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INCLUSION OF ROMA CHILDREN IN B&H EDUCATION: PRINCIPAL CHALLENGES AND SOLUTIONS

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

B/S/C	Bosnian/Serbian/Croatian
CEE/CIS	Region of Central and Eastern Europe and the Commonwealth of Independent States
FWPSE	Framework Law of Primary and Secondary Education
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
NPA	Action Plan on the Education Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in BiH
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
OSF	Open Society Fund
SC UK	Save the Children United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nation Development Program
UNESCO	United Nation Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The right to education is a basic human and child right and the safest way to change a path from poverty to a decent life and from marginalisation to participation in society. And yet, a staggering 80% of Roma children in Bosnia and Herzegovina (B&H) are excluded[1] from primary schooling. This paper will deal with some of the issues related to the high level of Roma children's exclusion from education. It will especially focus on exclusion at the school level and it will propose recommendations and concrete techniques to alleviate this problem. Semi-structured interviews, focus groups and analysis of policy documents were used as tools in uncovering some of the reasons for the exclusion of Roma children from education in B&H. The priorities in this research were: firstly to recognize obstacles and inflexibilities in schools in B&H in regard to schooling of Roma children and secondly to identify the practices and opportunities which have been successfully developed at some schools and which can be used as a basis for future policy development and action.

Three policy options were examined against the current educational and socio-political situation in B&H. Firstly there is an overview of the Action Plan on the Education Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in BiH (NPA) as a main policy for education of Roma children. Within this option responsibilities for different aspects of Roma education are divided between several stakeholders, some of which are Ministries of Education and NGOs. This option, which has been implicitly put forward in NPA,

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[1] In this paper exclusion will be used as a term for non attendance or drop out of Roma children from education, because they so often encounter exclusionary practices and barriers, such as: prejudice, long standing discrimination, lack of understanding for their lifestyle, inability to pay the books and school materials.

involves no change of school culture and no responsibility for school attendance and inclusion of vulnerable groups such as Roma being taken by the schools. The position of this paper is that this option is unsuccessful in education of Roma and one that widens the gap between Roma community and the schools. Another policy option that is considered in this paper is that NGOs have a main role in supporting Roma children in fulfilling their right to education. This approach is already happening in several schools in B&H and to some extend it is producing good results. Still this approach is not without problems because NGOs are dependant mostly on funding by international organisations. Furthermore in the context of B&H, with well-developed network of schools and educational institution, NGOs most often have only temporary role.

The policy option put forward in this paper, as a most effective and realistic option, has been developed by examining some of the successful practices in educating Roma children encountered during research for this study and review of other studies. This policy option is related to the principles and values of inclusive education[2]. It will be argued that best results are achieved when school takes more responsibility for the education of Roma children. Adopting this policy option does not require additional resources, change of legislation or significant increase in work load of teachers and school management.

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[2] In this paper inclusive education is considered within following scope: 'Inclusion-'All for One and One for All' a philosophy which views diversity of strengths, abilities and needs as natural and desirable bringing to any community the opportunity to respond in ways which lead to learning and growth to the whole community, and giving each and every member a valued role. Inclusion requires restructuring of schools and communities'. Mason (1997) in Aspis (2001, p.129)

FIGURE 1: Techniques identified as successful for education of Roma children and proposed for schools

	Techniques	What it entails
For school principal and management	Prepare and encourage teachers to get more involved	Discuss Roma issues at the staff meetings. Encourage staff to show some flexibility towards life style of Roma and to give extra attention to Roma children. Examine major difficulties that staff encounters and help them to find a ways to overcome these.
	Seek support from municipality officials	Try to arrange meetings with head of municipality to discuss issues of Roma children education. Seek support from the municipality founds for books for underprivileged Roma and other children.
	Seek support from international organisations	Through letter, e-mail or phone call describe situation in your school and ask or support in educating Roma children.
	Investigate why children drop out	Collect available figures on Roma children in your area, from NGOs or municipality. Visit Roma settlement with Roma representative. Talk to parent and children about reasons for school non attendance and offer your support.
	Techniques	**What it entails**
For teachers and all school staff	Show willingness to include Roma	Provide little bit extra attention to Roma child, even if only few minutes. Give praise for every achievement and support where child needs it. Address bulling or any discrimination towards Roma child. In accordance with their age talk to class as a whole about equality and respect for others regardless of their national or social status.
	Develop individual and tailor made approach for every Roma child	Some Roma children have problem in mastering language, do not discourage them but pay extra attention to that. In other cases Roma children achievement might be affected because they never attended school and do not know behaviours appropriate for the school. Talk to child individually and seek support from pedagogue or Roma assistant. Encourage every child to express their concern and worries and try to address those in supportive manner.

2.   INTRODUCTION

Since the year 2002 Roma education started to emerge as a priority at the European level (REI, 2004). This is reflected in more involvement of international organizations and a political commitment by international organisations, donors and governments in Central and South-eastern Europe to combat Roma poverty, exclusion, and discrimination within a regional framework through international initiative Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015. In spite of more effort directed towards Roma education in countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) Roma children continue to face barriers to education, which reduces their chances of employment and perpetuates a cycle of deprivation and marginalization. Lack of opportunity from the start and widespread discrimination lead Roma to live in isolated settlements of most deprived areas and slums often being victims of ill-treatment by police and racially motivated crimes (Amnesty International, 2006, p. 1).

