

Use of the Romani Language in the Education System of
Montenegro
(Case study: Schools in the Municipality of Nikšić)



BEST PRACTICES
for
ROMA INTEGRATION
in the Western Balkans

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Funded by the EU

Impresum

Written in December 2013 by:

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comma | communications design

This publication is produced by the author, with the assistance of the Best Practices for Roma Integration project (BPRI). This publication has been produced with the financial assistance of the European Union, under the BPRI project, implemented by the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR). The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union, nor do they necessarily reflect the policy and position of the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR).

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Senad Sejđović, activist and member of the Roma National Minority Council in Montenegro, selected the topic of education in Romani language for this study because he believes this is a key factor for the inclusion of Roma children in the education system. Knowledge of language also affects the realization of the rights of Roma in other areas: currently you cannot receive any personal documents in Romani language in Montenegro, you cannot have a court certified translator for a trial process because there are none for Romani in the country, etc. Changes are necessary, and where better to initiate them than in the education system where future generations should learn not only the language but also the culture of their ancestors. This is why the study emphasizes the use of Romani language in primary education and children would also surely overcome the language barrier easier with Roma mediators and assistants.



Primary school in Niksic

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I Aims of the study

There are two aims of this study. The first aim was to analyse the situation regarding the use of the Romani language in educational institutions, on the basis of a case study conducted in the municipality of Nikšić. The situation was analysed in relation to legislation, including the Constitution and laws of Montenegro, and legally binding documents (the Framework Convention for the Protection of Minorities, Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Convention against Discrimination in Education and Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2012–2016¹).

The second aim was to consider the importance of education in the minority language for Roma children. The study also takes into account the results of the corresponding measures in pilot projects, such as the introduction of teaching assistants and mediators to facilitate communication between school and parents.

The analysis includes recommendations for improving the existing policies in this field, which is crucial for the empowerment of the Roma community in Montenegro.

1 The Government of Montenegro, Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2012–2016, <http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=99613&rType=2>.

II Legal framework

In Montenegro, the Roma people are recognised as a minority in the National Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma, as well as through international covenants and charters that have been adopted². Based on these documents and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Romani language should be recognised as an official language, but is this the case?

Although Montenegro is a signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages³, the Romani language is not used as an official language. The Charter specifies that the Parties undertake, within the territory in which minority languages are used, according to the situation of each of these languages, and without prejudice to the teaching of the official language of the State, to make available education in the relevant regional or minority languages in accordance with the needs in the state and the number of children.

By ratifying the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, the Government of Montenegro recognised the Romani language as a separate

2 The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, European Social Charter, Council of Europe Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

3 Montenegro has submitted the First and Second Reports on the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, according to which the use of Romani lags behind other minority languages, such as Albanian; European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, <http://balkanshumanrights.org/bcms/wp-content/uploads/2010/02/Evropska-povelja-o-regionalnim-i-manjinskim-jezicima.pdf>.

minority language, but has not included it in the education system. In other words, Romani as a minority language has not been introduced as a mother tongue in educational institutions. The First and Second Reports on the Implementation of the Framework Convention and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages state that the reason for such situation is the lack of a standardised Romani language and qualified teaching staff who could deliver classes in the Romani language.⁴

The Constitution of Montenegro⁵ stipulates that Montenegrin shall be the language in official use in Montenegro, while Serbian, Bosnian, Albanian and Croatian languages shall also be in official use. The Constitution does not mention the Romani language. The national legislation does not define the concept of regional or minority languages, but Montenegro is a signatory to the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages which defines Romani as a minority language. The Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro deals with the issue of language under the chapter on the identity and culture of Roma, but does not mention their education. In the chapter relating to education, the Government of Montenegro encourages civil society representatives to stimulate the process of codification of the Romani language in order to educate teachers and introduce the language in the education system. This chapter also envisages the introduction of teaching assistants to support the education of Roma and Egyptian children.⁶ Article 13 of the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms reads:

Minority nations and other national minority communities and their members shall have the right to education in their own language and to adequate representation of their language in general and vocational education, depending on the number of students and available financial resources of Montenegro. [These rights] shall be exercised in all levels of education, [...] through special schools or special classes in regular schools. The language of instruction shall be the respective minority language throughout the teaching process.⁷

4 The first round of Montenegro's reporting on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was published in Strasbourg in 2010, the Report of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/report/EvaluationReports/MontenegroECRML1_me.pdf.

The First Report of Montenegro on the Charter, 2007, <http://postjugo.filg.uj.edu.pl/baza/files/268/jezici-montenegro.pdf>.

