

A Critical Reading of Official Data on School Segregation Affecting Roma Children in Romania

Dan Pătroc¹

Abstract

This article examines school segregation affecting Roma children in Romania through a county-level comparison between demographic data and recently published administrative monitoring data. It combines the share of the Roma population in each county, based on the 2021 Population and Housing Census, with segregation alert rates reported in the Ministry of Education's 2024-2025 monitoring exercise. Two indicators are analysed separately: segregation alerts at school-structure level and at class level. The results show a positive relationship between Roma population share and segregation alerts in both cases, stronger at class level than at school-structure level. At the same time, demographic composition alone does not explain the territorial distribution of segregation. Several counties report substantially higher or lower levels than would be expected based on Roma population share alone. The article argues that these differences reflect not only demography, but also variation in implementation, reporting practices, and local institutional context, while also acknowledging important data limitations.

Keywords

Roma children; school segregation; Romania; desegregation; educational inequality; county-level analysis

1. Introduction

Roma ethnic segregation in education remains a persistent challenge in Romania and across Europe, with direct implications for educational quality, equal opportunities, and the effective enjoyment of fundamental rights. At EU level, the right to education and the principle of non-discrimination are explicitly recognised in the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* (European Union, 2012, Art. 14 & 21). These principles are operationalised through EU anti-discrimination law, notably the Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC), which prohibits discrimination on grounds of racial or ethnic origin in key domains including education (Council of the European Union, 2000). In

¹ Ph.D., Assoc. Professor, University of Oradea, The Department of Educational Sciences. Email: dpatroc@uoradea.ro.

parallel, the EU's policy framework increasingly treats desegregation as a prerequisite for meaningful Roma inclusion, including via the EU Roma Strategic Framework 2020-2030 and the Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (European Commission, 2020; Council of the European Union, 2021).

Beyond EU law and policy, segregation has also been addressed as a rights violation within European human-rights jurisprudence. The European Court of Human Rights has held that separating Roma children into different educational tracks or classes (under apparently neutral rationales) can amount to unlawful discrimination in the enjoyment of the right to education (e.g., *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic*; *Oršuš and Others v. Croatia*) (European Court of Human Rights, 2007/Grand Chamber; 2010/Grand Chamber). These legal and policy positions align with a growing scholarly emphasis on segregation as an institutional mechanism that reproduces educational disadvantage and entrenches social exclusion, especially when segregation becomes “normalised” through administrative routines, school choice dynamics, or socio-spatial inequalities (Burger, 2019; Costache et al., 2022). In Romania, the issue is particularly salient because segregation is shaped by intertwined ethnic and socio-economic vulnerabilities, while measurement and governance rely heavily on administrative categorisations and local implementation capacity (Ivan & Bănică, 2022; Varga, 2022). EU-level guidance cautions that segregation is not only a matter of “*where children attend school*” but also of unequal access to quality mainstream services, and it stresses that public funding should avoid reinforcing separation (European Commission, 2015). Rather than seeking to measure the “true” prevalence of school segregation in Romania, this article examines what the first nationwide monitoring exercise can reveal—and what it cannot reveal—about the territorial distribution of segregation affecting Roma children. Its contribution therefore lies less in producing a definitive map of segregation than in offering a critical reading of how segregation becomes visible through official data under uneven conditions of reporting, eligibility, and ethnic self-identification.

Against this backdrop, the present article contributes an empirically grounded perspective on how officially measured segregation aligns (or fails to align) with demographic realities. Specifically, it links administrative measures of Roma-related school segregation with the county-level share of Roma population reported in Romania's 2021 national census, in order to examine whether segregation correlates with Roma population distribution and to identify counties displaying segregation levels that appear higher than expected given their demographic composition. This approach aims to support evidence-

informed discussion on monitoring quality, implementation gaps, and targeted desegregation policy design.

2. Conceptualising school segregation

School segregation is commonly understood as the systematic separation of social groups across educational settings, such that children who differ by ethnicity, socioeconomic background, disability status, or migration background are educated in unequal and often isolated learning environments (Burger, 2019). Conceptually, segregation is not reducible to “difference” or “diversity”; rather, it denotes a patterned distribution that departs from what would be expected under an even allocation of groups across schools and classrooms. This distinction matters because high group presence can reflect demographic concentration in a locality, whereas segregation implies *separation* that is often linked to differential opportunities, resources, and expectations.