2.1   *Context of the policy problems -Roma in B&H*

In order to place education of Roma children into context of B&H a brief overview of the past and current education system and related issues will be given. The war in BiH ended in November 1995 with the Dayton Peace agreement that divided the country into two entities, Republika Srpska and the Federation of BiH, where the Federation of BiH was further divided into 10 cantons and District Brcko. This division has serious implications for education, because it has resulted in a proliferation of major educational authorities in BiH, the Ministry of Education of Republika Srpska and the Ministry of Education of the Federation of BiH, and ten further cantonal ministries of education (UNDP, 2003). These

structures are not only expensive, but cause a lack of unified standards in school practices and financing (OECD, 2001). With ministers in these institutions appointed by their political party on the basis of their ethnic origin and political orientation, their main task often becomes to defend the interests of their ethnic group in education (OSCE, 2006b; Council of Europe, 2001, in Becirevic, 2006).

Access to primary education had declined after the war, which is especially evident in rural areas. The figure for preschool enrolment is also depressing, with only 4-6 percent of children having access to education before they are entitled to compulsory primary education at six years of age (Save the Children Norway, 2004). There are also serious issues with the quality of education especially when it comes to teacher pre-service training and the lack of in-service training (UNDP, 2005). It is evident that current education system is far from ideal, however lack of school access and the most severe discrimination are experienced by Roma children. In the countries of former Yugoslavia and in Central and Eastern Europe Roma people were always discriminated against and this was reflected through attempts to either forcefully assimilate or to marginalize them and deny their existence (OSI, 2006).

Roma are the most numerous ethnic minority in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country with a population of about four million (OSCE, 2005). According to the Roma Council, the Roma community numbers between 80,000 and 100,000 people, but the exact number cannot be determined because of inaccurate statistics. In the last census from 1991 only 9000 people declared themselves as Roma, which is certainly underestimate of true

number of Roma in B&H. Many Roma opted to declare themselves as Muslims, Serbs, or Croats to avoid discrimination (Spahic, 2005). According to other sources, such as the Organisation for cooperation and security in Europe (OSCE) number of Roma in B&H is between 30 000 and 60 000 while Roma NGOs give figures between 75 000-100 000 Roma (Amnesty International, 2006).

In Bosnia and Herzegovina Roma haven't been spared from human rights violations and abuses, especially during 1992-1995 war. They were especially targeted in certain areas under Bosnian Serb control (Amnesty International, p.12). Furthermore war changed the demography of Roma settlements. Prior to the war most of the Roma lived in Eastern Bosnia, which is Republika Srpska now. However, currently Roma live mostly in Tuzla Canton and in Central and Middle Bosnia. Vast numbers of Roma have not reclaimed their pre-war property and are left out without compensation (ERRC, 2004).

Even thought Bosnia and Herzegovina ratified the Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities and adopted the Law on Protection of Members of National Minorities in April 2003, the position of Roma people in BiH has not improved since (OSCE, 2005). Roma people in BiH suffer from extremely poor housing and are severely discriminated against in employment and education opportunities. According to B&H Helsinki Committee for Human Rights employment amongst Roma in B&H is as low as 1.5 per cent. According to the OSCE the position of Roma is strongly linked to severe violations of their human rights.

To summarise the situation of Roma people in B&H it can be said that Roma are excluded from society in every instance. According to the constitution they are not allowed to hold places in presidency if they are registered as Roma, since they are not a constituent people. Same apply for others who do not declare themselves as Bosniaks, Serbs or Croats. Edwards argues that in spite of broad human rights protection incorporated in Dayton Peace Agreement and the State and Entity Constitution, very little attention has been given to minority rights of the Roma in post-Dayton B&H which is in legal terms a retrograde step from the rights and status they enjoyed in under the 1974 Yugoslav constitution (Edwards, 2005, p. 475). Also currently in B&H Roma are often stateless because vast number of Roma does not hold personal documentation. They are also discriminated against in education, employment, housing and even subjected to random violent attacks (ERRC, 2004).

2.2   *Definition of the policy problem – exclusion of Roma children*

The focus of the proposed research is education of Roma children and the problems that Roma face in accessing primary school education. This problem is well illustrated through research carried out by the NGO Budimo Aktivni, supported by UNICEF and the European Commission. They found that around 80% of Roma children in Bosnia and Herzegovina who are not in school do want an education. The research reveals that poverty, together with the fact that many Roma parents missed out on schooling themselves are the main obstacles to the education of Roma children in BiH. It was also evident in this research that Roma children who gained access to school reported being seriously bullied both physically and verbally by their non-Roma peers. In addition,

at the school level education professionals who participated in the research displayed a wide range of attitudes, from prejudiced to positive, and often lacked the professional skills needed to provide high quality education to Roma children.

While doing research for this policy study I found that views of children and parents that have been interviewed confirm the preceding claims. Indeed all Roma parents and children interview in this study stressed how important education is to them. This finding strongly challenges views of some educators and wider public that Roma people have very low awareness of importance of education and that they forbid their children from attending school. Main reasons for school non-attendance, as reported in this study, as well as in several other studies (UNICEF, Save the Children) are inability of parents to pay for school books, stationery and pay transport when that is necessary. Also if they are not approached and offered support directly either from Roma association, NGOs or schools parents themselves do not know where to seek support if they have problem in educating their children.

In their analysis of Roma education across Europe, Save the Children (2006) argues that there is no shortage of international legal and political instruments to deal with the right to education and minority issues, however there is insufficient political will to accept and implement this, leaving a majority of Roma children excluded. Denying children the right to education has grave consequences, because it means denying other rights as well. However, if provided, education promotes the realization of social and economic rights, increases employment chances, health, access to housing and food. In general education

improves quality of life of individuals, but also it helps promote peace, democracy and economic development of the country (Save the Children, 2006).

