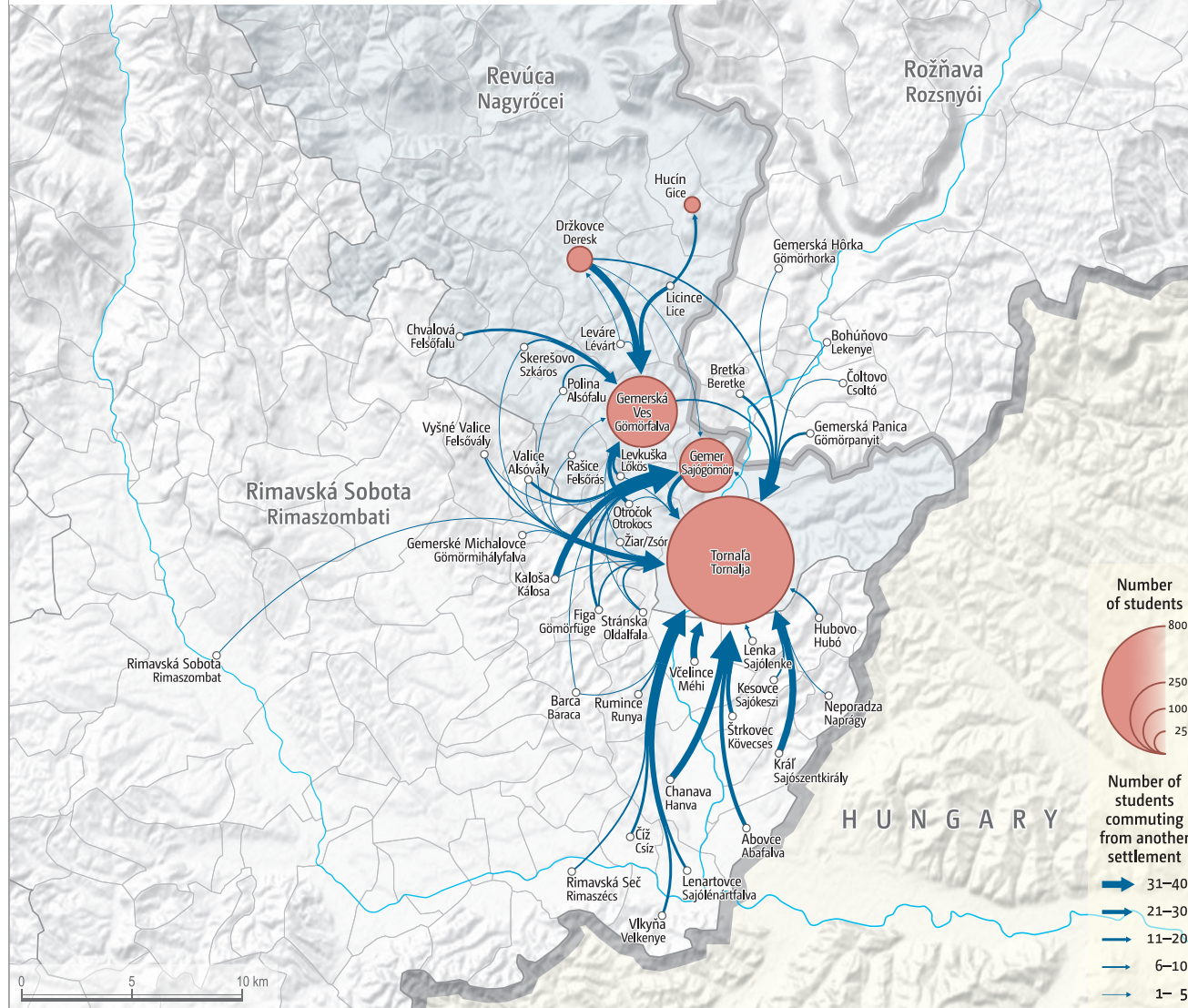
It is important to note that schools in the district attract not only students who live within the district. As already visible in Maps 37 and 38, commuting routes into schools in Revúca District cross district boundaries with exceptional density. This is most plausibly explained by the fact that these administrative borders cut across Tornaľa's catchment area. Map 41 makes it clear that the catchment area of the Tornaľa