A core analytical boundary separates inter-school (between-schools) segregation from intra-school (within-school) segregation. Inter-school Roma segregation refers to the uneven distribution of Roma and non-Roma students across schools (often shaped by residential segregation, school catchment areas, and school choice dynamics). In contrast, intra-school segregation exists when Roma students are separated within the same school, for example through class formation, tracking/ability grouping, placement in separate buildings or shifts, or other organisational practices. Romanian scholarship explicitly emphasises that analysing school segregation only at the “school average” can obscure within-school separation mechanisms, thereby underestimating the lived reality of segregation (Costache et al., 2022). This distinction is consequential for research design: a county may appear “integrated” if overall school-level shares are balanced, while substantial segregation may persist *inside* schools through classroom sorting.

Relatedly, segregation can be examined at multiple nested levels. A socio-spatial perspective highlights the role of catchment areas and local settlement patterns in structuring unequal school composition (Burger, 2019). At the institutional level, Romanian policy and monitoring frameworks treat the “*school structure*” (e.g., main unit and subordinate structures) as a meaningful unit for identifying segregation risk, alongside more granular levels such as buildings/wings, classrooms, and even seating arrangements (e.g., the “last two desks”), which are explicitly recognised in national regulatory language. These levels matter because each can embody a different mechanism: spatial separation between buildings may reflect infrastructural inequality; classroom separation

may reflect administrative sorting; and micro-level practices (including seating) may reflect everyday discrimination.

To avoid conceptual slippage, it is useful to distinguish concentration from segregation. Concentration describes a high share of Roma students in a given school or locality (potentially driven by demography and settlement patterns) without necessarily implying intentional sorting. Segregation, by contrast, signals separation relative to the surrounding population, often accompanied by differential access to quality instruction, resources, and expectations. The concept of separation (as the social-spatial splitting of groups) captures the experiential dimension of segregation (education “in isolation”) which the Council of Europe’s policy discourse has repeatedly connected to inclusion deficits and rights concerns.

A final conceptual boundary concerns legality and causality; *de jure* segregation refers to separation mandated by law or formal policy, while *de facto* segregation results from residential patterns, administrative routines, or “neutral” practices that nonetheless produce ethnically differentiated outcomes. In EU law, this distinction maps onto direct versus indirect discrimination: direct discrimination involves less favourable treatment explicitly on ethnic grounds, while indirect discrimination arises when an apparently neutral provision or practice puts members of an ethnic group at a particular disadvantage unless objectively justified and proportionate (Council Directive 2000/43/EC, Art. 2). This framing is particularly relevant to education, where school assignment, class grouping, and tracking can be defended as neutral yet operate in ways that systematically separate Roma children. Needless to say, in contemporary EU member states, *de jure* segregation is neither a plausible nor a policy-relevant baseline; the analytically and normatively pressing concern is therefore *de facto* segregation, especially where it is produced and sustained under the cover of seemingly reasonable institutional rationales and routine administrative decisions. This gap between *de jure* protection and *de facto* exclusion is not unique to school segregation, but echoes broader regional evidence showing that formal rights often remain weakly realised in practice when support systems are fragmented or underdeveloped (Tanasijević et al., 2025).

These conceptual distinctions clarify why a county-level comparison between measured segregation and the Roma population share can be analytically useful while remaining incomplete. Counties approximate the policy-relevant administrative scale at which resources, governance capacity, and demographic composition vary; thus, county patterns can reveal macro-level associations consistent with socio-spatial mechanisms. Yet segregation is also produced (and experienced) at micro-

levels (schools, buildings, classrooms) that may not be visible in aggregated indicators. Accordingly, county-level correlations can identify where segregation aligns with demographic concentration and where patterns deviate, but they cannot on their own adjudicate the *mechanisms* (e.g., within-school sorting, reporting practices, or local administrative decisions) that generate segregation on the ground (Costache et al., 2022; Ivan & Bănică, 2022). The county is not assumed here to be the level at which segregation is directly produced or experienced. Rather, it is used as the most meaningful territorial scale at which the newly available administrative data become comparable, allowing differences in demographic composition, reporting patterns, and implementation capacity to be examined within a common analytical frame.