The main reason why Roma do not attend or drop out of school in B&H does not lay within the Roma community, but in inflexibilities and prejudices put upon Roma by mainstream society. Also even if actions are taken to alleviate the problem, state stakeholders do not take enough responsibility, falling back into their prejudices centred around: *'Roma people are to blame'*. This will be illustrated with examples throughout the paper. In accepted policies such as the NPA, duties and responsibilities are divided between so many different stakeholders that in the end leaves it short of central body responsible to coordinate efforts. In this paper I argue that the schools are best positioned in society and local community to take this coordinating role.

2.3. Methodology and limitation of the study

The field work for this study was carried out in Bosnia and Herzegovina in summer 2006. Interviews and focus groups were conducted with Roma children, their parents, teachers, school principals, pedagogues and Roma NGOs representatives in three major Roma settlements: Sarajevo (Gorica and Cengic Vila), Tuzla (Mejdan) and Kakanj. Since Roma communities are sometimes difficult to approach, representatives of Roma NGOs were asked to help in organizing logistics for research. These included gathering Roma children and parents, as well as identifying those that are successfully included and those that are not. Once informed consent was obtained interviews were fully recorded. In the next few days interviews were fully transcribed. Additionally, data were used from the

study on inclusion in B&H conducted by the same researcher in April/May 2006 in Doboj and Sarajevo, which also explored issues of Roma children education.

Selection of informants was based on purposive sample technique (Cohen et al. 2000), that permitted identification of those who are most involved and informed. Semi-structured interviews, as an appropriate technique in exploring in depth people's experiences, reasoning in motivation (Drever, 2003), was used to interview representatives of Roma NGOs, school principals, pedagogues and teachers. Cooperation and rapport between interviewer and respondents was aided by use of open-ended questions (Cohen et al. 2000) in focus groups and in interviewing. In order to overcome resistances and difficulties in conducting research with Roma (Fonseca, 1995) high degree of flexibility was present throughout the study. The analyses performed on collected data corresponds to what Huberman and Miles (1994) would regard as thematic cross case analysis, where cases are individuals or units that share the same characteristics.

However there are several limitations of this study. Study was conducted in only three towns where larger Roma settlements are in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and it is possible that somewhat different situation would be encountered if the study were to include much larger and more diverse sample. Also the study was based on focus groups and interviews, which did yield rich information, however it is possible that respondent to some extend wanted to present situation as they like it to be reported. This could be avoided in the future by engaging into more ethnographic style study, where the

researcher would spend much more time getting to know the community and becoming part of that community in order to disentangle issues that Roma are faced with. Regardless of the above limitation this study managed to capture some of the important trends that are happening within field of Roma education.

2.4. Roadmap of the paper

Apart from conducting actual field research, the main policies (NPA, FWPSE) that govern Roma education were also analyzed and contrasted against the views obtained from informants. Furthermore several studies conducted by other organizations were carefully examined and compared to conclusions reached in this study. In the problem description section I will provide an overview of issues related to exclusion of Roma children from education. Also in this section policy on Roma education, together with its gaps and implementation issues will be presented. The policy options part contains examination of current policy and suggestion of possible policy that could alleviate problem of Roma children exclusion from education. Policy options are based on research for this study; however support for the proposed conclusion is also identified in other studies from B&H and across the CEE and SEE region.

3. PROBLEM DESCRIPTION

According to Save the Children UK Models of good practice (2006) the situation of Roma education has improved in the period between years 2001-2006. This improvement is reflected in increased number of Roma children who enrol in, attend and complete primary school. However, the number of Roma students in secondary schools and at

universities is still very low. Furthermore data on Roma education is not collected in all areas of B&H. Also procedures of collecting data and indicators monitoring are not unified, which makes comparisons very difficult (Save the Children UK, 2006).

In the study conducted by NGO Budimo Aktivni and UNICEF 2005 the teachers interviewed admitted that schools are rarely able to cope with the educational needs of Roma children. Furthermore non-Roma parents interviewed in the course of the research expressed disturbing levels of prejudice towards Roma people. Half of them did not know anything at all about Roma culture, habits and tradition, yet claimed that Roma people had a tendency towards crime. Most felt that Roma were only fit for menial, simple jobs. The poverty of Roma and discrimination they are faced with on a daily basis was strongly put forward in the research carried out for this policy study. For illustration all of the parents talked about their hardship in providing very basic for their children, such as food, clothes and school books. Parents also expressed worry about discrimination they children are faced with. For example one parent shared the concern that her daughter was separated from other children whenever she came into the school; her daughter was not with other children, she either sitting alone or being last in the queue when they are going to school trips.

3.1 Roma children and inclusive education
Even though it is acknowledged as one of the main problems, this policy study will not deal with socio-economic conditions that Roma people live in, such as poverty, high unemployment and lack of financing for Roma education. In fact it will look at the issues at the school with idea that changing those will make schools more accessible for Roma

and it will increase attendance and school success of Roma children. These issues can be examined in the context of inclusive education.

While conducting research on inclusion in B&H in spring 2006 I noticed that inclusion in B&H is mostly considered through practices in educating children with special needs, which is a somewhat narrow definition of inclusion and some of educators were aware of it. During the talk with the educators and the school managements it came out that inclusion initiatives do not include Roma children. The reasons why inclusion initiatives do not include Roma children can be understood when the issue is placed in a broader context. Inclusion in BiH, through the policies and work of NGOs, is developing primarily with a focus on children with disabilities, and these developments are inevitably transferred into school practice. The issue of Roma exclusion is tackled differently, mainly through seeking resources to overcome Roma poverty and language barriers. Meaningful restructuring of schools and school cultures in order to accommodate the needs of Roma children is not yet on the policy or school agenda (Becirevic, 2006).

