



CENTER "AMALIPE"

INTERCULTURAL EDUCATION AND EDUCATIONAL INTEGRATION

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Education is an area where Amalipe Center has been active since its foundation and its contribution in this area cannot be disputed. The main cause of Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance is to transform school into a place where children could find themselves, a place where every child would be able to believe that he or she can be an excellent student, can be a winner, a place that would give children a chance to dream and be humans!

Any child can be an excellent student!

If you make a child believe that they can succeed and truly seek success, then you're able to find the key to success in children's development – and then no one and nothing could put obstacles on their way to achieving it. This is the basic approach that Amalipe has applied during the three-year program to reduce the dropout of Roma children from school implemented with the support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation. A key element of this approach is the introduction of intercultural education (with a focus on the introduction of Roma Culture Classes) as a means of preserving and renewing the cultural identity of Roma community, as well as fostering mutual understanding and tolerance between children of different ethnicities.

In terms of educational integration, Amalipe Center works in partnership with the Ministry of Education, its regional bodies, municipalities, more than 250 schools, more than 2,500 teachers, universities, and many cultural centers in Bulgaria.



The program is a three-year initiative, implemented with the support of the America for Bulgaria Foundation in the period of 2010 – 2013. It systemizes and upgrades the long experience of Amalipe Center and the hundreds of partner schools in the field of educational integration and introduction of elective classes in Roma culture. Its main objective is the prevention of Roma children dropout of school in the compulsory school age; solving the problem of the large number of absences and low grades at school, the relatively small percentage of Roma students continuing their education in secondary schools (high schools), the non-participation of Roma parents in school life and school management structures.

In the period of 2010 - 2013, the Program involved schools that educated children of mixed ethnic origin. Initially 34 schools were included during the first year. By the end of the project, the number reached 173.

Pedagogical concept

The basic concept of the Program is that dropping out of school is a pedagogical problem and its overcoming requires educational resources: social activities are not enough but only complementary. A change in the overall school environment is necessary: a change in the pedagogical methods used, in the educational programs, in the organization of learning, in the interaction with parents. Interactive and intercultural education is the best pedagogical basis for overcoming dropout: an example thereof can be seen in the efforts of schools that have adopted the elective classes in Roma culture.

The pedagogical concept is based on several principles:

- **Each student can be an excellent student.** Each student is good at something. The idea of what a good student is may be different from what we perceive as “good at...” A student may be good at math, but another one may be good at being a leader and organizing others or being good at navigating through the woods, or even a good musician. Our approach is to find the area in which a student is good; help a student become an excellent student in this area by further developing his/her knowledge and skills in a socially acceptable manner; by the area they are good at, develop additional knowledge and skills in other areas that are in the curriculum.
- **Setting of high expectations.** Everyone strives to achieve what is expected of him. Very often the development of Roma children is determined by the low expectations that others (especially teachers) have for them. Therefore, if we want children to achieve better outcomes and develop constantly, newer and higher expectations should be set for them. Each child must be shown that he or she can succeed – and further on, higher goals and expectations should be set for her/him. Every child must be taught to believe that “I can ...” and “I want to ...”.
- To make school attractive, it is necessary for children, their parents and the local community of which they are part, to recognize school as “their” institution. On the one hand, they should be able to find something from their culture at school, and school should represent a favourable environment for

every child. In addition, it should also be involved in local community life. On the other hand, it is necessary that everyone can see the practical benefits of school: the curriculums and the whole educational process should cover areas that provide life skills and competences. (“Non scholae, sed vitae discimus” - “Not for school but for life we learn”);

- **School may be a well-functioning system.** A well-organised school is the best guarantee for recruitment, retention and success of students. A well-organized school knows how to involve and empower parents, it has the resources to offer a wider range of educational opportunities beyond one-shift education in class and apply modern teaching methods (including intercultural and interactive education).

Main activities of the program

One of the main approaches used in the program is “teachers teaching teachers”, i.e. using the experience gained so far by schools working successfully to reduce the dropout of Roma children from school. For this purpose, a group of “mentoring schools” was selected. These are schools that have experience and success in their efforts to attract and retain Roma children in school under the program for the introduction of elective classes in Roma culture and other programs. They support new / pilot schools in the development and implementation of school programs for dropout prevention. Each of the schools involved in the program must adopt its School program to reduce dropout, which includes activities for creating a favourable environment to support quality education and educational integration of Roma children. Each program must include the following elements:

- Training all teachers to work effectively in a multicultural environment carried out by specially trained teachers (so-called Mentors).
- Introducing intercultural education: by elective courses in Roma culture, extracurricular activities, introducing intercultural elements in the subjects of mandatory education.



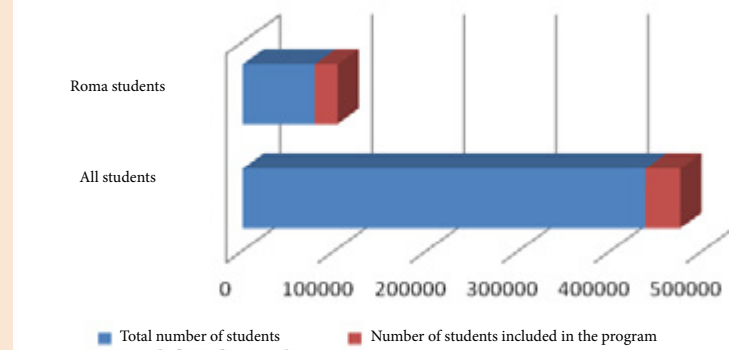
- Activities for the empowerment and involvement of parents: establishment of an active school board and inclusion of Roma parents; creation of a parent club of active parents to engage parents in solving problems related to children at risk of dropping out; organizing community discussions / parental lecture courses and "school for parents" on burning issues.
- Creation of a school parliament - with students of mixed ethnic origin (where it is possible) for active involvement of students in school life; engaging and empowering them to make decisions regarding their education at school; support for children at risk of dropping out.
- Peers helping peers (tutors): by this practice, students who have achieved good results at school are included as mentors / tutors to students who have problems with dropping out (low school marks, absence from school for various reasons, problems with other students, problems with early marriages, etc.).
- Individual work with those at risk of dropping out: making a profile for children at risk of dropping-out; preparing a portfolio of each child who is included in the elective courses of Roma culture, in which materials are collected for the work and development of the child.