5 Article 13, paragraph 1 of the Constitution of Montenegro.

6 Children who belong to the population of Egyptians use the Albanian language as their mother tongue.

7 The Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms.

In the process of ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, in line with the existing practice of the official use of language in education, Montenegro has accepted that the commitments specified under Part III of the Charter would refer to the Albanian and Romani languages. The Albanian language is a school subject in the communities where Albanians live: in Podgorica (city municipality of Tuzi) and the municipalities of Plav and Ulcinj.⁸ The Romani language has not yet been introduced anywhere.

Use of language and script

The use of language and script in the teaching process is regulated by several laws⁹. As part of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, in 2006 Montenegro ratified an important document of the Council of Europe – the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, and when it became an independent state, it also accepted Albanian and Romani as minority languages. In 2011, the amended laws regulating the field of mother tongue education renamed the subject previously called ‘Mother Tongue’ into ‘Montenegrin, Serbian, Croatian and Bosnian’ – four languages of the same root and origin, as opposed to the Albanian and Romani languages, which are different.

Several documents establish the use of Romani as a minority language in education: the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015, Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2012–2016, General Law on Education – Article 22, and Law on Primary Education. The following laws in the field of education are also in line with the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: the Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms, Law on Pre-School Education – Article 24, General Law on Education – Article 4, and Law on Higher Education – Article 6.

Montenegro has accepted the use of minority languages in education through **the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages** and applicable legal regulations, but this has not been implemented in practice.

8 The first round of Montenegro’s reporting on the implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages was published in Strasbourg in 2010, Report of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter, http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/minlang/report/EvaluationReports/MontenegroECRML1_me.pdf.

9 The most relevant are the General Law on Education, Law on Pre-School Education, Law on Primary Education, Law on Secondary Vocational School and Law on High School.

School entrance tests

The use of progressive matrices has been accepted in order to ensure non-discriminatory testing of children for entry into primary education. However, although such testing is non-discriminatory, it is still not adequate because those who administer tests do not have knowledge of the Romani language and therefore children are not able to demonstrate their abilities properly.

Article 5 of the **Law on Minority Rights and Freedoms** provides that national minorities are entitled to full enjoyment of rights, which may not be below the achieved level, under equal terms and with a view to ensuring their substantial equality with other citizens. Articles 14 and 15 of the Law envisage mother-tongue education for members of minority nations and alternative studying of minority languages, while in schools where the official language is the language of instruction, the curricula shall include topics on the mother tongue and literature, history, art and culture of minorities [...], promoting mutual tolerance and coexistence.

The Law on Primary Education provides that schools with a significant percentage of minority students should implement an appropriate curriculum, which includes the mother tongue in lower grades of primary school and covers thematic units related to the history and culture of that minority community.

Flexibility of the curriculum (20% content freedom)

The curriculum of primary education has been designed in such a way that 20% of the content may be created by teachers, parents and schools, in co-operation with local communities, in accordance with Article 22 of the **General Law on Education**. However, despite this, primary schools with a significant number of Roma children have not adopted the curricula that would include Romani language classes or topics on the culture of this population. These schools have also not introduced teaching assistants as a support system or alternative forms of learning the Romani language.

III Description of the current situation

3.1 Introduction

The analysis of documents and the views presented by respondents in focus groups and interviews reveal that the reasons for the high illiteracy rate among the Roma minority are manifold, often intertwined and deeply rooted in the system, which further complicates the process of finding an efficient solution. The extremely adverse socio-economic situation of Roma families and the lack of basic conditions for normal mental and physical development of children is certainly one of the most serious obstacles to their enrolment in school.

Based on the analysis of collected data, we may conclude that the majority of Roma and Egyptians live in extreme poverty and have very poor living standards, especially in terms of health and hygiene. According to the Roma National Minority Council, 20% do not possess personal documents, so they are without health and social insurance and lack access to education. Approximately 28,1% are illiterate¹⁰ and some do not have knowledge of the official language. In 2004, there were only 20 high school graduates from the Roma and Egyptian popula-

¹⁰ Second Report Submitted by Montenegro Pursuant to Framework Convention, <http://www.mmp.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=108632&rType=2>

tion¹¹ and this figure remains low today. The majority of Roma and Egyptians are unemployed and those who are employed perform the least skilled and paid jobs, or gain minimum earnings by using self-taught skills and crafts, which puts them in an unenviable and extremely uncompetitive position in the labour market.¹²

The language barrier is one of the major obstacles to their integration and position on the labour market. Two aspects of the curricula are particularly important for Roma: their social inclusion and a bilingual programme. The availability of a bilingual programme is especially important in the early years of schooling – pre-school and lower grades of primary school, since in this period it is easier for children to develop basic skills and abilities in their mother tongue. Research shows¹³ that the quality of knowledge in the mother tongue is of great importance for the overall language development of children, and that a good knowledge of the mother tongue provides a solid foundation for acquiring knowledge of a second language. In cases where schools and education systems are ethnocentric and do not develop bilingual programmes for pre-school and primary education, the effectiveness of pedagogy is brought into question.

