

NEW CHALLENGES BEFORE ROMA EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

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THE EDUCATIONAL REFORM IN BULGARIA AND THE CHALLENGES BEFORE ROMA EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

Since January 2008 a structural reform is going on in all schools in Bulgaria. The reform will have a significant impact on the process of Roma educational integration. . The reform combines the parallel introduction of two principles; from one side the principle “the money follows the student” is introduced through defining the so-called ‘unified standard of expenses’ i.e. annual allowance for the education of one student that includes all possible expenses and is not divided into type of expenses. The budget of a single school is defined only on the number of students enrolled in it. This supports the big city schools and would harm the schools in the small settlements which will face the danger of announcing bankruptcy due to the small number of students. From another side the so-called ‘delegated budgets’ principle is introduced according to which the school receives its budget on the basis of number of children and the school director decides how to spend the money: for utilities, teacher’s salaries, out of school activities and so on. The unified standard of expenses is different for the different types of schools. According to directors’ opinions and municipal educational experts’ opinions however its value is rather low which predefines the

CHANGES IN THE NATIONAL EDUCATION ACT

Changes in art.26 of the National Education Act published in State Gazette, # 50/2008 provide opportunities for intercultural education and promoting educational integration.

(4) (New - SG, # 50/2008) Full-day schooling and lunch are provided for the traveling children from 1st to 8th grade in the focal points schools. The financial resources for this will be defined according to the financial rules of § 6v/5.

(5) (New - SG, # 114/2003, previous § 4, compl. - SG, #50/2008) The financial resources for transportation according to § 3 and for full-day schooling and lunch according to § 4 will be specially provided from the central budget and will be allocated to the municipalities on the basis of the norms adopted by the Council of Ministers with the decision for implementation of the state budget.

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closing of many schools. In March 2008 the municipalities have decided to close 320 schools (most of which are in small settlements) which is around 15% of the primary schools in Bulgaria.

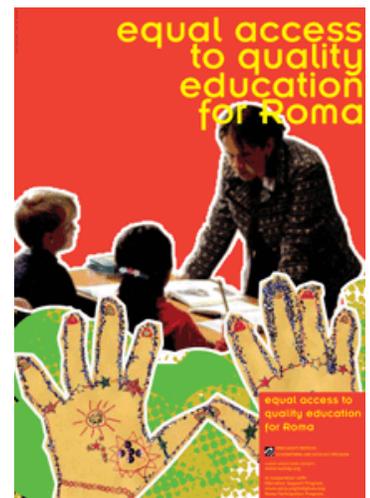
As a result the educational reform raises several problems and challenges before the process of Roma educational integration:

1. Most probably the number of dropping-out children will be sharply increased: many of the parents would not let their children study in schools in other towns no matter that free transport is provided. At this stage the Ministry of education does not provides special funds for work with the parents so that they are convinced in the necessity of education for their kids.

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EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ROMA

A new report of EUMAP (Open Society Institute – Budapest) has been published at the end of 2007. The report is a part of a series discussing the situation with the access to quality education for Roma children in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe. The report can be downloaded in Bulgarian and English from www.eumap.org



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2. The quality of the educational process in the small (village) schools will be worsened due to the minimal budget they would have. Most probably it will not cover any extra curricula activities, study-halls (the so-called *zanimalni*) or free-elective subjects. In addition, teachers would be paid significantly less than their colleagues in the big city schools.

3. Many of the focal-points schools do not offer good accepting environment for minority children; many of these schools enroll Roma children for the first time and the teachers do not have experience in work in multicultural environment. At the same time often the Bulgarian parents have a negative reaction to the process. At present no financial resources are allocated for such

activities that would result in an appropriate environment in the focal point schools;

4. The forms for intercultural education (ICE) will be reduced to minimum: at present intercultural education is applied through the Roma culture classes, Roma mother tongue classes and few other initiatives. Due to the limited budgets however most of the schools would not be able to afford any elective classes which would destroy the existing now initiatives. At the moment the Ministry of education does not plan devoting special resources for supporting the elective classes in the small schools or for supporting Intercultural education initiatives.