Results

During the three years of the program, the number of schools increased progressively: 34 in the first, 90 in the second and 173 in the third year. A total of 37735 students entered the classrooms of these schools at the beginning of the school year 2012/2013 (for the three years of the program, it included a total of 45,446 students), and Roma children represented 65% of them. And although our goal is a complete change of the learning environment, we have set the goal of a more concentrated impact on the most vulnerable groups – 4th, 7th and 8th grade (since these are the grades in which children need to be prepared and motivated to continue their education to the next stage). We tracked the developments and achievements of the children included in the elective classes of Roma culture to test the hypothesis that these classes invariably contribute to keeping children at school and achieving higher educational outcomes.



% of students included in the program in 2012/2103



For the last three years (2010 - 2013) the program covered about 8% of the students in the primary level of education and 24% of Roma children in schools in Bulgaria.

The change is most tangible and visible however in schools which have been involved in the program at the earliest or participated in the second year, thus applying its elements for longer time. The fact that 18 of them became from pilot to mentoring schools, comes to prove that each school can be a desirable environment for students.

The school Program for dropout prevention is an essential tool for planning of activities for keeping children at school. Defining the objectives and the target group which it wants to impact, each school can decide what specific actions can be implemented for retaining and attracting children, depending on the specific problems faced. Generally, all school programs provide activities in the following areas:

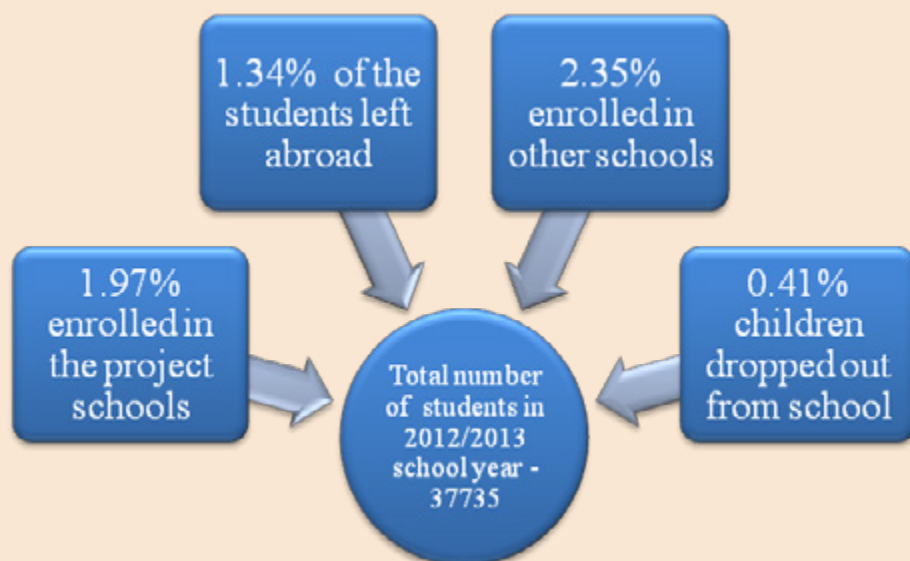
- Training of all teachers to work effectively in a multicultural environment. During the 2012/2013 school year, 81 teachers were trained as mentoring teachers who implemented monthly trainings in the pilot schools. Why did we choose this approach? The idea came from the teachers themselves: the vast experience they had gained needed to be shared and passed on to other colleagues in a very practical way, an experience that we only systematized and brought together. As a result, we ended up with about 2200 teachers and principals involved and trained.
- Introduction of mixed groups (groups involving children from different ethnic backgrounds) in the classes of Roma culture. From the first to the third year, their number also progressively increased as the number of schools: from 633 students in the first year of the program, their number reached 4162 in the third year.
- Activities for the active participation of parents in school life: in the third year of the program 129 parent clubs have been established and started to work actively. Over 380 lectures were



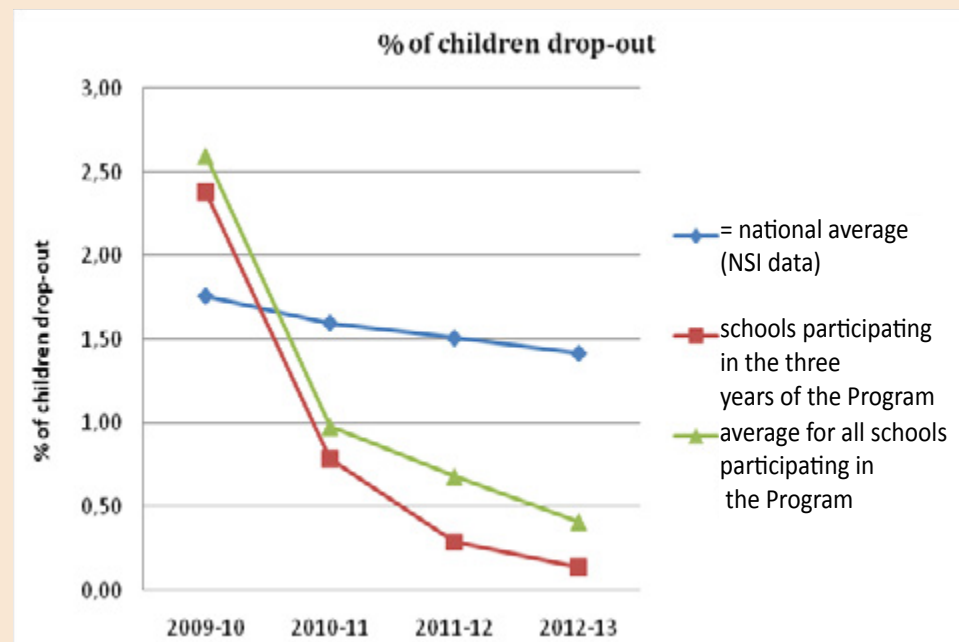
organized, as well as “Schools for parents”, lectures, discussions and a variety of extracurricular activities. As a result Roma parents were involved in 50% of the school boards.