At the same time, the bilingual policy may be very expensive and in the case of Romani, which has a variety of spoken dialects and whose standardisation has been the subject of disputes, the official bilingual policy and the development of proper materials present financial and technical challenges for the Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, there are proven methods¹⁴ for working in bilingual environments and improving learning through fostering and nurturing the mother tongue that can and should be used in the classroom, even when there is no official policy of bilingualism.¹⁵

In Montenegro, there is no educational institution that provides classes in the Romani language. The Romani language has 14 dialects, but 99 per cent of the Romani-speaking population in Montenegro uses only one of them – the Gurbet

11 An interview with Sokolj Beganaj, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

12 The Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2012–2016.

13 The First Report of Montenegro on the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages: 2.2.2 Romani, Article 8 – Education, item 189, available at: www.coe.int/t/dg4/education/.../MontenegroECRML1_me.pdf.

14 Research increasingly shows the cognitive, cultural, and economic advantages of bilingualism (Hakuta & Pease-Alvarez, 1992). Children who have the opportunity to speak two languages should be encouraged to maintain both, so they can enjoy the benefits that may accompany the bilingual status. Children from homes where English is not the native language should be encouraged to cultivate their home language as well as English. In some cases, the parents of these children are unable to speak English. If the children do not maintain their home language, they risk losing the ability to communicate well with their family members (Wong Fillmore, 1991). Additional support for the home language can come from after-school and Saturday classes. More details are available at the Centre for Applied Linguistics, <http://www.cal.org/resources/digest/nrcrds04.html>.

15 The Open Society Foundation, http://www.opensocietyfoundations.org/sites/default/files/montenegro2_20071217_0.pdf.

dialect,¹⁶ which facilitates the process of standardisation and simplifies the possibility of introducing Romani as the language of instruction. However, presently there is no qualified staff who could teach this language.¹⁷

3.2 State institutions

In 2010, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights submitted the Report on the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, presenting all achievements in the fields of culture, education, the official use of language, public and private use of language and other areas envisaged under the Charter. In general, significant progress has been made concerning the Albanian language: its use is particularly evident in the education system, as early as pre-school. The University of Montenegro also launched a course for *Teacher Education in the Albanian language*. This is a four-year academic course, organised as a major course of study in Podgorica.¹⁸

On the other hand, the Romani language is not present in the Montenegrin education system at all, at any level of education. The main reasons specified in these reports are the absence of a standardised language and the lack of qualified teaching staff.

Nevertheless, there are some positive developments:

1. *Standardisation of the Romani language in the Western Balkans region*
A regional initiative was launched in Sarajevo for standardisation of the Romani language in this region, which may be a good first step¹⁹ towards the introduction of Romani in the education system.
2. *Romani language camp*
According to the Activity Report of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, in 2012 the first Romani language camp was organised in co-operation with prominent experts from Serbia and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. Fifteen participants aged between six and 18 completed the training. The aim was to

16 The Gurbet dialect is the basis of the Romani language used in this territory by two population groups: Roma originating from Montenegro use the Gurbet dialect mixed with Montenegrin, while Roma originating from Kosovo speak the Gurbet dialect mixed with Albanian.

17 Information received from Mr. Sokolj Beganaj, Advisor at the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights.

18 The Second Report of Montenegro on the Implementation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages 2011, <http://www.google.me/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=2&ved=0CC8QFjAB&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.gov.me%2FResourceManager%2FFileDownload.aspx%3Frid%3D122588%26rType%3D2&ei=GBVIUb-AJ8GvtQbnyIC4DQ&usq=AFQjCNGS55t5sjSOM4cEhHeZM4ldfkTEiw&bvm=bv.44990110,d.Yms>.

19 In 2012, the regional standardisation of the Romani language was completed by Prof. Rajko Đurić upon the initiative of the associations Kali Sara and Roma Information Centre. The countries that participated in the project are Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Croatia.

inform students about the standardised Romani language and the literature used in studying the culture and tradition of Roma in the countries of the region.

3. *The Ministry of Education and Sports agrees with the recommendations of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and supports the activities aimed at standardisation and codification of the Romani language.*²⁰ The possibility has been considered to create books in Romani, which could be used in primary education.

However, for the time being, due to the lack of qualified staff, it is not possible to regulate, evaluate, standardise or codify the Romani language to give it the form of a literary language, or to train professional staff that would teach and develop textbooks.