3. Legal and policy framework: EU anti-discrimination, desegregation principles

The legal and policy architecture governing Roma (de)segregation in education in Romania is best understood as a multi-level regime: EU primary law and anti-discrimination legislation establish binding principles and enforceable rights, while EU Roma policy frameworks and funding conditionalities translate these principles into governance expectations; Romania, in turn, operationalises them through national anti-discrimination rules and sector-specific education regulation. These instruments make school segregation neither a “local anomaly” nor a merely pedagogical matter, but a rights-sensitive domain where states are expected to prevent, identify, and remedy discriminatory separation in education.

At the level of primary EU law, the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* guarantees the right to education (Article 14) and prohibits discrimination on grounds including racial or ethnic origin (Article 21) (European Union, 2012). These principles are concretised in secondary law through the Racial Equality Directive (Council Directive 2000/43/EC), which applies to both the public and private sectors and explicitly covers education within its material scope. Its Article 2 distinguishes direct discrimination from indirect discrimination, the latter capturing situations where apparently neutral rules or practices put persons of a certain racial or ethnic origin at a particular disadvantage unless objectively justified by a legitimate aim and proportionate means. This legal distinction is highly consequential in schooling, where separation may be defended via ostensibly neutral rationales (catchment boundaries, ability grouping, language, “special needs”, or parental choice), yet still produce systematic ethnic stratification. In the Roma context, legal scholarship has shown how the

indirect discrimination standard is particularly relevant for challenging segregation patterns that are not openly ethnic but predictably and disproportionately affect Roma children (van den Bogaert, 2011). EU Roma policy frameworks reinforce the expectation that education systems should move from formal equality to effective inclusion. The European Commission's *EU Roma Strategic Framework for Equality, Inclusion and Participation 2020-2030* frames Roma equality in education as a core objective and calls for stronger implementation, monitoring, and accountability mechanisms (European Commission, 2020). The Council Recommendation on Roma equality, inclusion and participation (2021/C 93/01) further urges Member States to adopt and implement targeted measures to combat discrimination and segregation affecting Roma, including in education, and to improve the monitoring and evaluation of policies. A critical operational layer is added by EU funding guidance, which treats desegregation as a governance and investment requirement rather than a purely normative aspiration. The Commission's guidance for Member States on the use of European Structural and Investment Funds (ESI Funds) defines segregation in terms of physical and social separation and links it to unequal access to quality mainstream services; it emphasises that investments should avoid reproducing segregation and should support desegregation and spatial integration where relevant (European Commission, 2015). Importantly for education, the guidance distinguishes between *non-segregation* (preventing new segregation and ensuring that mainstream provision is accessible and non-discriminatory) and *desegregation* (actively dismantling existing segregated arrangements). It also underscores governance needs that are directly relevant to empirical work: mapping, diagnostics, and monitoring are prerequisites for credible interventions and for safeguarding rights-based use of funds. Recent Council of Europe work complements the EU framework by documenting how segregation persists across Europe despite formal prohibitions and by stressing that inclusion requires enforceable, well-monitored desegregation strategies. For instance, the Council of Europe's *Mapping Study on School Segregation of Roma Communities: Trends and Pathways Towards Educational Inclusion* highlights that Roma segregation in education perpetuates inequalities and underscores the role of legal norms and implementation pathways in advancing educational inclusion (Council of Europe, 2024).

4. Monitoring segregation in Romania. Legal obligations, national coordination, and reporting limitations

Romania's regulatory architecture on school segregation combines an early, explicit prohibition with newer institutional arrangements

designed to steer implementation and coordination. The cornerstone is The Minister of Education's Order No. 6,134/21.12.2016, which formally prohibits school segregation in pre-university education and frames segregation as incompatible with the principle of equal access to quality education. The Ministry's published presentation of the order makes clear that the prohibition covers multiple criteria (not only ethnicity, but also disability/special educational needs, socio-economic status, residence, and school performance) and explicitly targets physical separation across groups/classes/buildings and even micro-level arrangements (e.g., "the last two desks") when such separation produces disproportionate concentrations relative to the majority. This legal framing is important analytically because it recognises segregation as a multi-level institutional practice, not merely a between-school demographic outcome.