- Activities for involvement of the students: over 146 Student parliaments were created and over 750 students-mentors were involved in supervising their peers to help for the retention and learning motivation of their classmates.
- Individual work with children at risk of dropping out: preventive activities were implemented for every student at risk of dropping out - 1087 children were at risk of dropping out and the regional coordinators of Amalipe Center together with school teams and moderators from the Community Development Centers worked with these children by making profiles and implementing daily care.
- In 2012, the model was complemented by the activities of the Community development centers created by Amalipe in Novi Pazar, Kamen, Peshtera, Etropole, Byala Slatina and Pavlikeni, as well as Strazhitsa, Radnevo, Dolna Banya and Knezha. They motivated and organized the parent community to support better education of Roma children. Their activity completed the created pattern, turning school into a centre for the local community.

At the end of the school year 2012/2013 out of the total of 37,735 students:

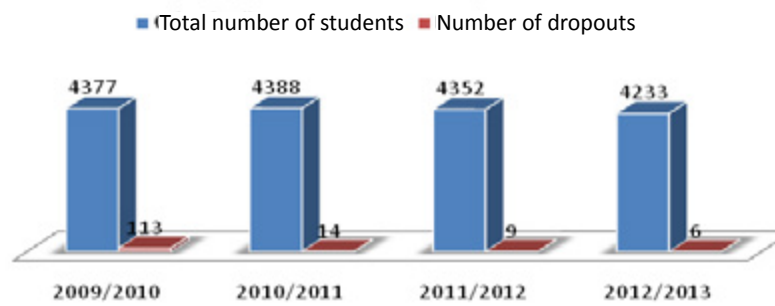


As a result of the interventions of the program, the level of dropouts in the 173 schools participating in it was reduced from 2.60% (the average rate for the year preceding the year in which the school was included in the program) to 0.41% at the end of the school year 2012/2013 (157 students dropped out). Only 14 out of these 157 students were from the risk grades (seven students from the 4th grade and seven students from the 7th grade). And the fact that only one of the dropouts is from the Roma culture classes shows the undeniable contribution of these classes for the attraction and retention of children at school.



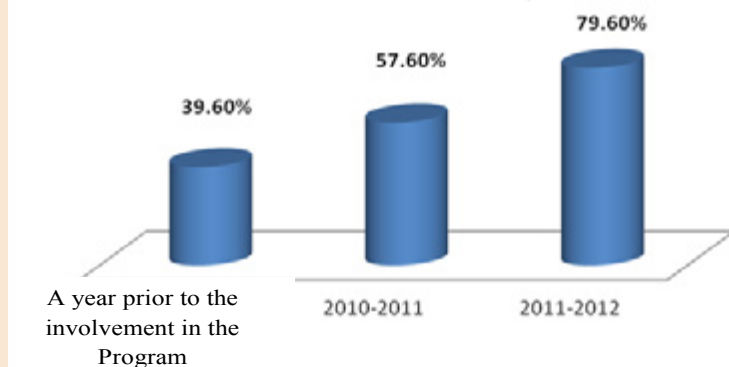
For the three years of the Program, the number of students “saved” from dropping out exceeded 1100 children.

Results of the schools participating in the three years of the program



The average number of absences (including all absences - excused and unexcused) in the schools involved in the Program in school year 2012/2013 dropped to 28.6 absences per student, compared to 110, which is the critical limit adopted by the Ministry of Education. Moreover, the average number of absences per student in the classes in Roma culture was 15.12 (including all absences, excused and unexcused), which indicated that the concentrated action and program activities significantly lower the level of absences.

% of students continuing their education in secondary schools



The Program has had a serious impact on the number of children continuing their education in high schools. The activities to achieve this goal are various: motivational campaigns, joint initiatives with high schools, meetings with successful young Roma, etc. As a result, the number of students continuing their education in high schools doubled.



Best practices in working with students at risk¹

Case study: Adrian is a student from Vasil Levski school, village K. The student is the fourth child in a family that is well-off. He has the examples of his elder brothers, two of whom have completed secondary education and one has completed primary education. However, the student attended school sporadically, and was often absent from school.

The school management is trying to cope with the problem by all traditional methods. Neither the penalties imposed, nor the suspension of child allowances or sending of letters to his parents by the class teacher helped resolve the problem. The mentoring teachers Maya Zrdavkova and Vasil Dimitrov were included in the solving of the problem. Two classmates-mentors were assigned to Adrian: one of them who enjoys prestige among his classmates and the other one is the best friend of Adrian. The two boys took to heart and very seriously their task to help their friend change his attitude towards school. Every morning they went to Adrian's home to go to school together. When this did not work, they informed the class teacher and mentors. For a long time, the home of Adrian was frequently visited by Mr. Dimitrov. Many discussions were held with the parents and with the student himself. The reasons were sought for his apathy and measures identified to increase his interest in school. As a result, the student did not drop out of school.

Next year, with the help of his mentors, Adrian was able to find a suitable friendly environment. A group of Roma boys with higher motivation to learn

accepted him and it made him feel more comfortable at school. His knowledge of biology and geography raised his prestige among his classmates and he gradually earned their respect. This contributed greatly to increase his motivation to learn. He began to regularly attend school and successfully completed his primary education. Now Adrian is continuing his secondary education at the Agricultural High School in Sadovo.

In 2011/2012 school year the pedagogical team of Amalipe Center was enlarged with four regional coordinators. In the following years, due to the increased number of schools, they became six. Their role was to visit each school and methodologically support the teachers and principals to resolve cases of children at risk of dropping out and successful integration of children from ethnic minorities.

¹ Children's names have been changed or are indicated by initials. With initials are shown also the names of the towns.





The community moderators from the Community Development Centers (CDC) were actively included in the overall work under the Program for reducing the dropout rate of Roma children (Center Amalipe has created CDC in 11 municipalities - Veliko Tarnovo, Pavlikeni, Dolna Banya, Peshtera, Novi Pazar, Kamenno, Strazhitza / Lyaskovets, Knezha, Byala Slatina, Etropole. Together - school, regional coordinators, community moderators and local communities managed to achieve impressive results in solving the problems faced by the educational integration.



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Case study: In early May, the 14-year old B. shared with the school principal the intention of her father to “marry” her to the 10-year old G. and stop her from school. The schoolgirl had very good rates, she was very motivated to finish school, and although her family was one of the poorest in the village of Pleven region, the girl came to school every day. She was actively involved in school initiatives and often helped younger students staying after school with them.