primary school extends to the Rimavská Sobota and Rožňava Districts as well. Perhaps even more striking is the case of the school in Gemer. Large numbers of students (especially in Grades 5–9) commute there from the Kaloša Valley villages in Rimavská Sobota District. From the map, it is apparent that Gemer is far from being the closest school for these villages. According to local interviews, this commuting route emerged during the socialist decades, partly to distribute the children evenly among schools in the region, paying particular attention to reducing the workload of the Tornaľa school. At the same time, it affects precisely those villages (e.g., Kaloša, Valice) where the share of Roma population is highest. In this way, commuting contributes to segregation between schools. Moreover, the approximately 20 km road distance (measured from Valice) intensifies access difficulties and, due to travel costs, contributes to relatively high rates of school absence, especially among socio-economically disadvantaged families.

At the secondary level, it is important to note that this is the level at which an institutional closure did occur: in 2018 the Hungarian grammar school in Tornaľa was closed, so the nearest Hungarian-medium grammar schools are now in Rimavská Sobota and Rožňava. The possibility of Hungarian-language secondary education in the district did not disappear, however, because

Map 41: Commuting routes to Hungarian-medium primary schools in the Revúca District, 2024/25



the vocational secondary school in Tornaľa continues to operate in both Hungarian and Slovak. It is nevertheless evident that even the Slovak-medium classes largely recruit from the Hungarian population (Table 13).

Our data collection does not provide sufficiently detailed information on secondary schools, so we can draw only broad conclusions. While for primary schools we were able to obtain location-specific data on where children attend school, the Tornaľa questionnaires do not identify the location of secondary-school completion. Based on the available information, most students appear to study locally (in Tornaľa) or in nearby Rimavská Sobota, while Košice and Rožňava also represent attractive destinations.

Notwithstanding these data limitations, an important fact remains: according to official statistics, in the 2024/25 school year the Hungarian-medium classes of the Tornaľa secondary school enrolled 166 students registered as Hungarian, 7 registered as Slovak, and zero registered as Roma. Meanwhile, the Slovak-medium classes enrolled 57 registered as Hungarian and 55 registered as Slovak. Overall, the same types of phenomena observed at kindergarten and primary levels are also present at secondary level, although the drivers are partly different: in vocational secondary education, language-of-instruction choice is also

Table 13: Secondary schools in the study area by language of instruction and ethnic composition, 2024/25

Municipality	Type	Language of instruction	Total number of students	Ethnic Hungarian	Ethnic Slovak
Tornaľa	secondary vocational school	HU	173	166	7
Tornaľa	secondary vocational school	SK	112	57	55
Tornaľa	SEN	SK	59	31	28
Tornaľa	SEN	SK	31	1	30
Total			375	255	120

shaped by the fact that certain specializations (e.g., bricklayer, carpenter, dressmaker) are available in Tornaľa only in Slovak.

The enrollment patterns outlined above for the Tornaľa micro-region have not changed substantially over the past decade and a half: the main dynamics were already present then, even if the numbers have shifted.⁶⁴

Today, these processes appear, despite the seemingly high rate of choosing Hungarian-medium education overall, to be unfavorable in aggregate and difficult to sustain, and they pose serious risks for the reproduction of Hungarian ethnic identity. Segregation processes, both at the institutional and the regional level, carry significant risks and may hinder social mobility, affecting not only Roma communities.



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THE CHANGING FACE OF HUNGARIAN MINORITY EDUCATION IN SLOVAKIA



an Atlas of Student Enrollment, Demography and Social Trends

Horizontum Civil Association; Geographical Institute HUN-REN CSFK; VEKTOR Social Research Association

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