Later, Romania strengthened the institutional layer of desegregation policy by creating a dedicated national coordination body. Order No. 6,832/20.12.2023 approved the "*Regulation on the organisation and functioning of the National Commission for School Desegregation*", published in the Official Gazette in January 2024. The order explicitly anchors the commission in the new pre-university education law and references the 2016 anti-segregation order, while also reorganising the national governance landscape (including the abrogation of an earlier commission framework established in 2019). Institutionally, this move signals that desegregation is treated as an issue requiring system-level coordination, technical support, and policy steering, rather than being left solely to ad hoc local compliance. More recently, the Commission's organisational framework has continued to evolve. A Regulation dated 4 July 2025, approved by Order No. 4,482/04.07.2025 and published in the Official Gazette in July 2025, reiterates the National Commission's consultative status and assigns it a central role in coordinating implementation of an action plan for school desegregation and educational quality improvements in pre-university education. The 2016 prohibition and the subsequent creation and updating of a national desegregation commission illustrate a shift from rule-setting toward institutionalised governance (i.e., building administrative structures meant to translate legal norms into routine monitoring, coordinated interventions, and sustained implementation).

While this regulatory and institutional architecture signals increasing policy attention, academic research has repeatedly cautioned that formal prohibitions do not automatically translate into effective desegregation on the ground. Studies focusing on Roma children's educational experiences in Romania describe segregation as a persistent, system-level issue, maintained through routine local practices and

implementation gaps, even when national-level frameworks prohibit separation. In this reading, Romania's challenge is not primarily the absence of rules, but the difficulty of turning national commitments into consistent local compliance and enforceable change across diverse territorial contexts (Varga, 2022). A key recent development is the Ministry of Education's "*National Report on School Segregation Risk Analysis (school year 2024-2025)*", which operationalises the state's monitoring obligation through a nationwide data-collection exercise (via SIIIR - "The Integrated Information System for Education in Romania", an official administrative tool) intended to generate actionable signals for prevention and intervention. Importantly, the report also provides unusually transparent evidence about the limits of the current monitoring capacity. It documents that the dedicated SIIIR module was only partially completed at the end of the first reporting cycle and notes a significant number of units that did not provide the data needed for robust monitoring; specifically, the report states that 603 school structures did not submit the data required to calculate segregation scores at class level, which triggered automatic "maximum alert" scoring under the methodology, an approach that improves compliance incentives but complicates interpretation of prevalence patterns (Ministry of Education and Research, 2026). The same report highlights structural constraints that affect building-level diagnosis and, by extension, policy targeting. For ethnic segregation at the level of buildings, it notes that in 55.2% of school structures the necessary information linking classes to buildings was not available in SIIIR, making it impossible to assess segregation at the building level for those units; an additional share had only partial data. This matters for governance because it shows that, despite an increasingly robust legal mandate, Romania's monitoring system is still in a transition phase where administrative data quality can limit the state's ability to systematically identify where desegregation interventions are most urgently needed (Ministry of Education and Research, 2026).

Finally, Romania's current desegregation monitoring efforts intersect with a well-known measurement dilemma in Roma policy: both census ethnicity and many administrative records rely on self-identification, which can produce undercounts in contexts shaped by stigma or fear of discrimination. Methodological scholarship on Romania's census data has shown that "undeclared ethnicity" and selective self-identification can materially affect Roma population estimates, and critical work on ethnic quantification highlights why official counts may systematically diverge from other measurement approaches. Studies that compare census figures with alternative measurement strategies discuss systematic gaps between official counts and other estimates, which matters for any analysis that relates

administrative education indicators to census-based Roma shares (Surdu, 2019). This is not simply a technical issue: it affects how policymakers interpret “need” how resources are targeted, and how success is assessed over time (Cernat, 2021).

5. Methodology

This study uses a descriptive-comparative, county-level approach to examine whether administrative indicators of school segregation (as revealed by the official 2025 data) tend to be higher in counties with a larger Roma population share, and whether some counties appear to report higher (or lower) segregation risk than the national pattern would suggest. The unit of analysis is the Romanian county (*județ*, in Romanian). Two public sources were combined:

- Ministry of Education segregation monitoring data (school year 2024-2025). The Ministry’s national report summarizes the first nationwide monitoring exercise implemented through the SIIIR platform, producing “alert scores” that flag potential segregation risk. The report also documents substantial constraints in data completion and eligibility that affect interpretability.