Teaching Albanian in schools

It is interesting that the Albanian language is used in primary education in settlements with a significant percentage of this population, but none of the competent institutions provides information about their exact number. At the same time, the Romani language is not introduced in schools where Roma and Egyptians represent a large minority, such as the primary school “Mileva Lajović Lalatović” in Nikšić where almost 50% of the students are Roma or Egyptian.

Parental advisory committee in primary schools

Each school creates a programme tailored to its specific needs. However, as not a single parent from the Roma and Egyptian population is a member of the parental advisory committee, language-related issues have never been raised at the “Mileva Lajović Lalatović” primary school. It is noteworthy that this school has around 200 students, of whom 89 are Roma and Egyptian. Parent-teacher conferences have always been attended by less than 10% of parents, which points to the problem of parental passivity.

Education reform in Montenegro (entrance tests for primary school)

The education system reform in Montenegro aims to create an environment that will take into account the individual needs of each child. For this reason, it is recommended to use progressive coloured matrices for testing the readiness for primary school because they are not verbal and assess the child’s perceptual abilities. Coloured matrices can be used to work with children who for some reason cannot understand or speak the official language, children with developmental challenges and children with social, linguistic and cultural barriers.

The test instructions are designed to ensure absolute understanding of the test, ways of testing and expected results. The examiner opens a notebook with the

²⁰ The Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro 2012–2016 recognised the problem and purpose of standardisation of the Romani language and included a set of measures aiming to solve this issue. For more information, please see: <http://www.gov.me/ResourceManager/FileDownload.aspx?rId=99613&rType=2>.

illustration and shows it to the child/respondent, instructs the child to look at the picture, while pointing to the figure and indicating that one piece is cut out from the picture. Then the examiner shows the pieces that include the missing part (each of them separately) and demonstrates to the child how to solve the task. After such demonstration, the child tries to solve the task independently. If the child does not pick the correct piece, the examiner continues to explain until the child has completely understood the essence of the problem to be solved. Thanks to this approach, this test is considered to be affirmative and non-discriminatory. However, Roma children cannot follow the instructions as these are not in Romani but in the majority language that they do not understand. This problem could be solved by engaging Romani-speaking assistants to administer the test.

3.3 International and local non-governmental organisations

An independent evaluation of the Roma Education Initiative (REI) Project²¹ was conducted at the end of the school year 2004/2005. It indicates a slightly higher dropout rate among the children in the first three grades of the target schools in Podgorica, Berane, Nikšić, Ulcinj and Bar. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, the average dropout rate of Roma pupils in these schools was 17.3 per cent in the school year 2005/2006. In the primary school “Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin”, which has the largest number of Roma pupils²², this rate reached 19.93 per cent, of which two-thirds were boys. In the Konik Camp²³ close to a quarter (22.3 per cent) of students dropped out. According to the Ministry of Education and Science, of all the Roma who dropped out from four grades of the primary schools included in the REI project, nearly three-quarters (73%) dropped out as early as in the first three grades. All projects implemented in co-operation with the Ministry of Education faced the common issue of language barrier, which they attempted to overcome by introducing assistants-mediators.

There are several projects in which Roma assistants were, or are still engaged, in primary schools. Reports often do not distinguish between (language or teaching) assistants and mediators, so the most common formally used word was *assistant*. In fact, these assistants performed the functions of mediators (facilitating communication between schools and parents and monitoring attendance).

21 National Report for Montenegro, http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/workshop/teseedokumentu/book/Montenegro.pdf.

22 Total 40% of all pupils in this school are Roma.

23 The primary school “Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin” has a special unit in Konik Camp which has only three grades and enrolls only Roma pupils.

3.3.1. The Roma Education Initiative was implemented in the period January 2006–December 2008, supported by the Roma Education Fund (REF)²⁴ and managed by the Red Cross of Montenegro. During its first programme in Montenegro, the REF funded training and fees for eight assistants throughout Montenegro. After the programme ended, the Ministry of Education no longer paid fees to assistants and their positions were gradually closed. In its new ongoing programme, the REF supports the engagement of six assistants/mediators. NGOs usually work with children/students from the Camps Konik 1 and 2 in Podgorica. All initiatives have been implemented in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Sports. Currently, there are three ongoing projects supported by the REF:

- a programme of student volunteering practice in the Konik Camp school (partnership programme of the NGO Pedagogical Centre of Montenegro, University of Nikšić, Ministry of Education and REF),
- support to the enrolment of children aged between three and six in the kindergarten Vrela Ribnička and
- support to the school “Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin” to improve school environment conditions for children living in the Camp Konik.