WHAT ARE THE STEPS FROM NOW ON

Unavoidably the changes in the educational system require more effective and efficient measures for attracting and keeping Roma children at school as well as for ensuring the quality of education. Assigning financial resources for elective courses and afternoon classes is a good investment that will result in keeping the children at school. There are several ways to do this

1. Including the elective courses in the general horarium of the teacher. The lessons of "Roma folklore and culture classes" are taught by teachers from the given school: teachers in History, Literature, and Music, teachers for the afternoon classes, etc. In the beginning of every school year Center "Amalipe" organizes a training for teachers who will teach Roma folklore for first time and maintains permanent communication with them during the entire school year in order to inform them about new methodological and pedagogical publications in this field. In this way teachers start teaching Roma folklore subject motivated and well-prepared and the results usually come soon.

2. Establishing National Program for Support of Intercultural Education (ICE) within the budget of Ministry of Education and Science. Through such a program schools could receive financing for organizing elective courses in ICE as well as for afternoon courses additional to the delegated school budget. Such a program could be similar to the other National programs within the budget of MoES that exist now.

3. Incorporating the opportunity for elective courses in ICE within the full-day schooling in the so-called "focal-point schools" ensured through art. 26, 4 of the Public Educational Act. Following the changes in art. 26 of PEA specific financial resources outside of the delegated budgets will be provided to the focal-point schools for ensuring full-day schooling for these pupils who travel in order to attend the school. Roma culture lessons and other forms of ICE could be organized within the frames of the afternoon classes ensured by these changes.

4. Incorporating component "activities for integration of minority children" or "activities for ICE" within the formula for defining the delegated school budget. If this component is not included in the formula by the Ministry of Education and Science, municipalities could incorporate it as "additional component" in the formula for distributing delegated budgets at municipal level. In this way schools will receive additional amounts for intercultural education and part of them could be dedicated for elective courses. Many municipalities have done it this year. It is very important that the focus is put not on the number of Roma children at school but on the additional work for their integration and quality education.

5. Preparing and implementing projects with focus on ICE.

EXPERTS FROM REGIONAL INSPECTORATES OF EDUCATION DISCUSSED ROMA EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION UNDER THE DELEGATED SCHOOL BUDGETS



The number of Roma drop-outs of school most probably will sharply increase from the beginning of next school year, the small schools which have not closed doors this year will hardly cope with their budgets. On the other hand, in many of the focal point schools which will have Roma children for first time there are concerns and fears how this would be accepted by students and parents, how the teachers would cope with the new situation of teaching in a multicultural environment. These were pointed as the sharpest problems before the educational integration of Roma children during the National working meeting “Educational integration under the delegated school budgets”. The meeting was organized by Center “Amalipe” with the support of Open Society Institute – Budapest and it took place from July 6th to 8th in Lyaskovetz. Experts from 15 Regional inspectorates of education (RIE) responsible for the educational integration took part in it.

The report “Equal Access of Roma to Quality Education” published by EUMAP (OSI – Budapest) was presented during the meeting. The participants discussed how to apply its recommendations under the conditions of educational reform from January 2008. It was discussed also the present stage of “Folklore of the ethnoi – Roma folklore” program as well as the effect of the delegated budgets on intercultural education. Deyan Kolev, Teodora Krumova (Center Amalipe) and Boyan Zahariev (OSI – Sofia) moderated the meeting.

The participants agreed to propose to the Ministry of Education and to the Ministry of Finance to establish a National Program for Support of Intercultural Education as a means for financing the elective classes and the

“afternoon classes” separately from the delegated school budgets. They will also propose the incorporation of additional component for schools that implement the Strategy for educational integration (approved by the Minister of education in June 2004) in the formula of the so-called “unified standard of expenses” (i.e. the sum provided by the Ministry of Education and Science for the education of one student).

It was decided also Center “Amalipe” and RIE to organize regional meetings with principals of focal-point schools in the six regions of Bulgaria and successful practices for attracting, keeping and integrating Roma children at school (such as Roma folklore classes), the main conclusions and recommendations of the report “Equal Access of Roma to Quality Education”, opportunities for financing Roma integration measures within the delegated budgets to be presented during the meetings.

THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE LOCAL CONDITIONS

For many people July is the beginning of the long-expected vacation; for us, it was the beginning of a month of extremely hard work: a long journey with dozens of meetings with school principals, teachers and other educational actors. We wanted to understand better the situation with all the new challenges that the introduction of the delegated school budgets and the abolishment of more than 300 schools put before the education of Roma children. We wanted also to advocate for incorporating Roma educational integration as one of the priorities in applying this educational reform.