- Roma population shares from the 2021 Romanian Population and Housing Census (RPL 2021). County-level Roma shares were computed using the census’s ethnicity tables, where ethnicity is based on self-identification.

To support comparability across counties of different sizes, the segregation indicators were treated as shares (percentages) rather than raw counts. In practice, the analysis uses **a**) the percentage of eligible school structures that were flagged with an alert at the *school-structure level*, and **b**) the percentage of eligible school structures that were flagged with an alert at the *class level*. The key demographic indicator is the percentage of the county population that self-identifies as Roma in the 2021 census.

The analysis has three steps:

1. Territorial variation (we first present how Roma population shares and segregation alert rates vary across counties).

2. Correlate the two indicators. (we then examine whether counties with higher Roma shares tend to report higher segregation alert rates, using standard correlation measures as reported in Results).

3. Identify counties that deviate from the national pattern (we highlight counties whose segregation alert rates appear notably higher or lower than what the overall national relationship would suggest given

their Roma share. These are treated as “*counties of interest*” for policy discussion, not as proof of causality).

Major limitations and interpretive cautions

(1) Incomplete reporting and limited eligibility in the Ministry dataset. The Ministry report itself emphasizes that this was a “first-time national exercise” and that the SIIIR module was only “partially completed” at the end of reporting. A significant number of units did not provide the data needed for robust monitoring at key levels. The report notes explicitly that 603 school structures did not provide the necessary data to compute segregation scores at class level. In addition, the report highlights a broader structural limitation: 55.2% of school structures lacked complete information needed to link classes to buildings, making building-level assessment impossible in those cases. While our analysis focuses on the county indicators that are available (structure-level and class-level alerts), these constraints mean that the resulting measures should be treated as administrative signals under conditions of partial reporting, not as a definitive estimate of the true prevalence of segregation.

A related limitation is that many school structures are not “eligible” for certain forms of assessment (e.g., where there is only one relevant structure/class configuration). As a result, county rates can be based on subsets of the total school landscape, and the size of the eligible base may vary substantially across counties, an important reason to interpret cross-county comparisons with caution.

(2) Likely underreporting of Roma identity in census data. As mentioned before, Roma population shares in the census depend on self-identification, and a consistent point in the literature is that Roma populations can be undercounted in censuses because some individuals avoid declaring Roma ethnicity due to stigma, discrimination concerns, or complex identity dynamics. For Romania specifically, recent research using alternative identification approaches finds substantial underreporting relative to official census figures, and critical scholarship discusses how census-based Roma numbers can systematically underestimate Roma presence. (Mitruț et al., 2025). While the official RPL 2021 data show a total of 569477 Roma persons in Romania, some alternative sources (even official ones) estimate around 1,85 million Roma people in Romania (Government of Romania, 2022). This interpretive caution is consistent with recent evidence from Northeastern Hungary, where different ethnic classification methods produce markedly different territorial pictures of the Roma population and, therefore, different readings of segregation risk (Pénzes et al., 2026). For this study, the practical implication is that the census-based county Roma shares

should be treated as a lowerbound indicator, not as an exact demographic measure.

(3) Similar self-identification constraints in school administrative records. The Ministry report refers to “students who declared Roma ethnicity,” indicating that ethnicity information used in the monitoring exercise relies on reported identity rather than external classification. In practice, this creates a parallel measurement challenge to the census: if Roma identity is under-declared in some local contexts, then both the demographic benchmark (census) and the school-based indicator may be affected in ways that are difficult to quantify.

6. Results

This section presents the main findings in three steps. First, it examines the overall relationship between county-level Roma population shares and the two segregation indicators used in this study. Second, it compares the **expected** and **observed** levels of segregation at the **school-structure level**, in order to identify counties that stand above or below the general national pattern. Third, it performs the same comparison for segregation at the **class level**.