The headmistress took prompt measures. She files a signal to the police station - Pleven and informed the mayor of the village. The parents of both children were called for conversation in the presence of representatives from the Child Pedagogic Department and Child Protection Department. It was explained in detail to the parents of B. what rights their child had and how they might be deprived of parental rights and subject to criminal liability. The father admitted that he did not know about this and he regretted his actions... He was ready to cooperate with the institutions. But the father of the “groom” did not agree. He claimed that the bride was now property of his 10-year-old son. The representatives of the Child Protection Department and the Child Pedagogic Department explained in detail that such an action would be immediately indicted for pedophilia and rape (suspecting that the groom’s father intended to personally benefit from the juvenile “bride”) and domestic violence, for which the law provided imprisonment of 10 years. At the end of the meeting the parents of both children signed a document not to get their children married until the age of 18 years and they were warned that they would be closely monitored. B. is temporarily accommodated in a protected home.

Both children continue their education. Since the beginning of the school year 2012/13 B. is a regular student in the sixth grade. She graduated with good grades and dreams of continuing her secondary education in “hairdressing” in the district town after finishing her primary education in the village. G. successfully completed fourth grade. He avoids talking about what happened and prefers to play with his peers. The neighborhood police officer and the mayor monitor the behavior of B. and G. During the last year, the Municipality of Pleven raised more than 10 charges against parents who did not allow their children to live their childhood.



Case Study: *Most of the students from sixth grade (90% are Roma) stopped attending school regularly after Christmas vacation. Children were actually at risk of dropping out and inability to complete the school term and the school year. A day before the official end of the first term, there were only three in the class with mark different from poor; The problematic class was problematic not because of ignorance but because of frivolous attitude towards education. Students had arrogant behavior towards their math teacher, the subject in which there were many bad marks. The class had the greatest number of absences - excused and unexcused.*

To react to the situation the headmaster, the regional pedagogical coordinator of Amalipe and the parent club initiated in the beginning of February a parent meeting was with the presence of students and parents from the “problematic” class. The parent club provided the presence of the parents. The meeting was attended by all teachers who have lessons in this class, representatives of the Student Parliament, the mentoring teacher T. Kostovska and the regional coordinator. All of them discussed how to reach a joint decision instead of blaming each other. They began the meeting with the mutual agreement that absolutely everyone was responsible for the situation. The representatives of the Student Parliament expressed their readiness to help children involving them in school initiatives. “We are challenging them: prove that you can!” The first proposal was to prepare the appropriate presentation of the class on April 8. “Why do you want to hear bad things about yourself? And how will others understand that you can be better?” Representatives of the parents and a

part of the parent club also supported the idea. Mrs. Temenuzhka Kostovska got students and parents acquainted with the performances planned in March and April and offered them to choose what activities they could be involved in. Students from the Student Parliament offered their help for catching up with the curriculum. The parent meeting ended with the proposal of the headmaster that parents could also be present during the classes in the next 2-3 weeks.

In the next few months, a total change happened in 6th “B” class in school. Parents were included in the classes where the children had discipline problems (those who had the opportunity and had the time); additional work was carried out with students with an additional math, Bulgarian, English and geography classes (including all teachers of the school); the class was actively included in school initiatives organized by the Student Parliament and a few of the girls became part of the Roma culture group and started serious activities to learn about Roma songs and dances. The first opportunity for performance was the occasion of the International

Roma Day - April 8. The students were part of the organizers and participants of the school initiative, attended by the Mayor and several city councillors. At the end of April again a parent - student - teacher meeting was held at which the headmaster expressed her thanks to all who were involved in solving the serious problems with the class. Also an improvement of the grades rate and a dramatic reduction of absences were noticed. A promise was given: If the class continued to be diligent in the educational process and active in extracurricular activities, they would receive a special prize at the end of the year - a trip to Veliko Tarnovo for the Roma Children Festival “Open Heart”.

In early June, dance groups from the classes of Roma culture, the Secondary School Hristo Smirnenski - Koynare took part in the 10th Children’s Roma Festival. Under a lot of applause, the girls Valya Betova and Penka Belyakova performed their dance to the music of a popular Russian romance. Their performance in the costumes and their cheerful mood were noticed by the huge crowd and they often posed for photos in front of the camera. The girls who won the heart of the audience were precisely the sixth graders from the “problematic” sixth “B” class.

A week later, the school year was over. At the initiative of the parent club, the notebooks with grades were given to the students in the solemn presence of students and parents. The class teacher indicated good average grades and only two students had bad grades. The students who were most active in extracurricular activities received certificates by the school management. Thus, with a joint effort a class of 26 students, 18 of which were at risk of dropping out, was saved.





Case study: Gyunay and Tunay are two brothers who beg and are often absent from school. They have poor discipline and low grades. Both parents are uneducated and have other four children, two of whom are deaf. The parents are powerless to deal with the situation and stop the children from begging.

Once the situation was discussed with the Headmaster of the school, the community moderators from the Community Development Center and the student parliament, the children in risk were included in the student parliament. With the help of their classmates from the student parliament, they began to participate in various activities; they were assigned responsibilities. Gradually they began to change their attitude and take responsibility for what they did. The fact that they would be assigned tasks for which they were responsible, and then receive the deserved compliments from peers and teachers gradually convinced them that they could handle it. This increased their interest in school where they already felt significant. This made them more motivated to reduce their absences from school and not to beg.

Case study: Anife is in 8th grade. Throughout the first term of the school year she did not attend school. Her family has 10 children, the father is unemployed and the mother is in another maternity leaves. Her parents rely on social benefits and monthly allowances. Their ignorance towards their children led to the "marriage" of Anife during the summer vacation, i.e. after the seventh grade. After an abortion she had "the marriage" was terminated and Anife was sent to her aunt in Greece. After finding out that she had returned from Greece, the class teacher, together with the parents club, prepared an individual plan for the return of Anife to school with the opportunity to complete her primary education. One of the parents from the parents club undertook the task to talk to Anife's parents because he was close to them. This contributed to the return of the student to school. From January to the end of the school year, she had no unexcused absences, and regularly attended school. She successfully completed her primary education.

Case study: Angelina is in the 6th grade. Her father would not let her go to school as Angelina complains that the older boys are teasing her. Thanks to a member of the parent club, Angelina's parents understood how important it was for their daughter to attend school. The girl's father attended all training sessions held for parents every month. A conversation was carried out by the teacher and the headmaster with the father, as well as regular visits of a member of the parent club in the family home. As a result, the student attended school regularly and successfully completed the school year.

