



PRESS RELEASE

What is happening to education for Roma in Macedonia?

Skopje and Budapest, 29 September 2008 - Macedonia could be leading the way as a model for the inclusion of Roma, with its commitment to multi-ethnic democracy. Yet when it comes to education, there is so little information available about Roma participation and performance that there is no way to ascertain any results, whether good or bad. In fact, the data that are available suggest that Roma children are far less likely to complete school, and that those who do finish may not have gained the skills they need to find a job after graduation. As a member of the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015" Macedonia has joined international efforts to address the problems facing the Roma community, and the work of civil society groups has focused on bringing Roma communities closer to schools. With real commitment on all sides, Macedonia still has a chance to show real progress in education for Roma.

These are the main findings included in the Open Society Institute (OSI) monitoring report *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma in Macedonia*. Synthesizing the findings of the existing studies on the issue as well as bringing to light new data, the report presents a comprehensive portrayal of education for Roma. Three case studies, covering Gostivar, Shuto Orizari, and Shtip, reveal important details about local practices and reflect what national policies mean to actual communities. The report was prepared by a team of local experts: Goran Janev and Anica Dragovic of the Institute for Sociological, Political, and Juridical Research, with the research support of Roma activists Redzep ali Cupi, Ibrahim Ibrahimi, and Sabina Mustafa.

The OSI report compiles the most relevant data that are available, which show that Roma are much worse off than the rest of the population. According to some estimates, as much as half of Roma children leave school early, and some research has suggested almost 25% of Roma adults have no education at all. However, the report cautions, many sources of data are unreliable. In particular, even the number of Roma in the country is disputed, with large differences between the estimates.

One area in which data are badly needed relates to special schools for children with intellectual disabilities. According to Asmet Elezovski, President of the Roma National Centrum NGO hosting today's launch event, "even though the law prescribes testing procedures to determine when a child is placed in a special school, some Roma children may be put into these schools only because of a language or cultural barrier, not a disability." The report recommends that the Ministry of Education and Science should undertake a comprehensive survey of special schools to determine how many Roma children may have been wrongly diagnosed.

Despite the country's legislation on the use of minority languages, Roma children have only very recently acquired the opportunity to study in their mother tongue in Macedonia. Beginning in 2008-2009, Romanes will be available as an elective subject in primary school, a very significant step forward in recognising the specific needs and interests of Roma children in education.

Pre-school is especially important for Roma children, but in Macedonia there are barriers to enrolment that some Roma families cannot overcome. In particular, the costs of pre-school are often too high for poorer Roma families. Without the vital preparation that pre-school can provide, Roma children often struggle in school, and may be more likely to drop out.

The report's three case studies, in-depth research carried out in different local communities, show how civil society organisations are doing important work to bring Roma children and families into the education system. Around Macedonia, NGOs are working to help get children enrolled, give parents a chance to take part in school affairs, and raise awareness about the importance of education for all. The Ministry of Education and Science should cooperate with NGOs to create further strategies and programmes that will improve educational opportunities for Roma. The Government cannot ignore the problems Roma children face in school, and a lack of data or information cannot hide the fact that these problems affect not only Roma, but all of Macedonian society.

Notes to editors

The monitoring of *Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma* is a multi country project covering eight countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015. The monitoring was carried out by the EU Monitoring and Advocacy Program (EUMAP) of the Open Society Institute (OSI), in cooperation with OSI's Education Support Program (ESP) and Roma Participation Program (RPP). Local partner NGOs and experts conducted the research in each country. The full text of the reports in English and in translation is available online at <http://www.eumap.org>. More information on OSI is available at <http://www.soros.org>.

The Macedonia report is being presented in cooperation with the Macedonian Roma National Centrum. The National Roma Centrum (NRC) is a civil and human rights based organisation, aiming to combat anti-Romani racism and human rights abuses against Roma. NRC represents and stimulates the active participation and integration of Romani people in line with the principles of a modern multiethnic European society. For more information see <http://www.nationalromacentrum.org>.