We were provoked by the fears shared with us by many people engaged in education: teachers, principals, experts in Regional Inspectorates of Education, municipal officials. So we decided to make series of meeting with school principals in the six planning regions and discuss with them the opportunities for intercultural education and educational integration of Roma children in the situation of the delegated school budgets. We wanted to present them also the Roma culture program as one of most popular forms of intercultural education, as well as the calls for proposals opened at present and how in this situation the recommendations of the Equal Access to

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EQUAL ACCESS TO QUALITY EDUCATION FOR ROMA: MAJOR RECOMMENDATIONS

Recommendations on Monitoring And Evaluation

- Develop data collection procedures and mechanisms for education, to ensure that data on education disaggregated on the basis of ethnicity and gender are made publicly available.

Recommendations for improving access to education

- Provide full-day educational programmes in primary schools for disadvantaged children
- Instruct segregated Roma schools to adopt a “zero enrolment” policy, where this would not prohibit Roma children from effective enrolment in school.
- improve overseeing of the Teams for Complex Pedagogical Assessment, to prevent the enrolment of children without disabilities in the special schools.
- Require special schools to offer preparatory courses and other support for students taking the exam allowing them to transfer to mainstream schools
- provide incentives and support for the education of teachers who would like to teach Romanes as a mother tongue
- Support and foster in-service and pre-service teacher training courses covering language acquisition and methodologies for bilingual education.

Recommendations on improving quality of education

- Revise curricula and produce learning materials to take into account Roma history, culture and values
- Further revise the criteria for textbook creation and selection, to bring them into conformity with the principles of multicultural education
- Work closely with NGOs and community groups to ensure that efforts to improve education for Roma are coordinated, and that the school is truly responsive to community needs and interests..
- Strengthen anti-discrimination and anti-bias measures,
- Ensure that all schools, including special schools and segregated Roma schools, are inspected regularly and held to the standards defined by law.
- Promote the introducing of various forms of ICE, e.g. Romani culture classes, Romani mother tongue classes and out-of-school activities.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR FINANCING: HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OPERATIONAL PROGRAM

The announcing of a call for proposals is forthcoming

PRIORITY AXIS 4: AREA OF INTERVENTION

4.2. CHILDREN AND YOUTH IN EDUCATION AND SOCIETY

In 2008 only one call for proposals will be announced within OP HRD directed to educational integration: this is the area of intervention known yet from 2007 – the out-of-school activities grant scheme. This year its budget however will be two or three times larger; the exact total budget is being discussed now from the Human Resources Development Operational Program. There are several peculiarities of the call for proposals which will be announced by the end of this year:

- The call for proposals will have two deadlines for applying within projects within the same call;
- The budget of the projects should be between 20 000 and 100 000 BGN. The exact amount of the upper limit is being discussed now;
- Schools, municipalities, municipality units, out-of-school pedagogical institutions and NGOs registered within the Law for juridical bodies with non-profit goals can apply as leading organizations or partners.
- If a school is not a leading organization at least one school should be a partner
- The expenses per child within a project will be among 250 and 264 BGN (the total amount is being discussed at the moment)
- The maximum time frame of the projects can not be more than 24 months
- The program supports the so-called soft-measures; expenses for equipment or renovation are allowed up to 5%
- The payment of the projects approved will be as follows:
 - 20 % in advance
 - interim payments after presenting the necessary documents
 - final payment

The call for proposal has been approved at a meeting of the Monitoring Committee on 23 – 24 April 2008 and at present coordination procedure is going on

**You can find the full report and recommendations
at WWW.EUMAP.ORG**

WWW.SF.MON.BG

THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF THE LOCAL CONDITIONS

Quality Education for Roma report published by EUMAP in 2007 could be applied. And thanks to the EUMAP we managed to fulfill our intention.

We were first welcomed by the English language school in Shumen which opened its doors for the school principals from Tragoviste, Silistra, Varna, Dobrich and Razgead on July 15th, 2008.

The efforts and the support of the RIE experts from Burgas, Sliven and Yambol gathered more than 50 participants at the meeting in Burgas two days later. The meeting took place under the sign of the Burgas hospitality and the eternal rivalry between Sliven and Yambol. The schools which have already been working on the Roma folklore and culture program did not miss the chance to boast about their achievement in the educational integration, especially with their participation in the Children Roma Festival Open Heart. One of these schools has even created the motto for the fourth edition of the Festival. During the meeting some of the principals shared again their concerns about the problems which will just appear with the beginning of the school year. One of the directors from the schools which will have Roma students for first time said she was worried from the reaction of the Bulgarian students and parents. She was concerned that her colleagues were not prepared enough to meet the challenges of working in multicultural environment. She shared that in her opinion the educational system so far had not paid enough attention to this problem and it might turn into a serious conflict after the first school day on September 15th.