Case study: *Kostadinka is a student in 6th grade at Hr. Botev School in P. town. At the beginning of the school year the student attended classes. After about a month, she stopped going to school and left home with her boyfriend without notifying her parents.* After a week stay in a close family, she came home and told her parents that she wanted to live in a family relationship with her friend who was in the tenth grade. Meanwhile, Hr. Botev School was included in Amalipe program to reduce dropout of Roma children from school and the school formed a group of Roma culture elective classes. The group was heterogeneous and included students from different ethnicities. Kostadinka was invited to participate in the activities of the group of Roma culture and was included in the target group of students at risk of dropping out. A number of measures were undertaken to return the student to school. The group leader Mr. Kaltchev together with teachers working on the project “No absences Measure” repeatedly visited the home of the student and met her parents and other influential local Roma. A positive result in resolving the case was achieved after the meetings with Kostadinka’s boyfriend and his parents, but mostly her participation in the group of Roma culture contributed to the positive outcome. In the beginning Kostadinka attended only the classes of Roma culture but gradually she started visiting the other classes, too. The interdisciplinary relationships set in the learning material of Roma culture classes awakened the interest of Kostadinka, and of other Roma students to different school subjects and extracurricular activities. Kostadinka was keen on participation in all activities and events of the group of Roma culture, and she regularly attended classes and successfully completed the school year.

Case study: *Margarita is 14 years old and is a student in 8th grade in Hristo Botev School, in the village of T. Surprisingly, after the New Year, the headmaster receives a medical note diagnosed with the pregnancy of the fourteen year old schoolgirl.* The girl is a quiet and polite child who is not absent from school and has relatively good grades. The class teacher of Margarita shares the same observations. After a meeting at school, the regional coordinator together with the moderator from the nearby Community Development Center and the headmaster of the school, visited the girl’s house, where she, her mother and her grandmother live. The grandmother began to tell the story because the mother’s hearing and speech are impaired. She told that a few months ago the boy (the father of the baby) came from the town of K. to live with his brother, who was married in the village of T. He met her granddaughter and they started to date, he was often a guest in their home. Margarita (the girl) presented Giulio (the boy) to her parents as her first boyfriend. It looked like a traditional teenage story and no one expected it to develop into something more, as the community is not traditional and early marriages are not practiced.

At Christmas, it became clear that Margarita was pregnant, and the boy came to live with them. The moderator from the Community Development Center explained to the mother and grandmother of the girl that they would suffer sanctions of the law, since their daughter and the boy are minors. Eventually a decision was taken that Margarita would continue to go to school until the end of the first term, and then she would continue with individual education for health reasons, to complete her primary education. This agreement was reached by the headmistress of the school and the parents of the girl and the girl herself. After the baby was born, it would be raised in a family environment with the help of Margarita’s mother, and once the child was one year old, Margarita could continue her secondary education.



Case study: Zlatka is a student at G.N.I. School in the village of G.I. A few consecutive school years, the student often traveled abroad, which made it difficult to learn the material and raise her grades at school. The school principal had a number of conversations with her parents about the importance of education. They were convinced of the abilities and skills of their daughter. In school year 2012/2013, the girl was included in the elective class of Roma culture. The teachers were actively and systematically working to create a supportive environment in the class – they observed her participation in various joint events, set a classmate mentor for her, included her in group works in class by carefully differentiating the groups and tasks. In this way the student was motivated; she started believing in her abilities, increased her grades and minimized her absences from classes. She successfully completed her primary education and continued her secondary education. She actively participates in extracurricular activities.

Case study: Stefan is a student in the fourth grade. He is the second child in a six-member family of satisfactory material condition. Since first grade, the student has had problems with discipline and attendance in classes. The reasons for this are that he did not attend kindergarten and did not receive proper upbringing. We put a lot of efforts to change his attitude towards the educational process. We originally made an individual profile of the student to identify the specific reasons for his behaviour and to identify the most appropriate measures for overcoming them. The child was under the daily supervision of the class teacher, the Commission dealing with antisocial behaviour at school, and the Community Support Centre Sadovo. For this purpose, the class teacher put a lot of effort towards the establishment of a regular dialogue with Stefan's parents. Full cooperation and support was received from them. One of the measures that were taken was to invite them regularly in classes. In practice, parents could see their son's behaviour and knowledge of individual subjects. An effective measure proved to be the unannounced visits by his parents in school. They came during the breaks and watched the behaviour of their son from aside. They stimulated him when behaving well and imposed penalties for negative behaviour. A very important role had also the individual work with Stefan and his involvement in school activities. This affected his private and personal responsibility very well in setting certain tasks related to the performance of organizational capacity. The greatest effect had his inclusion in the elective football classes which motivated him to take the educational process seriously and responsibly. Football is his favourite sport. The student was favourably affected by his classmates' initiative to lend him a hand and to help him with his homework in different subjects. They were constantly looking for him, controlling him and directing his behaviour in the right direction. Now Stefan is an example to his younger brother Stanislav, who is in first grade.



Case study: *In the village of V., the keen athlete Yanko of 5th grade does not have so many absences any more after sporting has been bound with school attendance. He remains in the list of students at risk, not because of absences but because his grades are still low. At the beginning of the school year, Yanko showed aggression toward classmates and some teachers.* With the help of other teachers, a representative of the parent club and the student parliament, the class teacher prepared an individual profile of Yanko and identified the specific measures that could be applied in his case. The individual profile showed that only football manages to keep his attention, so the school headmaster decided to overcome his absences and outbursts of aggression with his participation in the sports team. Thus, the child began to expend his excess energy in sports and kicking the ball, and not during classes at school. We are currently working with him to increase his grades.