3.3.2. The project entitled *Support to the Full Process of Social Inclusion* is implemented through IPA 2010. The project sub-goals include the identification of organisational resources and the capacity to engage Roma and Egyptian assistants, ways of providing financial support, the selection criteria and process, and job description parameters. Particular support is provided to the primary school “Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin”, which is in the immediate vicinity of the Camp Konik. The Ministry of Education and Institute of Education, in co-operation with the Pedagogical Centre and Faculty of Philosophy in Nikšić, work in this school to improve the students’ achievements, reduce language barriers, provide support and assistance in acquiring social skills and knowledge, and provide support in raising the level of confidence and satisfaction. The Institute of Education monitors the implementation of tasks. Within these activities, a preschool programme was organised for 106 children in Podgorica and 45 children in Nikšić to facilitate their enrolment in primary school (all of these children were enrolled in the first grade of primary school). Currently, the focus is on the prevention of school dropouts through the development of social mediators in eight pilot schools (four in Podgorica, two in Nikšić, one in Tivat and one in Berane).

3.3.3. The above **Roma Education Initiative** was implemented in 2006 and included mediators who were financed by the Open Society Foundation.²⁵ The pro-

24 REF – Support for the RAE Population in Camps Konik.

25 The Open Society Foundation, http://www.osim.org.me/fosi_rom_cg/frame_programske_a.htm.

ject was a result of co-operation between the Open Society Foundation, Ministry of Education, UNICEF and Pedagogical Institute. However, as mentioned earlier, the assistants did not continue to work after the project ended.

3.3.4. The Institute of Social Inclusion (former Roma Scholarship Foundation) has been involved, since its establishment, in the education of Roma and Egyptians at the primary school, high school and university level. Scholarships for high school and university students include material support, but also a series of other activities aimed at monitoring their achievements, attendance, and mentoring support. During the implementation of the project *Support to Education of Roma Children from the Camps Konik*, the Institute of Social Inclusion encountered the issue of poor official language skills among the children attending the first four grades in a branch unit of the primary school “Božidar Vuković Podgoričanin”. Therefore, they organised additional classes in the official language to improve the children’s skills and enable them to participate in classes. The lack of language skills contributes to the dropout rate, but there are also other factors, such as tradition, early marriage, migration/travelling abroad, etc.

Language/teaching assistants

In spite of continuous success, the Ministry did **not** support the introduction of assistants as a systemic solution to the language barrier and dropout. The reason lies primarily in a vaguely defined role of teaching assistants in the project funded by the Open Society Foundation as a result of the failure to standardise their professional profile. The assistants’ role should have been to provide children with support in overcoming language barriers and learning throughout the process of education, which was not achieved during the project period.²⁶ In the project of the Roma Scholarship Foundation, the word *assistants* was used for *mediators* who have no educational function, but act as intermediaries between the institution and the parents and monitor the regularity of attendance and potential dropouts.

The Ministry of Education and Sports has introduced an entrance test system based on progressive coloured matrices, which is affirmative and non-discriminatory. However, it did not provide entrance tests in the mother tongue of Roma children, which it was required to do under the ratified Convention against Discrimination in Education – Article 5.²⁷

26 The Drugi izvještaj Crne Gore o ostvarivanju Okvirne konvencije, 2011. http://www.coe.int/t/dghl/monitoring/minorities/3_FCNMdocs/PDF_2nd_SR_Montenegro_mt.pdf.

27 The Convention Against Discrimination in Education – Article 5, <http://www.unmikonline.org/regulations/unmikgazette/05bosniak/BRacialdiscrimination.pdf>.

IV Case study: Schools in the municipality of Nikšić

Selection of municipality and settlement for the study

The municipality of Nikšić is the third largest municipality in Montenegro by the number of Roma and Egyptians, but there are no sufficient data on their education. For that reason, this municipality has been selected for the study.²⁸

In the municipality of Nikšić, Roma and Egyptians live mainly in four settlements: Brlja, divided in Gornja (Upper) and Donja (Lower), Naselje pod Trebjesom, Budo Tomović and Željezara. According to the latest 2011 Population Census, 483 persons in the municipality of Nikšić declared Roma ethnicity (0.67% of the total population), while 402 persons stated that Romani was their mother tongue (mainly using the Gurbet dialect from Kosovo). The number of persons who declared Egyptian ethnicity is similar (446) and their mother tongue is Albanian. According to the Census, there are 242 Roma and 237 Egyptians under the age of 18.²⁹ The overall situation of this population is explained more thoroughly in

28 Some local non-governmental organisations have tried to conduct research on the situation, but their findings are not relevant due to inconsistent samples.