The opportunities for intercultural education in the situation of the re-structuring of the educational system discussed on July 18th, in Veliko Turnovo the school principals from North Central Bulgaria: Veliko Turnovo, Ruse, Lovech and Gabrovo districts.



A week later competing with the schedule of the summer vacations and thanks to the help and hospitality of the Regional Inspectorate of Education in Montana and the colleagues from SHAM Resource Center Foundation we carried out the similar meetings in Montana on July 23rd and Sofia on July 24th. The colleagues from Montana, Vidin and Vratsa, where there is already a tradition for introducing intercultural education shared that they most probably would not have problems with the adaptation and the integration of the children from the closed schools because they already have a culture of tolerance built in the schools from the region: within the desegregation projects, within the Roma culture program and so on. Similar was the opinion of the Sofia school principals who also enroll already Roma kids in their schools. The meeting in Sofia was visited also by the representatives of the Ministry of education: Asen Petrov, Director of Educational environment and educational



integration Department and Yosif Nunev, state expert in the MoES. So the directors from Sofia – district, Sofia – city, Blagoevgrad and Kyustendil had the opportunity to receive fresh information from the “source” about the policies the Ministry of education will lead in the future regarding the educational integration of Roma kids. “If you decide to join the Roma folklore and culture program you will be warmly welcomed in the big family of the schools which already have this subject – an initiative created by Center Amalipe and the Ministry of education and Science in 2002” – Yosif Nunev encouraged the participants.

The last station from our tour was Plovdiv but before Plovdiv we decided to cut the way short and to go to Dupnitsa in South-Western Bulgaria. On July 26, Deyan Kolev met more than 70 teachers and directors for South-West Bulgaria. The meeting took place in the city hall of Dupnitsa Municipality. It was initiated by Iosif Nounnev, PhD, state expert in the Ministry of Education and Science within the program for raising the qualification of teachers of the South-West University ‘Neofit Rilski’ – Blagoevgrad. Deyan Kolev presented the Roma folklore and culture program stressing that it had proved in practice its positive results. “Roma folklore classes provide you with a good opportunity to

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attract and keep children at school, to make the educational process attractive, to establish sustainable interaction with parents and to engage them. Within the conditions of delegated school budgets every additional elective class means additional expenses but Roma folk-

lore classes are strategic investment since they attract children at school and make schooling attractive for students and parents.” – outlined the lecturer. He also spoke about the opportunities for financing educational integration activities within the delegated school budgets as well as about opportunities for projects financed by different donors. Deyan Kolev presented the main recommendations of the report “Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma” prepared by Krassimir Kanev, E. Nikolov and Teodora Krumova and published by EUMAP as well as the ways these recommendations could be applied within the conditions of the structural reform in education.

The teachers and school principals present raised numerous questions about the necessity of comprehensive governmental policy for educational integration and ICE



They stressed the need of training in Roma culture and work in multicultural environment for all teachers. There are teachers who want to learn Romani language and opportunities for this should be provided. The participants also shared that Ministry of Education and Science does not promote and support their efforts for educational integration in the necessary degree.

Plovdiv welcomed us with same southern hospitality we remember from the summer of 2006 when we organized the first seminar there with teachers teaching Roma folklore and culture. The meeting on July 31st, 2008 was also an



occasion to meet again some of the colleagues as well as to establish contacts with new schools who will just now face the challenges of the educational integration. An additional stimulus for our successful work was the never-ending enthusiasm of the Music expert in the Regional inspectorate of education – Plovdiv as well as the relaxing environment in the renovated building of our hosts: Hristo G.Danov School in Plovdiv.

You will maybe asked whether we were tired at the end? We should have been... We ‘ve found that we have passed 2315 km for two weeks ☺ I do not know. But for sure we felt satisfied from the meeting of more than 250 teachers and school principals, from their willingness to work, their enthusiasm to succeed no matter of the difficult situation and the hope that we managed to help them in their efforts at least a little bit

THIS EDITION IS PART OF A SERIES DEDICATED TO THE EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION OF ROMA CHILDREN IN BULGARIA. YOU CAN FIND MORE INFORMATION AT WWW.AMALIPE.COM

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