

## MINORITY EDUCATION FACT SHEET

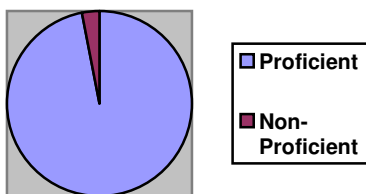
### Mission Mandate

The OSCE Mission to Serbia regards education as a fundamental human right. Education is considered a vital tool in building the foundations of democracy. It plays a significant role in conflict prevention and post-conflict reconstruction in Serbia. The OSCE Mission to Serbia also recognises the importance of education in combating manifestations of intolerance especially aggressive nationalism, chauvinism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism. The right of national minorities to receive an education in their own language and to foster an understanding of their cultural identity is regarded as imperative. This vision of education reflects the concept of education developed by the European Union, which sees education as an asset for the development of social and cultural cohesion.

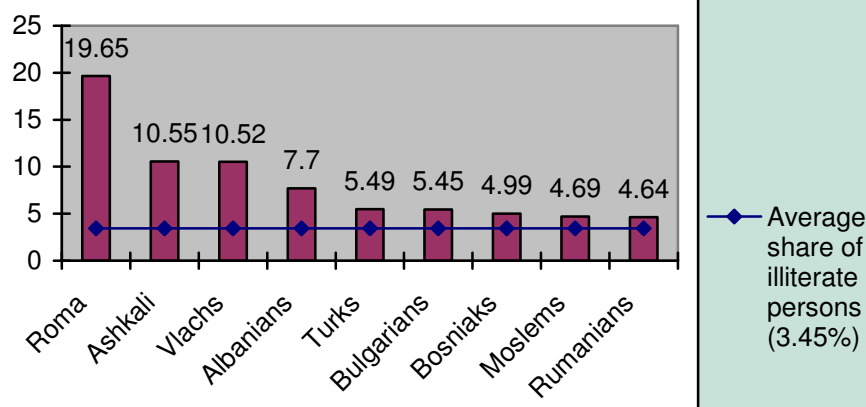
### Context

The Education program of the Equal Opportunities Section was launched in 2004, during the Bulgarian Chairmanship-in-Office of the OSCE.<sup>1</sup> The Bulgarian Chairmanship made education one of its priorities for the year 2004, only to be followed by Slovenia, who maintained a focus on this issue in 2005. Since the beginning of the program, two main areas have been in the interest of the Mission: 1) minority education, 2) education for tolerance/democracy. The importance of education programs is particularly highlighted by the data on illiteracy among minority groups in Serbia.<sup>2 3</sup>

**Serbian Language Proficiency of Roma who attended NGO-run preschool programs**



**Ethnic communities and their illiterate share above the republic average (%)**



<sup>1</sup> Every year, upon taking the OSCE Chairmanship, the designated Country informs the participating States about the “priorities” it wants to address during the year.

<sup>2</sup> UNICEF (2007), *Breaking the Cycle of Exclusion: Roma Children in South East Europe*.

<sup>3</sup> Aleksandra Vujicma, “The Background Paper on Education in Minority Languages in Serbia,” Vojvodina Center for Human Rights, Serbia.

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### Aims

The Mission's work in the field of education aims to support the implementation of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities, contained both in international instruments<sup>4</sup> and in the Serbian legislation.<sup>5</sup> The OSCE Mission to Serbia collaborates with State Institutions, (NMCs), NGO's and especially the Ministry for Education to prioritize education initiatives. The Mission aims to promote education for tolerance/democracy fostering democratic principles within education to create a more cohesive, inclusive and tolerant society. The Mission works to combat the growing isolation among national minorities in accessing, participating and completing an education. It supports the development of an inclusive curriculum, civic education, teacher training, specific teaching material and continuous staff development.

### Program Elements

Mission's activities have included the following initiatives:

- **Inter-institutional coordination** between the Ministry of Education, NMCs, relevant state agencies and the Provincial institutions in Vojvodina through a workshop co-hosted by the OSCE Mission and the Ministry;
- **Training for education boards of National Minority Councils** through specific programs conducted in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina;
- **Raising awareness on the importance of bilingualism** for national minorities (to learn the state language) through a mini-conference held in Novi Sad in cooperation with the Pedagogical Institute of Vojvodina;
- **Providing 6<sup>th</sup> grade textbook for Albanian students in southern Serbia** through the *We and the Others* project, which supports and promotes multi-ethnic dialogue among the students of ten high schools who are researching the local history of their multi-ethnic communities.
- **Supporting Belgrade Open School's Youth Portal** through a roundtable discussion organized by the Mission in March 2007. The Portal caters to the

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<sup>4</sup> International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (12/03/01), Convention on the Rights of the Child (12/03/01), Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (12/03/01), European Convention of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms; Revised Social Charter (22/03/05), Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (01/09/01), European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (01/06/06).

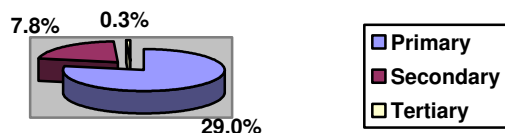
<sup>5</sup> According to the 2002 Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities – which is in accordance with international standards - persons belonging to national minorities have the right to an education in their mother tongue in pre-school, elementary and secondary school education. Responsibilities are divided between the State - responsible for guaranteeing this right - and National Minority Councils (NMCs) – responsible for representing national minorities in Serbia in the sphere of education, use of language, culture and media, as well as the use of national symbols.

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information needs of educators and brings youth together from different regions in an interactive online place that helps to build their knowledge and skills.

- **Supporting NGO Hajde da's Alphabet of Tolerance** project through the organisation of the event "Tolerance Day" in March 2007, which provided a forum for discussion among the various education, government, and international and domestic NGO participants on the importance of inter-cultural education. The Mission also supported the translation of the Alphabet for Tolerance textbook into several minority languages as an inter-cultural education teaching resource.
- **Working on Roma-related education issues** through its extra-budgetary contribution activities. Currently, the Mission is implementing a complex overall Roma Assistance Programme, which started in April 2006 and is funded by the European Agency for Reconstruction.

**School completion rate of Roma children in  
Serbia**



<sup>6</sup> United Nations Development Programme, Faces of Poverty. Bratislava 2005.