



Foundation Open Society Institute
Representative Office Montenegro

PRESS RELEASE

Montenegro Roma children still face serious barriers to education, report says

Budapest and Podgorica, 24 April 2008. Montenegro has taken up the issue of education for Roma and made commendable strides. Yet several obstacles such as the isolation of Roma communities and lack of access to pre-school, as well as an absence of basic information about the Roma population in the country, undercut the effectiveness of Government action. As a result Roma children in Montenegro cannot enjoy the same access to quality education as other children in the country, which jeopardizes their chances to fully participate in and contribute to Montenegro's future.

These are the main findings included in the monitoring report 'Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma in Montenegro'. Produced by the Open Society Institute in cooperation with the Foundation for an Open Society Institute Representative Office in Montenegro, the report is released today in Podgorica.

This comprehensive report, including original research from the three case study locations of Berane, Nikšić and Podgorica, is the most comprehensive report ever produced on the situation of Roma in education in Montenegro. The report also includes concrete and specific policy recommendations addressed at bringing about real change.

Montenegro's Government has recognised the importance of supporting the equal access of Roma children to schools by launching the 'Roma Education Initiative' (REI) and participating in the 'Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005-2015', an international effort to improve the social inclusion of Roma in Europe.

However, in Montenegro, NGO research estimates that up to 60 per cent of Roma children are outside the school system. The Government itself has acknowledged that well over half of the total Roma population in the country has had no formal education whatsoever. The failure and drop-out rates for Roma children who do attend school are also very high: according to Government data only 29 per cent of monitored Roma children who are enrolled in Grade 5 pass at the end of the year.

Segregation in separate schools or classes is a widespread problem in Europe which has been clearly condemned in the *D.H. and Others v. the Czech Republic* judgment of the European Court of Human Rights of 13 November 2007. In Montenegro, the Government has not formally recognised the existence of segregation not it has taken any steps to assess the extent of this problem, and therefore can not effectively address it.

In particular, the geographic isolation of some Roma communities has given rise to schools and classes where Roma predominate. According to the OSI report this situation will only change if better transportation to schools, and administrative procedures for registration that many Roma families cannot fulfil, are addressed.

Costs of pre-school in Montenegro are too high for many Roma families, even with State subsidies. Moreover, the available support is not extended to internally displaced people (IDP) or refugee families, which means that many Roma cannot benefit (there are an estimated 4,600 Roma refugees in Montenegro).

According to Tamara Srzentić of the Podgorica based Foundation for an Open Society Institute, and author of the report, “pre-school is extremely important for Roma children, to familiarise them with the school environment and the Montenegrin language, and can make a real difference in Roma children’s later success in school.” The report calls on the Government to implement affirmative policies for Roma children to give them priority placement in pre-schools.

The Government has introduced in a number of classrooms Roma teaching assistants who help Roma children in bridging language and cultural differences. This programme has proven successful in other countries in recent years. The report urges that the Government ensure that these assistants are effective and the programme can extend to more schools.

The OSI report also reveals serious gaps in the available data on Roma in Montenegro which stand in the way of policy development that is tailored to the needs of the community. Unofficial estimates by the UN and NGOs put the Roma population at about 20,000 although the census records fewer than 3,000. Their number on the census has actually declined since 1991, even though large numbers of Roma have settled in Montenegro following the conflicts in Kosovo and other parts of the former Yugoslavia. The Government’s failure to undertake more vigorous efforts to collect data calls into question its commitment to pursuing appropriate policy-making and monitoring.

Notes to the 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 Montenegro report was prepared in cooperation with the Foundation for an Open Society Institute – representative office Podgorica and was researched and drafted by Tamara Srzentic. For more information on the foundation see <http://www.osim.cg.yu>.