29 The 2011 Population Census in Montenegro, <http://www.monstat.org/userfiles/file/popis2011/saopstenje/saopstenje%281%29.pdf>.

the Report on Local Participation by the SOS Hotline for Women and Children Victims of Violence in Nikšić:

One of the biggest problems of the Roma community is the large number of uneducated and illiterate persons. The main reasons are very poor living conditions. The children lack clothing and footwear, and do not have money for books and school bags. Schools are far away from the settlements and it is hard for them to walk so far, and the parents cannot provide money for transportation. Families live in dilapidated shacks that are in a very poor condition. Very few Roma are employed; however, their salaries are irregular and delayed for a few months, and they are forced to provide for a livelihood in different ways (to beg, collect waste, etc). As soon as children turn 15, their parents tell them that they must find a way to earn for themselves and their families. Some parents force children to beg and collect waste as early as at the age of eight or nine because they do not have any means for living.³⁰

Setting up focus groups

The case study was conducted through focus groups:

1. One group included assistants involved in the above projects – there were six respondents: three of them Romani-speaking and three Albanian-speaking Egyptians³¹.
2. Four focus groups included parents in the settlements where they live. The respondents were of Roma and Egyptian ethnicity. There were ten Roma parents from the settlement Brlja, eight parents of mixed ethnicity from Naselje pod Trebjesom, eight parents from Željezara and eight parents (50% Roma and 50% Egyptians) from Budo Tomović. In total, there were 34 parents who answered a set of questions about the use of the mother tongue/minority language in education of their children.

30 The Annual Report of the Centre for Roma Initiatives, The Position of Roma Minority and Position of Roma Women in Community, 2010. http://www.sosnk.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/Polozaj_romske_manjine_i_polozej_Romkinja_u_zajednici.pdf.

31 Roma speak the Romani language as their mother tongue, while Egyptians speak Albanian.

Case study findings

Two assistants or social inclusion mediators began working in the primary school “Mileva Lajović Lalatović” within the Roma Education Initiative project. A preschool programme was organised for 106 Roma and Egyptian children in Podgorica and 45 Roma and Egyptian children in Nikšić to facilitate their enrolment in primary school (all of these children were successfully enrolled). The assistants helped children with studying and overcoming the language barrier and communicated with parents and institutions. Currently, the focus is on the prevention of school dropouts through the development of detection mechanisms in eight pilot schools (four in Podgorica, two in Nikšić, one in Tivat and one in Berane).³²

The civil society sector proposed many more persons to be trained and to work with children, but only two assistants were recruited in the end. The project was completed and the assistants assessed it as very efficient. The children did not find themselves in unpleasant situations of not understanding what they were being told in class, their level of education improved and there were fewer dropouts.³³ However, when the project funding ran out, the institutions failed to recognise the necessity to continue with the activities and the assistants ceased to work in schools. This had a negative effect on children’s dropout rates.

In 2012, through the Ministry of Education and Sports, two assistants were engaged to participate in the entire process of pre-school and school enrolment. In this case, the assistants were involved in the process of testing children for entry into primary education by using progressive coloured matrices to evaluate the readiness for school. The test is not discriminatory, but it was not implemented by people who have knowledge of the minority language, and in this case the assistants did not have the opportunity to help children by explaining them what to do in the Romani language.

Only ten parents answered that their children had the opportunity to be tested in their mother tongue for entry into primary education, while others were neither aware of that possibility nor did they know that they could invoke this right. About 50% (17) of parents said that their child had a teaching assistant who helped them to overcome the language barrier, but also that their children were more interested in classes and that they themselves also had more initiative.

Half of the respondents (17) agreed that the introduction of the Romani language in the first fourth grades was a partial solution to adapting children to the official language, while the other half (17) of the respondents considered it necessary to

32 An interview with Tamara Milić, inclusive education advisor at the Ministry of Education and Sports.

33 An interview with Fatima Naza, a member of the NGO CRI. However, there is also a concern that the analysed samples were not suitable and therefore invalid.



introduce the Albanian language since it was understood by the majority of children³⁴. The reason for considering the minority language more suitable is that either Romani or Albanian is spoken in the family and children have poor contact with the language of the majority in the first years of education.

Language limitations of parents

According to parents, teachers always recommend them to speak Montenegrin with their children, which is not easy because the majority of mothers, who spend most time with children, are not proficient in Montenegrin. This leads to the situation where the child who has grown up in a family where the majority language is not spoken is not able to understand all lessons, gradually loses interest in learning and eventually drops out due to low school achievement. At the same time, the process of de-socialisation goes on in school because the initial interest and the opportunity to interact with children who speak the majority language fall to the background because of the language barrier. Thus, the lack of knowledge of the majority language further influences the decision to drop out.