Correlation between Roma population share and segregation alert rates

The first step of the analysis examined whether counties with a higher share of Roma population also tend to report higher segregation alert rates. Two indicators were considered separately: the percentage of eligible school structures flagged with an alert at structure level and the percentage of eligible school structures flagged with an alert at class level. The results show a positive relationship in both cases. At the structure level, the Pearson correlation coefficient between the county Roma population share and the segregation alert rate is 0.515 ($p = 0.0005$). This indicates a moderate positive association: counties with larger Roma population shares tend, in general, to report higher structure-level segregation alerts. The relationship is stronger at the class level. Here, the Pearson correlation coefficient is 0.674 ($p < 0.0001$), suggesting a clearer positive association between the proportion of Roma population and the class-level segregation alert rate. Our findings suggest that counties with larger Roma populations are generally more likely to report higher segregation alerts. However, the relationship is not strong enough to explain all county-level differences. In other words, demography matters, but it does not fully account for the territorial distribution of segregation alerts across Romania.

Table 1: Correlations between Roma population share and segregation alert rates

Variables compared	N	Pearson's r	p-value
Roma population share and structure-level segregation alert rate	42	0.515	< 0.001
Roma population share and class-level segregation alert rate	42	0.674	< 0.001

(Source: author's calculations based on data provided by Ministry of Education and Research, 2026, and National Institute of Statistics, 2023)

Expected and observed segregation at school-structure level

The second stage of the analysis focused on segregation alerts at the school-structure level. In order to move beyond the overall correlation presented above, the analysis estimated an expected structure-level alert rate for each county based on the general national relationship between the Roma population share and the structure-level segregation alert rate. In practical terms, this means that each county was assigned an estimated value derived from the overall national trend linking the two variables. Expected county values were estimated through a simple linear regression, using the county Roma population share as the predictor and the structure-level segregation alert rate as the outcome. These expected values should be understood only as estimates derived from the overall national linear trend and not as substantively “normal” or normatively appropriate levels of segregation for any given county. The observed county value was then compared with this estimated value. The difference between the two was used to identify counties that stand above or below the broader national pattern. This comparison makes it possible to identify counties where the reported structure-level segregation alert rate is higher than expected or lower than expected, given the county's Roma population share. In substantive terms, counties above the expected level can be seen as places where segregation at school-structure level appears more pronounced than the broader national pattern would suggest. Counties below the expected level, by contrast, report lower values than expected.

The results show that several counties stand clearly above the expected pattern. The most notable case is Satu Mare, which exceeds the expected value by 30.84 percentage points. Other counties with substantial positive deviations are Olt (+23.09), Harghita (+21.05), Argeş (+16.29), and Vâlcea (+15.77). Brăila also stands out, with a positive deviation of +14.95 percentage points. These counties report structure-level segregation alert rates that are considerably higher than would be expected on the basis of demography alone (the national linear trend). At the other end of the distribution, several counties fall clearly below the expected pattern. The strongest negative deviation is recorded in Sălaj, which is 26.86 percentage points below its expected value. Other counties with marked below-expected

values are Dolj (-18.99), Călărași (-16.63), Galați (-12.56), and Timiș (-12.35). In these counties, the observed structure-level segregation alert rate is noticeably lower than the national pattern would suggest given their Roma population share. Lower-than-expected values should not be read as evidence of inclusion in any straightforward sense, as they may also reflect reporting or data-quality differences.

Table 2: Counties above and below the expected pattern at school-structure level

County	Roma population share (%)	Observed structure-level alert rate (%)	Expected structure-level alert rate (%)	Deviation (Observed / Expected)
Above expected				
Satu Mare	4.94	57.35	26.51	+30.84
Olt	2.56	41.18	18.09	+23.09
Harghita	1.69	36.07	15.02	+21.05
Argeș	2.99	35.90	19.61	+16.29
Vâlcea	2.41	33.33	17.56	+15.77
Brăila	2.64	33.33	18.38	+14.95
Below expected				
Sălaj	7.87	24.00	50.86	-26.86
Dolj	4.99	7.69	26.68	-18.99
Călărași	6.19	14.29	30.92	-16.63
Galați	3.09	7.41	19.97	-12.56
Timiș	1.91	3.45	15.80	-12.35

(Source: author's calculations based on data provided by Ministry of Education and Research, 2026, and National Institute of Statistics, 2023)

Expected and observed segregation at class level

The third stage of the analysis focused on segregation alerts at the class level. Expected county values were estimated through a simple linear regression, using the county Roma population share as the predictor and the class-level segregation alert rate as the outcome; the difference between the observed and predicted values was then used to identify counties above or below the general national pattern. In practical terms, this means that each county was assigned an estimated class-level alert rate based on the overall national relationship between the Roma population share and the class-level segregation alert rate. The observed county value was then compared with this estimated value. Counties with observed values above the expected level can be understood as places where class-level segregation appears more pronounced than the broader national pattern would suggest, while counties below the expected level report lower values than expected.