This attitude of school staff and management can support or be an obstacle to inclusion of all children, as well as of Roma children. From the research conducted for this policy study it appears that majority of educators in B&H on all levels are not changing their usual practices and approaches to adjust education methods and school cultures to the needs of Roma children as well. In response Roma children and parents do not see school

as being adequately engaged around issues that matter to them and therefore do not feel accepted, valued and recognized in schools.

Furthermore during this research on inclusion it become apparent that teachers, school principals and pedagogues are supportive of inclusive education, but do not consider Roma children to be part of inclusion initiatives. This trend does not concur with the perspective that 'inclusion involves an approach to education and society concerned with increasing the participation of all and reducing all forms of discrimination and exclusion' (Booth, 2005, p. 1). In addition those views stand against the perspective that inclusive education is considered as one aspect of inclusion in society (Booth, Ainscow, Black-Hawkins, Vaughan, Shaw, 2000, in Becirevic, 2006).

These claims can be illustrated by the example from Bulgaria, a county with largest Roma minority, over 10%. In the last 40 years many initiatives to educate Roma children have started. Unfortunately these initiatives produced modest results with only 10-15% of school age Roma reaching average level of educational attainment. One reason for this failure is because mainstream curriculum itself is not inclusive and it in mainly designed to meet educational needs of average or above average learner. Also there is a lack of methodology and pedagogical awareness to work with children for whom Bulgarian is their second language. Even when efforts to overcome language barrier have been made the success is limited because teachers disregard Roma culture and personality (Kuchukov, 1994 in Tzokova & Dobrev, 2000).

3.2 Major policies on Roma education

In February 2004, Education Ministers adopted the Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Members of Other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NPA) which recommended a set of actions to tackle social and economic barriers to education of Roma people. Apart from the NPA, the Education Reform Agenda (2002) is the main policy document that serves as the basis for other educational policies. This document prioritizes some of the international documents such as the United Nation Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) and the World Declaration on Education for All (1990). Furthermore Framework Law on Primary and Secondary Education (FW PSE) (Government of BiH, 2003) stipulates that all children in BiH are to have equal access to primary school. However, according to a report conducted in 2004 by two local NGOs ('Our Children' and 'Hi Neighbour') who work on children's rights in BiH, the reality is somewhat different, leaving significant numbers of children out of school (Save the Children Norway, 2004), and this is especially evident for Roma children.

The Action Plan on the Education Needs of Roma and Members of Other Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NPA) proposes a set of recommendations, which include the introduction of teaching of Roma language in schools, free school transport and books for Roma children. Achieving these goals is very important for improving access and the quality of Roma education; however they are severely constrained by already limited financing in education. Apart from this research in Bulgaria shows that Roma school children have problems in mastering both Bulgarian and their mother tongue. This delayed language development is caused by their social and educational disadvantages

(Kuchukov, 1997 u Tzokova and Dobrev, 2000).   Introducing teaching of Roma language and culture in schools is however something that BiH society should strive towards. Unfortunately at present there are almost no Roma teachers who could undertake this role. For now it is necessary that school provide best possible educational opportunities for Roma children in accordance with available school resources.

It is unrealistic to expect BiH authorities and educationalists will be able to achieve the goals set in the NPA in the near future. Furthermore, the NPA and other policy documents do not adequately address practices at the school level, and if these are not addressed no action on the schooling Roma children will succeed. For example the responsible bodies for implementing proposed actions in the NPA are mostly educational authorities and Roma representatives. It is interesting that the NPA in its recommendations does not pass any responsibility to schools, even though the schools are the first and only instance of providing education in communities. Without disregarding existing policies, especially NPA, the proposed research will aim at producing an additional and complimentary set of actions and recommendations that are specifically focused on the schools' practices.

There are several short term goals that stem from the Action Plan on the Education Needs of Roma and Members of other National Minorities in BiH (NPA) which this research will readily utilize and these are; *Acknowledging the crucial role of Romani representatives and Romani parents in defining their educational needs and actively participating in the development of solutions to address the access barriers they face;*

Ensure that national minorities and especially Roma are enabled to define their own needs and to support them in assessing what is necessary for successful education' (NPA, 2004).

3.3 Successful practices

Still, there it appears that there are some schools that are successful in educating Roma children. It has been shown that schooling of Roma children is much better in communities where Roma NGOs are active. Unfortunately there are only a few communities in BiH that have active Roma organizations (ERRC, 2004). Apart from issues of language, school books and transport available polices need to address more explicitly school practices. Positive changes at the school level could stimulate Roma children's enrolment in primary schools. For example, Roma families do not provide adequate school preparation, nor can they help them master the demanding school syllabus. Therefore Roma children have to receive additional assistance in order to persist in their schooling. Positive examples of overcoming this barrier can be drawn from the experiences of Roma association from Tuzla, who with the help of local schools, organized preparatory classes and academic support for a group of Roma children in order to help them keep pace with other children, and, for older children, to pass the exams they missed.

Generally schools could tackle the issue of Roma children exclusion if they were to introduce greater flexibility and adopt instructions that are person centred and appropriate for children who live very different life styles often in unfavourable circumstances. Still

what schools need to do need to be explored further. What makes one school successful in educating Roma children and other unsuccessful needs more investigation in order for realistic actions to be identified. Reviewing literature from other countries could be one means by which this problem might further explored. However due to specificities of the BiH context, continuing research in this field is desirable for B&H. In a meanwhile, and as a starting point, findings of this study can be used, since this study managed to identify several important factors that contribute to the success of schools in including Roma children.