34 The mother tongue of the 2.500 Egyptians living in Montenegro is Albanian.

V Conclusions

By examining the documents and comparing them with the field analysis, we reached the conclusion that although a number of legal provisions point to the need of introducing the Romani language into schools, the institutions have failed to find an appropriate mechanism to put that into practice.

NGOs are trying to address the problem of low participation of Roma children in education, but after completed projects – no matter how successful and justifiable they are – educational institutions do not follow the examples of good practice. Each initiative lasts as long as there are funds available for the respective projects. The concept of teaching assistants has proved to be very useful as it contributes to reducing dropouts and increasing the number of children who complete education successfully.

Generally speaking, by adopting the Law on Primary Education, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, Strategy and Action Plan for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians in Montenegro, the state has taken a series of legislative measures that fully meet the needs for preserving the identity, culture and schooling specificities of this population. However, the situation is different when it comes to practical implementation. Montenegro may be a positive example in the region in terms of the adoption of good policies, but a negative one with respect to the extent of their implementation at the local level. One of the measures for overcoming this situation is to create local action plans in order to raise to a higher level the ratification of documents and the implementation of the National Strategy. In the course of 2008, the municipality of Nikšić adopted

the Local Action Plan for Roma Inclusion, but only 9,000 euros were allocated for the needs of this population in the last four years, although the annual amount of 40,000 was envisaged.³⁵

The assistants or mediators who belong to the Roma and Egyptian communities constitute a bridge between the school and parents. They identify and resolve possible conflicts and provide assistance to teachers and students in case of poor language skills. In order to make this position sustainable, it is necessary to develop occupational standards and a detailed job description to provide the assistants with a legal basis. This would also enable them to gain the knowledge needed for helping children to overcome language barriers and social exclusion and contributing to equal education of children who experience discrimination.

In order to establish future policies in schools, it is necessary to raise the awareness of parents about the importance of their participation in the school decision-making system. In this sense, they should be encouraged to join parental advisory committees and take part in their work. Parents have a major role in the whole process, but in many cases they do not have the necessary knowledge of the official language and a large number of them are illiterate.³⁶ Therefore, they are powerless to help, despite their aspirations towards changes. They are not familiar with the process of enrolment or the importance of education. Therefore, the role of a mediator and assistant is crucial. According to Igor Lakić, a member of the Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, a short-term and temporary solution would be to engage specialised staff to deliver classes in the Romani language, while a long-term solution would be to send a number of students abroad to acquire qualifications in the Romani language.

In order to introduce language assistants, it is necessary to accept one of the codified versions of the Romani language. This is a necessary step for creating the professional profile of teaching assistants, issuing textbooks in the Romani language and using them to deliver classes in the Romani language. If children were educated in their mother tongue, they would certainly acquire knowledge easier and much better, and would have better school achievement³⁷. Besides, the introduction of the Romani language is necessary for its preservation and for the survival of the Romani cultural identity whose essential element is the language. Of course, Roma children also need to be proficient in the official language of the country. The official language classes could benefit from teachings in Romani, which would enable children to learn and understand better the official language and complete school successfully.

35 An interview with Mr. Mirsad Muratović from the local NGO "Romska nada".

36 According to NGO research, the illiteracy of this population exceeds 70%.

37 Research shows that the quality of knowledge in the mother tongue is of great importance for the overall language development of children, and that good knowledge of the mother tongue provides a solid foundation for acquiring knowledge of a second language. For more information, please see footnote 14.

VI Recommendations

Valid reasons for introducing the Romani language and assistants in schools are to:

1. Decrease and prevent dropout
2. Prevent or reduce illiteracy
3. Improve the educational level of Roma children, increase their attendance in secondary and higher education
4. Preserve the Romani language and culture.

Recommendations for state institutions, based on the case study:

1. The Ministry of Education and Sports should hire Romani-speaking assistants to administer the primary school entrance test, so that Roma children can understand what they need to do;
2. The Ministry of Education and Sports should accept the regional codification of the Romani language that is acceptable to the majority of Roma in Montenegro;
3. The Ministry of Education and Sports should introduce the occupational standards for the profile of a Romani teaching assistant (as a language assistant and mediator);
4. The Ministry of Education and Sports should introduce Romani teaching assistants in the education system;

5. Provide courses to educate staff for teaching in the Romani language and take affirmative actions to stimulate enrolment in these courses; in the absence of such courses, employ temporarily qualified staff from countries in the region;
6. Make available optional classes in the Romani language for pupils of the first four grades of primary school;
7. Introduce textbooks in the Romani language for optional classes; include topics on Roma culture, tradition and history in the textbooks for regular classes, and include Roma among textbook authors.