The results show that several counties stand clearly above the expected pattern. The most notable case is Satu Mare, which exceeds the expected value by 18.50 percentage points. Other counties with substantial positive deviations are Harghita (+13.68), Cluj (+12.53), Arad (+12.11), and Ilfov (+8.87). Giurgiu also stands out, with a positive deviation of +8.22

percentage points. These counties report class-level segregation alert rates that are considerably higher than would be expected on the basis of the national linear trend. At the other end of the distribution, several counties fall clearly below the expected pattern. The strongest negative deviation is recorded in Argeş, which is 13.72 percentage points below its expected value. Other counties with marked below-expected values are Vaslui (-10.40), Olt (-10.31), Sibiu (-9.30), and Neamţ (-7.12). Timiş also falls below the expected level, with a deviation of -7.00 percentage points. In these counties, the observed class-level segregation alert rate is noticeably lower than the national pattern would suggest given their Roma population share.

Our results show that, although the relationship between Roma population share and segregation is stronger at class level than at structure level, demography still does not fully explain the territorial distribution of class-level segregation alerts. Counties with similar Roma population shares may still report very different class-level alert rates. This suggests that local administrative practices, school-level dynamics, reporting patterns, or broader territorial factors may also influence how segregation is identified and recorded. A caveat, however: deviations should be interpreted with caution in counties with small eligible denominators.

Table 3: Counties above and below the expected pattern at class level

County	Roma population share (%)	Observed class-level alert rate (%)	Expected class-level alert rate (%)	Deviation (Observed / Expected)
Above expected				
Satu Mare	4.94	63.89	45.39	+18.50
Harghita	1.69	47.31	33.63	+13.68
Cluj	2.62	49.53	37.00	+12.53
Arad	4.08	54.39	42.28	+12.11
Ilfov	1.69	42.50	33.63	+8.87
Giurgiu	4.57	52.27	44.05	+8.22
Below expected				
Argeş	2.99	24.62	38.34	-13.72
Vaslui	1.41	22.22	32.62	-10.40
Olt	2.56	26.47	36.78	-10.31
Sibiu	3.30	30.16	39.46	-9.30
Neamţ	1.27	25.00	32.12	-7.12
Timiş	1.91	27.43	34.43	-7.00

(Source: author's calculations based on data provided by Ministry of Education and Research, 2026, and National Institute of Statistics, 2023)

7. Discussion

The findings of this study suggest that county-level demographic composition does matter for understanding the territorial distribution of segregation alerts in Romania, but only up to a point. In both models, counties with higher Roma population shares tended to report higher segregation alert rates, and this relationship was stronger at class level than

at school-structure level. At the same time, the pattern was far from uniform: several counties recorded substantially higher or lower alert rates than would be expected on the basis of Roma population share alone. This is an important result because it suggests that school segregation cannot be reduced to demography. Rather, the data point to the continued relevance of local administrative practices, institutional routines, and territorial differences in how segregation is produced, identified, and reported. This interpretation is broadly consistent with the Romanian and regional literature, which has long argued that Roma school segregation is not simply a reflection of population distribution, but a more complex institutional and social process (Moisa & Roth, 2011; Varga, 2022). In this sense, the county deviations identified in this study should be read not only as possible signals of uneven segregation, but also as possible signals of uneven administrative visibility. Put differently, the monitoring system may be capturing both segregation itself and the variable local capacity (or willingness) to detect, report, and classify it.