Case study: *Radka is a Roma girl in 6th grade of secondary school Ivan Vazov, town of V. with good discipline and good grades, a child who can be relied on and who has not been defined as a student at risk. Unexpectedly she stole the jacket of her Bulgarian classmate Maria, and disappeared in the neighbourhood in the middle of the class. The friends of Radka (also Roma girls) were very surprised and horrified by what happened and they sought the class teacher. They were joined by Maria, the girl whose jacket was stolen – she was a great girl, she participated in all events. In addition, she was the president of the Club for friendship, she won the first place in a contest with her essay for tolerance and the traditional Roma dish for the celebration of Vasilitsa. She was familiar with Radka and they respected each other. Her family was also respected in the town. Her father was the chairman of the City Council. The girls went to the neighbourhood and took back the stolen jacket. Maria was a very sensible girl, she was angry but she wanted to find an explanation for the action of her friend. She said that the act of one person was not a reason to change the attitude to all Roma and it would not change her attitude even to Radka. Maybe she very strongly wanted to have such a jacket... The “violinist”, however, since then stopped coming to school. The class teacher understood that if she realized what she had done, it was normal to be ashamed of her actions. However, the problem further developed because her classmates ignored her, especially the Roma girls in the class, who were ashamed of her – they did not want to be with her and did not seek her. The class teacher told the class that anyone could make a mistake. Bulgarian students in the class were more inclined to forgive and not to remind her about this, but Roma children - not.*

To cope with the situation, the class teacher prepared an individual profile and started looking for a reason for what happened. Using information from other girls, as well as visiting the family neighbourhood, she found out

that the family environment is definitely relevant to what happened. Radka was abandoned by her parents. Radka’s mother and father separated when Radka was 1 year old and since then her grandmother took care of her. In the beginning the mother was going from town to town, and several years ago she returned to the neighbourhood. Now she lived in a van, in cohabitation with another man, with whom she had a child. Radka was not poor, she was well dressed, lived with her grandmother in a house which was well maintained, although the grandmother was not wealthy. She definitely did not need a coat but she did not explain why she took it. At each visit of the class teacher she apologized, saying she’s sorry, and was ashamed but she continued to take medical notes and did not come to school. There was also another problem – the grandparents who lived with Radka said that if she did not go to school and stayed at home – they would get her married. But she was one of the best at school. Her father lived in the town of B. He was a very wealthy man who loved Radka and took care of her, he regularly sent her money. He also had another wife who accepted Radka “as her child.” She had her own room at his home, a computer, an expensive phone, nice clothes ... everything. But she used them only when she was there. The father did not give them to her because when she



got home in V., they get “lost” with her numerous cousins. He wanted to take her to live with him but the mother did not let her go. According to Radka, her mother planed to address the Agency for Child Protection. Radka also wanted to live with her father but she was not allowed to because the court gave her to her mother who had never taken care of her.

After setting these details it became clear that the action of Radka was not the result of material needs, but the need to attract attention and thus to express her problems. Since her opinion as a child, but as the main victim in the relationship between her parents, was not taken into account, she obviously found a subconscious way through this action to “scream” that she needed to be heard. The subsequent measures were twofold: on one hand with the parents of Radka, especially with her father, to achieve a legislative solution to the problem, and on the other hand with her classmates, who had not only to accept her again, but also to help her overcome the shame of her action - to adapt again and to catch up with the material and not to drop out of school, which in turn would mean to get her married. After a discussion with the entire class, Maria became Radka’s mentor, who made every effort to convince the other classmates that they had to accept her again. Maria predisposed her to share more. This helped Radka to adapt again and to find her place in the class, but now she shared more, which was a prerequisite to prevent similar situations in the future.

Case study: *Albena is in the 4th grade of primary school Hristo Botev in the village of L. She did not get along with her classmates and isolated herself from them. The class teacher also did not like the girl. Once a mobile went missing and the class teacher accused Albena. She went to look for the phone in her house. The grandmother, who raised Albena, as her parents were abroad, was offended by this attitude. Although the next day it was found out that the child whose phone was missing had forgotten it at home and it was not stolen, the grandmother said that Albena would go abroad, she took her school leaving note and stopped her from school. Two weeks later, however, it appeared that Albena had not moved abroad but she stayed at home.*

След проведената среща с бабата на Албена директорът установява After meeting Albena’s grandmother the headmaster defined the problem. The grandmother did not object that the child would go back to school: the mother would go abroad but it is not certain that she would take Albena with her and the grandmother believed that it would be better for the child to go to school. But she wanted the headmaster to ensure that the child would have no problems at school. She had confidence in him. Albena also wanted to go to school, although she was slightly hesitant. She wanted to sit together with Simona – she did not get well with the others at all. She had participated in the elective classes of Roma Culture and she wanted to continue with it, as in the

summer there would be a festival in Turnovo. They agreed that Simona, one of the leaders in the class, would be a mentor for Albena and help her not only to catch up on the omitted material, but also to be accepted by the other children in the class and to get socialized. The headmaster held a serious conversation with the class teacher to change her attitude and not show bias towards students. As a result of the efforts, Albena successfully completed IV grade and continued in secondary school.

Case study: *Stefka was in the 8th grade and studied at a primary school in the town of B. (area of Montana). In the spring she stopped going to school. From conversations with other students, the class teacher realized that Stefka has “married” and she went with her husband to the village of P. (area of Burgas), where he found work. Stefka did not take her school leaving note and the headmaster considered her as a dropping out student.*

The class teacher and the headmaster informed the regional coordinator of Amalipe Center. Using an extensive network of schools, with which Amalipe works, the educational team got in touch with the school in the village of P., which was also working on the Program to reduce the dropout of Roma children from school. The headmaster of the school, with the help of local community leaders, managed to find the newcomers. As a result of the conversations held, they were convinced that the girl had to be enrolled and regularly attend the local school to complete her primary education. Otherwise, the “bridegroom”, who was an adult, would be sanctioned by law. Stefka was enrolled in school, she regularly attended classes and successfully completed her primary education, and her papers were sent through official channels from the school which she had left.





**COMMENTS OF
STUDENTS WHO
PARTICIPATED IN
THE PROGRAM...**

A: Do you think the Student Parliament contributes to more active and higher quality education at your school?

I like being at school and eagerly participate in extracurricular activities! In the Roma culture classes I learned a lot of stories from the life of Roma I did not know about. I participate in recreating some of the customs and traditions of Roma folklore with great interest

Desislava Radeva,
8th grade, Tsanko Tserkovski High School,
Nikola Kozlevo village, Shumen district



Many things in school depend on us, we sometimes give ideas to teachers and classmates for good events. We are looking after those who are not at school, we talk to them or their parents.