3.4 Main themes and issues related to Roma education as identified in this study

There are several main issues that have been identified after interviews and focus groups discussions were analyzed and these issues are elaborated here. These issues are also mentioned in other studies and are also tackled by policy documents, especially NPA.

Roma language: When it comes to Roma language children who participated in focus groups said that they were not at all fluent in Roma language. Furthermore lack of Roma language in school is not the reason for their non-attendance, as once thought. In fact their parents and themselves do not use Roma language in their communication.
'...us older are making mistake with our language, because where we live we do not use it even 1%, and that is why children do not know it (Roma parent)'.
Still in their desire to preserve tradition, when asked what they would like to have in school they children often mentioned Roma language. They said they would like to learn Roma language because it is traditionally language of Roma people, and this would be

the way to preserve Roma tradition, even thought last 2-3 generations are using Roma language to a much lesser degree.

Discrimination: According to parents, children and representatives of Roma association discrimination to Roma has reduced in recent years. Furthermore they were full of praise for school staff in that respect. School principals and pedagogues also talked about equality, valuing Roma children and making sure they are treated without discrimination. Still discrimination appeared once children started to talk how they felt in the school and it loomed large through themes of children feeling excluded in their class.

Educational methodologies in work with Roma children: When talking with schools staff (school principals and pedagogues) about the specificities of educating Roma children several themes appeared. When asked if Roma children need special approach and treatment in school they said that they do not need anything extraordinary. They all agreed that education of Roma children requires some flexibility in teaching and pedagogical approach. They argued that this is something that can be achieved with any good teaching practice. The principal from Tuzla formulated her thinking on these issues as follows:

> '*They need little bit more love and attention…when they just come to school we need to work a lot on socialization with younger children. Educationally in later classes they experience problems with more difficult subjects' mathematics and physics and that is where they need extra bit of attention' (School principal).*

In regards to Roma children difficulties with Bosnian language principal from Sarajevo responded:

> *'...teachers need to have patience. Some of the Roma children are not so fluent with language. In this school teachers of mother tongue are instructed not to be too sensitive towards mistakes Roma children naturally make with language. It is easy to say you do not speak and write correctly and we are going to fail you'.*

<u>Responsibilities of school staff</u>*:* Parents and NGO representatives talked about efforts of school principal from Tuzla, a woman who goes out of her way to bring children into the school. This school principal has a practice to pay visits to families if the child stopped going to school. Furthermore she would stop and talk to Roma children on the street persuading them to come and resume their education of enrol in school. The other principal stressed the importance of tolerance towards Roma children in educational progress, but also in their inability to buy books and stationery for school. He highlighted that the attitude of school staff is changing and they are nowadays more inclined to accept responsibilities for Roma children and to try their best to include them. This principal showed knowledge about Roma life styles, cultures and even origins of Roma children in his school. These approaches reflects Allan's (1999, 2006) idea of inclusion as an ethical project of ours and other's responsibility, an ongoing desire for change that requires seeing ourselves implicated in injustice and exclusion.

<u>Situation has improved:</u> Those interviewed reveal that the situation in education for Roma children has changed positively in the last few years. This was on number of

occasions expressed by parents, teachers and NGO workers. A representative of Roma NGO stressed that situation for Roma people is generally improving. He illustrated that through the example that now he as a Roma participates in meetings and speaks to minister of education about Roma issues, something that was unimaginable before.

 Participation of Roma in developing policies: There were several examples of Roma people participation in developing educational policies. This was especially true for persons having the role of representatives of Roma organizations. However it is hard to tell if representative of Roma organizations are adequately presenting range of needs that arise in Roma community. Furthermore Roma organizations are often responsible for distribution of resources designated to Roma community, and this way of working leaves possibilities for mismanagement of resources. Parents were only consulted on the school level, and otherwise had no influence on policy making. One example of misinterpretation of Roma needs in education is overemphasis on Roma language in policies of international organizations. These policies pay very significant attention to introduction of Roma language teaching in schools, while none of the Roma children, I talked to within this study, speak Roma language. Lack of Roma language in the schools never came up as a reason why they do not enrol or drop out of school. However they did say they would like to learn Roma language, sometimes during their schooling, in order to preserve their tradition.

4. POLICY OPTIONS

Problems in education Roma children and ways to overcome them, as presented in this study, are mostly drawn from conversations with those who are directly involved and who deal with the issue on daily basis. Furthermore, this study was used as a way to put across perspective of Roma children and parents in considering ways to overcome educational obstacles, as well as educationalist who have most experience in educating Roma children. Also discussing issues with practitioners who are working every day on overcoming various obstacles of Roma children education gave me opportunity to discuss several options and to reveal unrealistic propositions made in current policy documents.

In this section I will examine three policy options proposed to tackle exclusion of Roma children from education. Some of these options are already accepted by government, such as NPA, however so far they have not been systematically or critically examined by policy community in B&H. My examination of these proposed options will be based on the situation I encountered while doing research in B&H in 2006, but it will also reflect on literature available in B&H and several other countries from the region.

