

Introduction

- Glad that the OSCE HDIM has selected education for Roma as a central theme for today's discussion.
- EUMAP monitored Equal access to quality education for Roma from 2005-2007, culminating in the publication of a series of reports covering eight countries in Central and South-Eastern Europe.
- An essential conclusion of this monitoring was that the measures needed to improve education for Roma would not benefit Roma only; initiatives such as improved teacher training, expanded access to preschool, or enriched course material will clearly make all students better off.
- Furthermore, recent research strongly supports the understanding that an integrated, high-quality educational system is ultimately more cost-effective and efficient.
- Stereotypes, misinformation and poor communication between Roma communities and majority society are perhaps the most serious obstacles to attaining true equality in access to quality education, and a real shift in attitude is needed from all involved, to move forward. The OSCE, its Member States, and the NGOs represented here are uniquely positioned to promote real progress at this critical time.

Main findings from EUMAP monitoring

- The lack of data available on Roma children's participation and performance in education is a serious problem in all countries covered. Several factors contribute to this situation:
 - Laws or interpretation of laws that prohibit the collection and processing of personal data in some countries (Hungary, Romania, Slovakia)
 - Generally unreliable data on the Roma population in general, leading to uncertainty about the number of Roma children of school age, which undercuts the trustworthiness of data that is collected. (all countries)
 - Data collected in an unsystematic way, with several bodies responsible for gathering data on education but not according to consistent definitions (Croatia, Montenegro, Macedonia)

We recommend: developing a set of indicators to guide governments in which data they should collect; pressure from the OSCE on governments to collect this data, disaggregated by ethnicity and sex; support to NGOs to develop awareness of importance of data among Roma communities, and encourage participation in data collection.

- Education policy is inextricably linked to many other policy areas: social welfare, health care, and infrastructure development.
 - Many aspects of national education policy must actually be implemented at the local level, yet local governments may lack the resources and/or political will to carry them out.
 - The impact of social welfare policies on Roma school participation and performance must be carefully monitored, as schemes designed to increase school attendance among Roma have been found to have a negative impact in practice.

We recommend that the OSCE, through promoting the Action Plan on Roma and other instruments, should encourage Member States to address educational issues as part of an overall strategy to improve the situation of Roma, and to ensure adequate coordination among the various ministries and local agencies responsible for implementation.

- Segregation remains a major, sometimes unacknowledged obstacle to Roma children's access to education.

- A number of countries do not officially recognise segregated schooling (Croatia, Montenegro, Slovakia) although there are convincing data pointing to the separation of Roma in schools and classes.
- Measures to prevent the incorrect placement of Roma children in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities have been inadequately implemented in many countries (Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary, Slovakia) and in other countries (Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) the scope of the incorrect placement problem remains poorly researched.
- As mentioned above, local authorities that are responsible for actually carrying out desegregation programmes do not always have the resources or interest to do so.

EUMAP calls for governments to formally acknowledge the problem of segregated schooling, and to assess the extent of this problem – including the incorrect placement of Roma children in special schools – in order to address it appropriately.

- In most countries Roma participation in preschool is minimal, although access to preschool is extremely important for Roma children, especially those who do not speak the majority language at home. However,
 - Some countries do not have sufficient space to accommodate all children of preschool age, and Roma are not always given priority placement where space is limited. (Priority for working parents in Serbia)
 - Preschools usually charge fees, which may be too high for many Roma families to afford.

We recommend expanding the provision of preschool to ensure all Roma children can participate; where necessary, central Government funds should be made available to cover preschool fees set at the local level.

- Teachers working with Roma students rarely have adequate formal training to enable them to meet the needs of a diverse classroom
 - In many countries, NGOs have offered training for working with Roma students, but these are often offered outside the accredited in-service training process, and are optional.
 - Teachers that do receive training have little support, such as mentoring, once they return to the classroom, to help them actually implement the methodologies they have studied.
 - Teachers working in special schools have an incentive to encourage the enrolment of children in these schools, and there are reports of “recruitment” of Roma children to special schools in Bulgaria and Slovakia.

EUMAP urges governments to make partnerships with civil society to develop teacher training for work in diverse, multiethnic classrooms, using child-centred techniques. There should be more support for integrated education, giving teachers with experience working in the special educational system a role in mainstream schools supporting those students needing extra help.

- Low expectations in the classroom and in society undermine Roma children’s own confidence, and limit their horizons.
 - Segregated classes using a “simplified” curriculum have been reported; Roma children are believed to be unable to understand certain abstract concepts or to follow in the majority language and so are relegated to these inferior-quality classes.
 - Few successful Roma role models to promote staying in school and the benefits of education

- Curricula rarely include Roma as contributing members of national society; textbooks seldom mention Roma, or may even portray Roma culture negatively
- Dismal physical conditions in many Roma-majority schools send a message that these schools are not worth the expense of basic facilities and maintenance.

We recommend expanding successful models of Roma teaching assistant programs, to give Roma children support in mainstream, integrated classes; allowing for curriculum development at the school level that takes into account the local Roma community; support to Roma-led NGOs promoting staying in school and working to prevent dropping out.