**Lyubomir
Lyubomirov,**
Grade 6,
Bratya Miladinovi School,
Cherna village,
Dobrich district



I am convinced that the creation and consolidation of a core of active students contributes to more active and quality education in our schools. On the one hand, the example of the active students motivates the others to express themselves, and on the other hand- the influence that the members of the student parliament enjoy in their classes, results to a positive change in attitude towards learning, school and education in general. In the activities we attract students at risk of dropping out, and we gladly recognize that in recent years we have no dropouts..

Valentina Miteva,
10th grade,
St. Paisiy Hilendarski
secondary school,
town of Varbitsa,
Shumen district



COMMENTS OF THE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PROGRAM



A: Do you like going to school and participating in extracurricular activities, what did you learn in the elective class of Roma culture?

I participate in the elective class of Roma folklore with great pleasure. These classes are the most pleasant for me because here I learn a lot about our culture and customs. During these classes we can dance, we can express our skills and give the best of ourselves so that people would like us.

Lyubomir
Lyubomirov,
Grade 6,
Bratya Miladinovi
School,
Cherna village,
Dobrich district

The Student Parliament promotes greater involvement of students in school life. The distance teacher-student is reduced, making us (students) more accountable and we act as agents for solving conflicts at all school levels.

Desislava Radeva,
8th grade,
Tsanko Tserkovski
High School,
Nikola Kozlevo village,
Shumen district

I love going to school. This is where I prove myself everyday. My interests outside school activities are various and therefore I am included in many extracurricular activities. As a member of the journalism club I attend all open sessions and public appearances of the elective Roma culture classes. My last report was associated with the celebration of Vasilitsa. Each meeting with the groups of elective classes enriches me with knowledge about the rituals and lifestyle of different ethnic groups in the country.

Valentina Miteva, 10th Grade,
St. Paisiy Hilendarski secondary school, town of
Varbitsa, Shumen district

COMMENTS OF PARENTS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM ...

A: Did you change your attitude towards school as an institution after your participation in the parent club and in the Program for Reducing the drop-out of Roma children from school?



It changed my attitude to the work of teachers and their efforts to keep every child in school - away from the street and bad habits. I'm not sure that other institutions apply so much care and diligence. By participating in the Program of Amalipe Center, I became more active, I freely communicate with parents of all ethnicities, I am not afraid to express my opinion, I created new friendships and I it is fun.

Christina
Aleksandrova,
parent from
St. Paisiy Hilendarski secondary school, town of
Shumen district

I've always had a positive attitude towards school as an institution and as a member of the parent club I have always shown respect. My attitude was further strengthened by my participation in the Program of Amalipe Center. I fully support the creation of Parent clubs and my participation in it showed me the difficulties faced by teachers in their daily work.

Teodora Radeva,
parent from
Tsanko Tserkovski secondary school,
village of
Nikola Kozlevo,
Shumen district

Yes, since my participation in the parent club, I understand how difficult it is sometimes for teachers, I understand that we need to unite together to get our children to actively participate in school life.

The school is very important institution in a village and we, parents, are always trying to help, as far as we can. We are glad that our teachers and the headmaster are interested in our children and comply with our opinion. Teachers visit our homes, they talk to us. We maintain close relationships with both teachers and the headmaster.

Tyurkryan Ali Sally,
parent from
Bratya Miladinovi school,
Cherna village,
Dobrich district



COMMENTS OF TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

A: Do you see a change in attitudes of students and parents to the school institution after your participation in the Program for reducing the dropout of Roma children from school?

My attitude is in very positive direction, because after the involvement of our school in the Program, the dropout has been minimized, i.e. we have no dropouts. Parental involvement in school life gets school close to the family environment and this makes students to be more responsible for the learning process. An additional reason is the involvement of students in school management by the Student Parliament, making them more accountable, and motivating them to achieve better results in the educational process and in extracurricular activities, which also is an example for other students. The work of Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance is effective and shows good results!

*Ivelina Hristova, a teacher at Tsanko Tserkovski school,
Nikola Kozlevo village,
Shumen district*



A Parent Club and a Student Parliament were established two years ago in the frames of the Program of Amalipe Center and America for Bulgaria Foundation – Reducing the drop-out of Roma students from school, implemented in Bratya Miladinovi School in Cherna village. We have regular joint meetings of the school management, the Student parliament and Parent club for the coordination of the project activities and responsibilities of the parents. This leads to increased involvement of parents in school problems, interest and understanding of school policy and responsibilities of the parents. There is not a better practice than showing to your students that their opinion is important; that they can really contribute to the improvement of school life. Children were fascinated that someone asked them how to do something. Initiatives were started aiming at helping poor students increase their health awareness, making presentations on various social issues, such as Roma woman, a woman's place in the modern world, why do I want to study, etc. Furthermore, student parliament managed to attract many of the parents in their initiatives. The members of the student parliament created their Facebook groups that eagerly commented on school life. Amalipe Center continued to be a member of these groups and to follow with interest what is happening ... and of course, to help any way it could. The students' parliament supports teachers in their work with children at risk. And – most important - empowers children, introduces them to new worlds. Achieving of high grades at school is a necessary condition for participation in the National Roma Children Festival "Open Heart" in Veliko Tarnovo. This is a very good and effective incentive for each student and it is also tested in time. By learning tales, celebrations, customs, songs of Roma folklore and emphasizing their connection with the folklore of other ethnic groups, each child has the opportunity to find their place in class and at school as a whole. Children along with their parents should not be ashamed of their origin – on the contrary – it should help them enrich their school life. This is the purpose of the Program.

**Daniela Stankova,
headmasterr of Bratya Miladinovi Primary School,
Cherna village,
Dobrich district**



COMMENTS OF TEACHERS AND HEADMASTERS PARTICIPATING IN THE PROGRAM

A: How does the establishment of a parent club and a student parliament at your school within the program of Amalipe Centre motivated students to attend classes regularly?

The establishment of the parent club has helped parents to willingly assist and solve the problem of keeping students at school. They feel directly involved in the school life. Students are also very active in the student parliament and influence even more students with their enthusiasm to participate in various initiatives; Both parents and students now have greater confidence in the school institution and began to increasingly contact us for help as well as assist us when needed! Every last Wednesday of the month, there is a meeting of the parent club where we discuss what has been done in the past month and set tasks for the upcoming month.