4.1 Policy option 1: Current policy as proposed by NPA with no responsibility for schools

In February 2004, Education Ministers adopted an Action Plan on the Educational Needs of Roma and Members of other National Minorities in Bosnia and Herzegovina (NPA) which recommended a set of actions to tackle social and economic barriers to education

of Roma people. The NPA to a great extend reflect what international organizations argue and that is; severe exclusion of Roma children in B&H education occurs because of the extent of poverty that Roma live in, frequent discrimination in schools and complete absence of Roma language and culture teaching in B&H schools (Save the Children 2006, OSCE 2006, NPA, 2004;).

For example the NPA, as well as policy proposals suggested by international organizations argue that more resources for education and introducing teaching of Roma language and culture in school curricula are one of the main components in solving this problem. While doing research with Roma children and their parents I asked them about their language and how they think this needs to be addressed. Interestingly enough none of the children I spoke to in Tuzla, Sarajevo and Kakanj spoke Romani. Instead they spoke Bosnian. However the level of their Bosnian was very much dependent on their schooling and level of education. Children who never attended school were less able to express themselves and their views, while Roma children who attended school articulated their viewpoint with ease. Their idea was that learning of Romani could take place somewhere in a community or as an extracurricular activity in the school. At this point in time, and perhaps in the next several years I think their suggestion makes a lot of sense. Introducing Roma language in schools right now is impossible because there are virtually only few people who can teach in Romani in B&H, and these few would not be able to fulfil demands of all schools.

NPA as a second goal proposes removal of financial and administrative barriers in order to increase Roma school enrolment and completion. Fulfilling this goal would support inclusion of Roma children to a greater extent, because it has been shown that the biggest obstacle for their attendances presents inability of parents to pay for the school books, required stationery and materials and also to provide necessary clothing. As presented in problem description majority of Roma parents are unemployed and this situation in not likely to change in the near future, therefore financial support for Roma children education is necessary pre-requirement if access to education is to be increased.

Even though this goal is very welcomed by all concerned for Roma education, as well as among Roma parents themselves it is often very problematic when attempts are made to translate it into practice. One of the problems with the implementation of this goal is unclear responsibility for provision of resources. For fulfilment of this goal the NPA gives responsibility to entity and cantonal ministries of social welfare, education and finance and municipal and school authorities. Giving responsibility to several bodies leads to reduced responsibility of any single body thus creating confusion in the beginning of school year who in fact should provide what.

Furthermore Roma representative reported that ministries of education were very slow in delivering promises even though resources were allocated in the last two years. It seems that the problem does not lay so much in lack of resources, but in ineffective and badly managed ways of distribution. This produces situations where books and materials are delivered late which discourage Roma children from attending school. Also most often

distribution of books and materials falls on Roma association who try to coordinate these activities, however their capacities are often limited and require additional support.

In the NPA policy option no responsibility is given to school, even though schools are naturally positioned in the centre of Roma children education. In spite of proposed policies some practices encountered during research looked as if they developed naturally, with more of a local character. It become apparent that different practices exists in different school and those open for education of Roma children go about different ways in undertaking responsibility for education of Roma. In Tuzla, for example, the Roma association works closely with school in delivering school books and materials. In this way cooperation between school, Roma parents and Roma association is strengthened and they all become more responsible and unified in overcoming obstacles. In order to get this support children are required to attend the school. Furthermore, parents are expected to cooperate with pedagogues and teaching staff while school principals become more aware of the problem and if responsible enough seek solutions where there is a shortage of support.

Another, good example also comes from Tuzla where school principal and staff participate in assessing situation and mapping various sources of support. Instead of just relying on one source they seek support from several available resources. The involvement of the principal is highly valued by children and parents and it shows dedication of non Roma stakeholders, thus reducing lack of trust Roma people have toward non-Roma people who are in position of power. Furthermore, the school principal

is often a person respected in community and more likely to obtain support from different sources then Roma representative themselves. Therefore this cooperation of Roma association and school is necessary if greater inclusion of Roma children is to be achieved.

In Sarajevo schools in Cengic Vila and Gorica school the principal and pedagogues argue that they always had success in educating Roma children. They main achievement is in cooperation with Roma community and working towards reducing discrimination among school staff. In this respect school principal as a person of authority takes a stance that Roma children are not to be divided from other children and that due attention will be given to them. In these schools they stressed importance of engaging Roma assistant as a part of school team. As a person recognized by Roma community assistant has a role to liaison between school and Roma, to work on raising awareness among Roma parents and to help school staff understand some Roma issues. On the other hand school management often engaged in seeking support from municipality or NGOs for procurement of books and school materials.

Unfortunately not all schools are open for education of Roma children. During research on inclusion I encountered negative examples where school pedagogues and other staff are insensitive towards education of Roma and often blame Roma lifestyle and habits, as to why children do not go to school: *'they do not care about school; they miss classes and then they can't catch up, they find more important to go around and work…* *(Pedagogue)'.* Also it was not unusual to encounter the following views among some

school staff: *'We have lots of Roma children in our classes, but we have a number of difficulties because parents are irresponsible and do not send them to school…they are not excluded, they exclude themselves' (Defectologist).*

Those schools were unsuccessful in educating Roma children, and even when teachers expressed some awareness of Roma exclusion, it seemed that they were completely unaware of exclusionary school practices.

In conclusion to this policy option it can be said that NPA proposed some good measures, such as increasing resources and raising awareness on Roma children education. However NPA failed to address role of individual schools. The above positive and negative examples identified in schools in B&H were given in order to illustrate the enormous importance of individual schools. Even if B&H increase resources for Roma education, but if school continue to discriminate against Roma and avoid responsibility all efforts will be wasted. On the other hand if schools recognize their exclusionary practices and if they are supported to confront them there is a better chance for education of Roma children as seen from several examples where schools are successful.