A second important conclusion concerns the stronger association observed at class level. Substantively, this may indicate that the more persistent forms of separation are often located within schools rather than only between schools or school structures. In other words, segregation may survive even where children formally belong to the same institution, through class-level sorting, differentiated expectations, or everyday administrative decisions. This reading is in line with earlier work showing that school segregation in Romania often persists through internal organisational arrangements and through apparently routine practices that reproduce unequal educational spaces over time (Moisa & Roth, 2011; Varga, 2022). It also resonates with ethnographic research showing that segregated educational trajectories are sustained not only by formal rules, but also by broader institutional settings, financing logics, and local social relations that shape how schools function in practice (Plainer, 2021). The counties that appear above the expected pattern are especially important from a policy perspective. They should not be interpreted as proof of intentional discrimination in any simple sense, but they do indicate places where the observed level of segregation is higher than the national demographic trend would predict. In the context of Romania's anti-segregation framework, this matters because the legal prohibition is already in place, and a national monitoring architecture has also been developed. Yet the new ministerial report itself shows that monitoring capacity remains uneven: the first nationwide exercise was affected by partial reporting, incomplete data, and uneven eligibility for assessment across schools and structures (Ministry of Education and Research, 2026). The present findings therefore support a broader interpretation already present in the literature: the main challenge in Romania is no longer only the absence of legal norms, but the gap between

formal prohibition and effective implementation on the ground (Moisa & Roth, 2011; Varga, 2022). At the same time, the counties falling below the expected pattern should be interpreted cautiously. A lower-than-expected alert rate does not necessarily indicate a more inclusive educational reality. It may reflect better local practice, but it may also reflect differences in reporting, in the operational use of the alert system, or in the quality and completeness of administrative data. This caution is especially important because both the census-based measure of Roma population share and parts of the school-based identification process depend on self-identification. Research on the Romanian census has shown that ethnicity data can be affected by undercounting and undeclared ethnicity, which complicates the use of official figures as a precise demographic benchmark (Cernat, 2021). In this respect, the contribution of the present study is not to offer a definitive measurement of segregation, but to identify meaningful territorial patterns within the limits of currently available public data.

Overall, the study points to a broader implication for Romanian education policy. If segregation alerts are only partly explained by demographic composition, then desegregation policy must go beyond demographic reasoning and focus more directly on implementation. This includes better reporting compliance, more reliable monitoring tools, closer scrutiny of within-school separation, and stronger follow-up in counties that repeatedly appear above the national pattern. The results also suggest that future research should combine administrative data with qualitative inquiry at local level, especially in counties that deviate strongly from expected values. Such an approach would make it easier to distinguish between genuine implementation problems, differences in reporting practice, and the wider social conditions that continue to reproduce segregated educational spaces (Plainer, 2021; Varga, 2022). Comparative minority-policy research also suggests that even relatively developed legal and institutional frameworks do not automatically overcome the persistent educational and social disadvantages affecting Roma communities (Villányi, 2026).

8. Conclusion

This article has examined school segregation affecting Roma children in Romania through a county-level comparison between census-based Roma population shares and the segregation alert rates reported in the Ministry of Education's recent monitoring exercise. The findings show that counties with larger Roma population shares tend, in general, to report higher segregation alert rates, especially at class level. At the same time, the results also show that this relationship is only partial. Several counties report levels of segregation that are either substantially higher or substantially lower than what would be expected based on demographic composition alone. This

is an important finding because it suggests that school segregation in Romania cannot be understood simply as a demographic outcome. Rather, it appears to reflect a broader combination of territorial, institutional, and administrative factors. In this sense, the study supports the view that segregation persists not only because of the distribution of Roma communities, but also because of differences in implementation, monitoring, and local educational practices.

The article also highlights a broader governance problem. Romania has, on paper, a clear anti-segregation framework, supported by legal prohibition, a national desegregation commission, and a new monitoring mechanism. However, the available evidence suggests that the gap between formal commitment and effective implementation remains significant. The Ministry's own report points to incomplete reporting and unequal data quality, while both census and school-level ethnicity data remain affected by the limitations of self-identification. These limitations do not make the analysis unusable, but they do narrow what can reasonably be claimed. The findings suggest that the current monitoring system is useful as an initial diagnostic tool, but not yet sufficient as a fully reliable measure of the territorial distribution of segregation. This implementation gap also resonates with broader inclusion-policy findings showing that targeted projects may generate local benefits while still failing to secure durable policy change and institutional sustainability at the systemic level (Bergmann, 2026).

Future policy efforts should therefore focus not only on strengthening legal commitments, but also on improving reporting quality, increasing follow-up capacity, and paying closer attention to counties where reported segregation exceeds the broader national pattern. At the same time, future research would benefit from combining administrative data with qualitative investigation at local level, in order to better understand the institutional and social mechanisms through which segregation continues to be reproduced.

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