Dida Stamboliyska,
Principal of St. Kl. Ohridski
Primary School,
village of
Aleko Konstantinovo,
region of Pazardzhik

Following the “empowerment” of students and parents to participate directly in the decision-making activities of the school, an increased motivation to prevent absenteeism is observed of the children at risk of dropping out of school. The members of the parent club and the student parliament have direct control over the school attendance and the extracurricular activities. Still, the greatest difficulties we meet are with the students who travel and are late, so they miss the school bus. Definitely, the participation of our school in the programme has achieved its targets to a great extent although the desired change happens slowly and with some resistance from some teachers and parents. I believe that with consistent and permanent impacts on all participants in the process we will strengthen the confidence in the school institution.

Meetings are held almost every month and if problems arise or a school event is arranged extraordinary meetings are convened. We also use the meetings of the school board and the scheduled parent meetings to promote the work of the parent club.

Daniela Petkova,
Principal of
Graf Ignatiev Primary School,
village of Graf Ignatievo,
region of Plovdiv





**A: In what activities of the parent club do you participate?
Are you an active member of the parent club?**

We take part in the following activities: preparation, organization, and realization of school activities and events; working with other parents from the village.

Participation in trainings, meetings with parents-activists from other schools; collection of folklore materials and museum exhibits; organizing and conducting school events: festivals, tours, help in cleaning the school and the yard, etc. We cannot help students with their homework but in order to increase their motivation we try to be active at school and take part in school activities. We often meet the principal and other teachers in the school through personal meetings in school; they visit us at home and we talk on the phone at least 2-3 times a month. The trust of the teachers flatters us but also makes us more responsible and proactive. The trainings with trainers and successful people from our ethnicity are extremely useful for us. We feel as leaders among the parents in our villages. We have learned more about the role of the school and family upbringing.

Petya Bencheva,
Tatyana Vasileva,
Borislav Petrov,

representatives of the parent club of Vasil Levski Primary School,
village of Vidrare, region of Sofia Region.

**A: Can you see a change in the attitude of the students
and parents to the school institution after your enrollment
in the programme for reduction of the number of Roma
children dropping out of school?**

The change is positive as parents and students have become active and equal part of the school life. The creation of a parent club and a student parliament at school increases the capacity and the self-organization of the parent community, the teachers, and the students. The main objective of our work is to improve student achievement and reduce dropping out of school. The communication with the families of students at risk of dropping out of school is not only with the teachers but also with members of the parent club. Students who have achieved good results are included as mentors to students who are having problems.

Yovka Rasheva, teacher at Hr. Smirnenki Elementary School,
town of Byala Slatna, region of Vratsa

Hristo Smirnenski Elementary School has been working on this programme for many years and there are already positive changes in the attitudes of many parents of students of the school. The creation of a parent club has promoted the realization of regular meetings on aspects of school life of children and on cases of children at risk of dropping out; through the creation of a student parliament older students meet their obligations and their behavior in school becomes more responsible. We are working purposefully for regular school attendance by students at risk through the closely established teacher-parent-student relationship and with equal inclusion of the three parties.

The change in the attitude of both a large part of the parents and the students is positive through their involvement and active participation in the school life. Seeing their role as equivalent to that of the teachers in the discussions on a particular case, they understand their relevance and ability to contribute to the resolving of any issue or problem and they get committed and willing to help when needed. The trainings for work in a multicultural environment conducted by Amalipe Centre are useful as they show many sides of the issues in the education of students from different ethnicities as well as options for solving those issues. Sharing experience and best practices between teams from schools across the country has an important contribution to finding adequate models to work with students and parents in the education system.

The present members of the educational team of Amalipe Centre work beautifully and always cooperate in case of problems and answer competently our questions. We hope this fruitful cooperation to continue in the future for the sake of the children who are our future.

**Evgeni Angelov,
Principal of Hr. Smirnenski Elementary School,
town of Byala Slatna,
region of Vratsa**



The educational program has been further upgraded during 2013 – 2015 under the name “Every student can be a winner”. The new two year-long initiative has focussed on improving and strengthening the model ***Inclusive intercultural school and on preparing the ground for significant expansion of the model in larger number of schools during the following years.*** The Inclusive intercultural model aims to:

- Reduce dropout and absenteeism of Roma students; and
- Improve rates of high school enrolment and graduation of Roma students.

Therefore it has set the following objectives:

1. **Differentiation** of the program intervention in different types of schools in order to achieve better efficiency (including cost efficiency) and effectiveness: although the key elements from the model are cross-cutting in all schools, the approach for achieving them could not be one and the same since the status and the motivation of different types of schools are different.
2. **Diversification** of the intervention: within the previous project we have developed mainly the school-centred and teachers-centred activities. The upgraded program continues developing them combining with parents and community components;
3. Further extension of the model through incorporating elements for ***raising the number of Roma students who continue their education*** beyond 8th grade and graduate from high school;
4. **Preparing expansion of the model** in a larger number of new schools nationally after September 2015.

The development of the Program in 2013 – 2015 covers 170 schools and more than 37 000 students and includes the following activities:

- Testing of a new working model in 10 pilot schools with increased

intervention by the regional coordinators of Center Amalipe;

- Strengthening the elements:
 - Working with students: organizing training for capacity building of the student parliaments, campaigning for continuing education with youth clubs, created within the project “Youth is tolerance”;
 - Working with parents: increasing the capacity of the parent clubs, trainings for the chairs of the parent clubs, “Parents teach parents” - training held by the heads of the parent clubs, involving parents in the school activities, and so on;
 - Working with teachers: increasing the capacity of teachers, using the model “Learning through sharing experience”, organizing conferences in the municipalities, conducting online training to work in a multicultural environment; teacher training for Roma culture classes, National conference on Intercultural education, and so on;
- Providing methodological support and educational tools to attract the interest of Roma children and parents in the learning process;
- Empowering Roma parents and increasing their involvement in their children’s school life;







Amalipe Center for Interethnic Dialogue and Tolerance is a leading Roma organization, working for the equal integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society. The organization plays a central role in organizing a Roma civic movement and advocating for Roma integration within the state institutions. Amalipe is a member of the National Network of Children, the Civil Participation Forum, the National Patient organization, the European Women Lobby. Center Amalipe has its representatives in the Monitoring Committees of the Human Resources Development OP, Education and Science for Smart Growth OP, Regions in Development OP, Good Governance OP and the Partnership Agreement. At present the organization has Community Development Centres and Local community clubs in 11 municipalities and works with a network of more than 170 schools.

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