4.2 Policy option 2: NGOs take responsibility for education of Roma children

Since the war in B&H number of international organizations and NGOs become very active and influential. Some of these are OSF, UNICEF, Save the Children, OSCE and many others. Since they largely base they work on principles of human rights they often focus attention to marginalized groups in B&H, especially Roma. After 10 years of their

work progress is evident in some areas. There is more awareness on human and children rights, while participation of children and citizens become more accepted.

Furthermore these organizations engaged and supported various local NGOs and association, through funding and capacity building. Save the Children UK, OSF and UNICEF together with their local partner organizations achieved remarkable results in increasing access of Roma children to education, but also in raising awareness about importance or Roma education. Save the Children UK with local organizations Be my Fiend, Land of Children and Hi Neighbour organized preparatory classes, developed various ways of direct work, engaged relevant stakeholders and developed education materials. In the areas where they worked results are evident. In nine communities where SCUK they worked enrolment increased from 20 percent before the project to 89% percent during project implementation (Save the Children UK, 2006).

During this research participants often referred to SCUK, UNICEF, and OSF evoking some of the practices that have been introduced. Therefore it is evident that some of the initiatives and trainings that international organizations (IO) and NGOs conducted will be sustained in the future. For country like B&H that suffers lack of resources and initiative it is easy and comfortable to sign various cooperation agreements and to pass responsibility NGOs. However relying on NGOs to initiate actions and provide support permanently is not feasible policy option. Passing responsibility of Roma education to Roma and other NGOs without meaningful engagement of school staff around all issues puts Roma people in the position of the outsiders, thus reducing their confidence in

school management and teachers. Furthermore lack of flexibility and understanding of Roma and their lifestyle leads teachers to be less involved and unaware of educational needs of Roma children.

While doing research it was encountered that some of the actions are not sustained. Local NGOs depend on funding and struggle every year to keep their organizations running. On the other hand larger organization operate all over the world and every year they reduce funding for B&H in order to attend countries that are in the middle of a crisis. Therefore policy option that gives responsibility for education of Roma children to NGOs and IOs is not the one that is appropriate for tackling exclusion in B&H education. Instead state authorities will need to find a ways how to overcome Roma children exclusion using existing resources within current educational system, without relying to heavily on NGOs and international organizations.

4.3 Policy option 3: Schools and local communities take responsibility for education of Roma children

Policy options reviewed so far do not focus attention on schools or actions that can be taken on the level of schools in order to alleviate problem of Roma children exclusion and drop out. Throughout the paper I argued that this approach was wrong and that future policies need to favour school as a focal point in addressing educational needs of Roma children. In this section I will present a policy option were schools are encouraged to take more responsibility not only in providing education for average learner but in adapting education and school environment to diverse children population.

In this option school has more responsibility in developing network within community and in mapping out resources that can be used as a support for providing books, school materials and free transport for Roma children. This policy option is not against current policy proposed in NPA, but it gives support to it by making it more extensive for school, something that current NPA failed to address. It can also serve as a supporting policy to current action plans and legislations. It is important to note that no legislation change is required within this option and no additional resources will be sought. Instead it will give clear guidelines on mechanisms of providing support for Roma children and in making school cultures more inclusive. In this part of the paper this policy option will be elaborated through suggesting what role schools need to take in overcoming major obstacles to Roma children inclusion, more precisely what schools can do to provide books and transport, to engage Roma assistant and to adopt school cultures.

Providing books and transport

Proactive approach that produced success in visited schools was reflected in engagement of school principal to procure books, and materials for Roma children, but also for non-Roma children who come for unprivileged families. In these schools principal and pedagogues were aware of number of Roma children in their areas and looked for ways to include them. Furthermore they were open for cooperation with Roma parents, Roma association, international NGOs and government structures. Before the beginning of school year school staff and management would get in touch with Roma association or NGO. They would together exchange available data and agree on strategy as to what steps to undertake and where to seek support. If support for school books is not provided

by Ministry of Education the school principal would seek support from municipality officials and international organization.

Roma assistant

Schools visited within this project reported that help from Roma assistant increased inclusion of Roma children. The same has been reported in Save the Children UK (2006) project on Roma education. This practice will be easier achieved where Roma assistant is employed on full time or part time basis by the schools. The role of Roma assistant will be connection between Roma community and school. Roma assistant would have a responsibility to conduct assessment before every school year on number of Roma children that are due to be enrolled in particular area/municipality. Roma assistant would communicate these findings to school, which will then make projection of calculations for amount of resources needed to buy books and school material. With the expenses projections school will in august, before the beginning of school year, apply to municipality for funding. If municipality falls short on providing all funds school will contact international organizations, NGOs and social services to obtain additional funds. In this way school is taking responsibility and coordinates efforts, thus creating sustainable solution. This practice was found in some schools in Sarajevo experienced in educating Roma children since 1960s. Not all schools will need Roma assistant, but only schools in areas where there is a significant population of Roma. In order to reduce cost 2-3 schools in area could share services of one Roma assistant.

School cultures

Values promulgated by school management were reflected on whole staff that showed flexibility in teaching and were prepared to address pedagogical needs of Roma children. When this approaches were discussed school staff stressed that educating Roma children does not require any special methodology or approach. According to those in the field when educating Roma children school staff needs to be flexible, understanding and to give that little bit extra attention to Roma children. Also their role was to address any discrimination that occurs in the school, because this discrimination is what hurts Roma children and makes them feel unwelcome. Again addressing discrimination does not require any additional program, but simply making children aware that differences are welcomed and need to be celebrated and not looked down to. In situation where bullying occurs teacher needs to take a firm stance that such behaviours will not be tolerated.

