



'You belong to several places at once'

Sari Gardner and her husband David have been living in Romania since 2002, helping Roma communities access the good news of Jesus in their own languages. They have four children. Sari writes:

Living here has helped me to see what it is like to live as a member of a minority, and how successful mother-tongue education can be. Our children have gone to local schools, from playschool to university.



Romania has a good system of mother-tongue education for ethnic minorities. I am from Hungary, and there are so many Hungarians living in Romania that there are Hungarian schools in many parts of the country. This means that the children are taught in Hungarian from playschool onwards, and learn Romanian as a second language. That makes for longer schooldays, but the children get to know their ancestors' culture, language and literature.

Our children are fluent in Hungarian and English (their father's language), and are doing satisfactorily in Romanian too. They were able to learn to read and to study new concepts in a language that they already spoke.

They have made friends in the various schools they attend, they have been exposed to different opinions and encouraged to think about issues that in their home countries they wouldn't have given a thought to. We hope that they have developed compassion and understanding because of these experiences.



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Our daughter Aniko says, 'While you do not really know where you belong, you do belong to several places at once to some extent.'

They have experienced hardships too. They have always been considered outsiders and maybe always will be. Even though they speak the same language, people in a small village do not easily accept newcomers, so



while making friends is possible, it is often difficult. Classes in a village school are also small, and the teaching might not be at the same level as in a larger town or in the West.

However, they have not had it as hard as some minorities, for instance the Roma people we work with. Roma children in our village have to learn to read in a language that they do not speak very well. They need to fight old customs and prejudice if they want to succeed at school. They usually do not have the equipment to follow classes online.

Our younger son Erik has helped us provide books and an alphabet app for these children. He has translated children's books, typed up the text and tested the app. He plays with the children when they come for reading lessons and encourages them to go to school. He is only nine years old but already knows that not all of us have the same opportunities in life.