Recommendations for the civil society sector:

1. Enhanced work with parents on the importance of proper education in the form of public discussions, direct work with individuals, workshops, seminars;
2. Co-operation with teaching assistants and parents on monitoring attendance and school-parent communication.

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VIII List of the interviewed representatives of institutions and organisations

- **Ministry of Education and Sports**
Tamara Milić, Inclusive Education Advisor
- **Ministry of Human and Minority Rights**
Sokolj Beganaj, Advisor
Sabahudin Delić, Roma Decade National Co-ordinator
- **Committee of Experts of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages**
Igor Lakić, Member of the Committee
- **National Council of Roma and Egyptians**
Muhamed Uković, Vice-Chairman
- **Roma Scholarship Foundation / Institute of Social Inclusion**
Andrija Đukanović, Project Coordinator
- **Roma Education Fund**
Nataša Kočić-Rakočević, Project Co-ordinator
- **Delegation of the EU to Montenegro**
Jadranka Milić, Task Manager in the EU Delegation
- **Local Roma NGO “Romska nada”**
Mirsad Muratović

IX Questionnaires

Questions for assistants

1. In which period did you work as an assistant/mediator?
2. In which project were you engaged?
3. What were your tasks?
4. To which extent did the language barrier hinder children to follow regular classes and how did you contribute to solving that problem?
5. Your recommendations or suggestions to reduce the language barrier.

Questions for experts

1. Were some of your students Roma or Egyptian?
2. What was their academic achievement:
 - a) above average
 - b) very good
 - c) average
 - d) below average
3. Do you believe that the language barrier affected the quality of their learning during studies and why?
4. Are you acquainted with affirmative action programmes and legally binding documents related to the rights of minorities (Roma)?
5. To what extent are these documents applied in Montenegro?
6. To what extent do the absence of the mother tongue in education and simultaneous learning of the official language affect:
 - a – progress in education
 - b – social aspect of RE youth?
7. Do you have information about the number of qualified staff that could deliver classes in the Romani language?
8. Do you have a suggestion for improving the language policy in schools?

Questions for representatives of institutions

1. Are you acquainted with the legal framework for education in the Romani language in Montenegro?
2. Are you acquainted with the ratified document – the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which relates to education in the Romani language?
3. In your opinion, what are the reasons for non-implementation of the legal framework and ratified documents?
4. What has your institution done, within its mandate, since the ratification of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, concerning the introduction of primary school entrance tests in children's mother tongue?
5. What is the reason for failure of the project of introducing Romani assistants in the education system (the question relates to the Open Society Foundation project for the Ministry of Education and Sports)?
6. Given that the Strategy for Improving the Position of Roma and Egyptians envisages teaching assistants, how does your institution intend to implement these plans related to education in the Romani language?

7. Do you have some other plan to prevent dropouts of Roma children in compulsory primary education, which is largely a result of poor knowledge of the language of instruction?

Questions for non-governmental organisations

1. Have you had projects dealing with the issue of education of Roma and Egyptians?
2. Have you addressed, in your projects, the problem of the language barrier in accessing primary education? If yes, please explain what problems did pupils face?
3. If you have launched initiatives with respect to competent institutions, please give details.
4. Do you believe that the introduction of teaching assistants would facilitate solving these problems?
5. Do you believe that the introduction of the Romani language in the first four grades of primary school would partly solve the problem of children's adaptation to the official language?
6. Do you think that the level of language skills affects school achievement and why?
7. Do you think that the level of language skills contributes to dropouts and why?
8. Your recommendations for solving this problem.

Questions for parents

1. When you were enrolling your child in the first grade of primary school, what was the language of entrance test?
2. If the second language in your family is Albanian, was it possible to test your child in the Albanian language?
3. Do you know that your child has the right to be tested in his or her mother tongue?
4. When you were enrolling your child in school, did you know that your child had the right to be tested in his or her mother tongue?
5. Did your child have a teaching assistant? If yes, to what extent did it help the child to follow classes regularly?
 - a) Yes, it helped the child to overcome poor knowledge of the official language
 - b) It helped very little
 - c) It did not help at all
6. Are you able to help your child with homework in Montenegrin?
7. Yes, I am able to help?
8. I also have poor knowledge of the official language?

- 
9. No, I am not able to help?
 10. Does the child interact with the children in school who do not speak Romani or Albanian?
 11. Do you believe that the introduction of the Romani language in the first four grades of primary school would partly solve the problem of children's adaptation to the official language?
 12. Do you think that the level of language skills affects school achievement and why?
 13. Do you think that the level of language skills contributes to drop-outs and why?