For example in their classes teachers would remind children of importance of treating everybody the same, valuing equality and being a good friend to each other. The same was done with parents of non-Roma children. School principals and teachers are the people who enjoy respect in community and among parent and they can set positive examples by showing that inclusion of Roma children can be beneficial for all involved. It is important to note that these practices do not require any additional resources. Furthermore these practices reflect inclusive orientation of schools and achieving inclusion in this way i.e. by taking responsibility for all children and changing school cultures are those that are more easily sustained then one off programs by international organizations or simple legal act imposed by government.

School needs proactive approach

The rationale for developing this policy option is derived from the research carried out in B&H and it is based on identified successful practices. Some of the schools in B&H I visited demonstrated impressive results in educating Roma children and this was confirmed by children themselves, their parents, representatives of Roma associations and school staff. It appeared that successful practices are largely dependant on school management, more precisely school principal, who is a person dedicated to education of Roma children. In these schools successful cooperation have been achieved between above mentioned stakeholders. However it was evident that school was taking more proactive approach then it was a case in some other schools that are less successful in educating Roma children.

5. RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

This policy study reviewed three policy options for education of Roma children. First two options – current option as proposed by NPA and another implicit option that is passing responsibility to NGOs were considered ineffective because they do not put school in the centre of Roma children inclusion. The third policy option that is proposed as feasible and realistic for context of B&H puts responsibility for educating Roma children onto the schools. This policy option is drawn from the successful examples identified during research for this study and it is related and based on the principles of inclusive education. If taken forward this policy option has a chance to increase inclusion of Roma children and to support development of more flexible and responsive education system. It is

argued that resources are available, however they need to be coordinated and un-locked (Stubbs, 2002). Here are the practical recommendations on how this policy option can be achieved.

5. 1 How to put this option forward

This policy option is very much dependant on ethics of school principals and staff and it largely depends on their engagement. If not carried out no legal action will be taken against school, however soft approached in implementing this policy need to be taken. These soft approached can be utilized by all important stakeholders such as cantonal ministries of education, OSCE, OSF, Save the Children, UNICEF and teacher training schools. Here schools will not be abandoned by organizations that provide support, but will undertake more coordinating role for support of Roma children.

In this policy option school responsibility will be to contact municipality, ministry and international organizations in quest for procure books and stationery for unprivileged children. In this way confusion on who is responsible will be avoided. Resources for supporting unprivileged children can be places in municipality budget and schools will apply to municipality with their estimate on how much money they need each year. Some schools and municipalities offices already cooperate in addressing educational needs of Roma children. Furthermore school principal will be asked to report how many Roma children have been successfully included and what are the steps that school undertook each year. School inspector from Ministry of Education will take responsibility in overseeing progress made each year.

5.2 Way to achieve this policy option

This policy option is can be realistically achieved because it is something that is already practiced in number of schools. Within this policy option cantonal ministers of education would have a significant role, especially in putting across this option. Right now is a favourable momentum to achieve this option because attention is already given to Roma education and there is a pressure by international organisations, NGOs and human rights activists to achieve grater inclusion of Roma children. If this policy option gains acceptance Roma children will be treated as all other children of B&H who come from underprivileged background, and not as outsiders. Furthermore OSCE and international organizations already have some data on numbers of Roma children and places where they live and this data needs to be communicated back to ministries of education as a starting point of reference. In addition a booklet containing instruction on inclusion of Roma children will be a starting point towards achieving this policy option and it will be distributed to schools in areas where larger Roma population is settled. This booklet will contain information on Roma community, resources that schools can utilize and ways to how school culture can be adopted to Roma children. The booklet would be produced by NGOs and schools who have experience in educating Roma children.

Conclusion

The very high exclusion of Roma children in B&H is to great extent caused by poverty Roma people live in and discrimination they are confronted in all segments of society. For too long B&H relied on external influences in addressing various problems in society and that was the case with Roma education. The external influences came in the time of

crises and produced various results, sometimes initiated change. However, currently B&H is in time when local resources and knowledge need to be utilized in order to sustain changes and build more prosperous country.

If Roma people are discriminated against in education they will never have a chance to break a circle of poverty and deprivation they live in. The safest way to end the poverty that Roma people live in is by providing them with access to inclusive and relevant education. Achieving education system that is inclusive is never ending process that need to be started from schools and local communities if we want it to be accepted and further developed. If schools adopt inclusive values and principals they will be more successful in education Roma children and in overcoming obstacles for any other marginalized group in society. Based on these premises and on the assessment of current situation I suggested the policy option where schools are placed at the centre of improving the access and quality of education.

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APPENDIX 1

PARTICIPANTS IN INTERVIEWS AND FOCUS GROUPS

Schools involved in research	Interviews and focus groups	Conducted
OŠ Osman Nakas-Sarajevo	- School principal - School pedagogue	September 2006
OŠ Gorica- Sarajevo	- School pedagogue	September 2006
Roma association, Sretni Romi	- Roma representative	September 2006
OŠ Mejdan, Tuzla	- School principal - Group of parents - Group of children	September 2006
Roma associationi, Omladinska Romska Incijativa, Kakanj	- Group of children - Group of parents - Roma representative	September 2006
OŠ Vuk Stefanovic Karadzic, Doboj	- School pedagogue - School principal - Teacher - Defectologist	May 2006
OŠ Čengić Vila	- School principal	April 2006
OŠ Kovacici I	- School principal - Teacher - Pedagogue	April 2006