

## **Introduction**

This set of policy papers is a direct result of the project “To Solve Our Problems Together”, undertaken in partnership by the ECHOSOC Foundation—Romania and the Open University Subotica—Serbia. The papers aim at portraying the situation of the Roma minority in the two countries, in various areas of social life. Moreover, they bring forth a series of recommendations meant to contribute to the identification of feasible intervention means for solving many of the different problems presented.

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### **Other organisations involved in the project:**

- ◆ CATALACTICA Association, Bucharest;
- ◆ Phoenix Foundation, Bucharest;
- ◆ Agency for Community Development “Împreună” [Together], Bucharest;
- ◆ Aven Amentza Foundation, Bucharest;
- ◆ Ramses—Foundation for Social Development of the Roma, Dej;
- ◆ Cultural Democratic Union of Roma from Valea Jiului, Petroșani;
- ◆ Intercultural Institute, Timișoara;
- ◆ Rrominterpress, Belgrade;
- ◆ European Voivodina, Novi Sad;
- ◆ International Scientific Forum "Danube—River of Cooperation" (ISF “DRC”), Belgrade;
- ◆ The Modern Society Movement (MSM), Zemun.

We hope these materials contribute to a better knowledge regarding the situation of the Roma population in Romania and Serbia, as well as adequate support for needed interventions.

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## 1. For whom is this Policy Paper formulated?

The current document targets primarily the categories of Roma population who are currently of the legal school age or who interrupted their formal education:

- *Children and/or young persons (16-25 years old) who abandoned school, for various reasons;*
- *Persons who live in disadvantaged areas;*
- *Young illiterates (18–25 years old);*
- *Migrating populations;*
- *Persons without a stable residence;*
- *Street children;*
- *Young long-term unemployed.*

A series of professional categories or decision-making factors can benefit from the current paper:

- teachers;
- decision-makers;
- social and economic actors interested in the “products” of the educational system;
- non-governmental organisations that undertake programs targeted at youth and children categories as mentioned above;
- mass-media etc.

Basically, we aim at: institutions of the central administration (ministries directly or indirectly involved in the process of formation and training for youth and children), institutions of local administration with attributions in the same field (county school inspectorates, teaching staff institutions), and local public administrations (city councils, mayors, prefects).

## 2. Objectives

The declared purpose of this paper is to effectively transpose into immediate reality the principle of equal chances, to ensure the access to the institutionalised education system for all categories of youth, regardless of their social-economic condition, area of residence, ethnic belonging, race or religious confession.

In this context, the following specific objectives can also be observed:

- ***Institutionalisation of the above-mentioned issue and awareness amongst central/local competent public authorities*** with regard to the implementation of concrete measures resulting from the current paper;
- ***Support for the formation and/or specialisation and promotion of teaching staff*** who can facilitate the implementation of programs and innovations with regard to the target population (especially inter-cultural education);
- ***Elimination of certain stereotypes, prejudices or practices*** that encourage discrimination against disadvantaged groups on various reasons, at all levels of schooling;
- ***Stimulation of the participation to the educational life of children, youth and parents from the targeted categories***, through their involvement in programs of educational assistance and support;
- ***Determination of positive changes in the public opinion*** regarding Roma children.

### **3. Methodological framework**

Our approach follows, from a methodological viewpoint, the category of “research-action”, with the specific methodology for our areas of interest: general sociology and sociology of education, general and specialised pedagogy (of small children, school pupils, adults, etc.), educational management, and the like. The particulars of research-action are rooted in the need for the results of the research to take shape in a “pilot-product”, that would later be validated/invalidated by practice, and that would open the possibility of replication on a larger scale.

#### **a. Instruments**

- Official statistics;
- Databases regarding the school situation of Roma children;
- Database regarding the insertion of young adults on the labour market;
- Specific or synthetic indicators;
- Questionnaires addressed to all actors involved in the educational or day to day life;
- General indicators;
- Informal discussions;

- Comparative studies;
- Workshops, round tables or other forms of specialised and/or non-specialised communication.

**b. Data collection**

- On a documentary basis;
- On direct basis;
- From general or specialised/selective bibliography;
- On an institutional basis—local, regional, national.

**c. Data analysis** through

- Observation judgements, particularly of quantitative nature;
- Value judgements, particularly of quantitative nature;
- Identification of “serious” tendencies, short- and medium-term trends;
- Diagnosis—through corroboration—of the current state and tendencies.

**4. Identification of the problem**

Obviously, at the level of Romania, of all categories of children and youth in vulnerable situations (except for those resulting from illegal migration), children and youth of the Roma minority exhibit a series of particular features. Such features appeared due to historical and social-economic reasons combined with a specific individual and/or collective spirituality. Hence, these features occupy the special and unfortunate position of aggravating circumstances with respect to the legitimate aspirations of the ethnic group or of society, in general.

In our opinion, these aggravating circumstances are related to:

- Lack of knowledge, within the majority public opinion, of the set of norms, rules, and taboos that regulate the life of Roma communities, especially with regard to the life of children and youth;
- Lack of awareness, at individual level, regarding the rights and obligations of each young citizen of a democratic state, namely of Romania;
- Lack of communication between the culture of the majority and the culture of the minority, with regard to the individual and collective needs of children and

youngsters and, consequently, lack of exchange regarding cultural-educational values between the two cultures;

- Perpetuation of clichés and stereotypes in inter-personal and inter-community relations at the level of children and youth, even in spite of legislative norms that stipulate full equality of rights and obligations amongst citizens;
- Chronic crisis of human resources and materials for the development of a flexible educational system, efficient and correlated with the current individual and collective demands;
- Absence, at the national level and, therefore, at the level of Roma communities, too, of efficient structures for the promotion of informal and non-formal “long-term” education for children and youth, in order to achieve the four major objectives of 21<sup>st</sup> Century education: “savoir”, “savoir-faire”, “savoir-être” and “savoir vivre ensemble”<sup>1</sup>;
- Absence, at the level of the Romanian society as a whole, of “success models” of education, being well known that education is—by definition—a process of modelling in relation to validated models.

## 5. Alternative policy options

Diagnosis offers the possibility of formulating alternative scenarios to the current state. Out of these, pending validation through research, and representing food-for-thought to decision-makers, we note the following:

- Inexistence of legal “alternatives” for schooling Roma children, in accordance with their life-style;
- Quasi-general lack of interest for institutionalised education amongst Roma families, mainly for economic reasons;
- Necessity to remodel pupil-teacher relations around important themes that would facilitate closer relations between the majority and minority cultures;
- Relatively passive and mechanicist attitudes with respect to involving Roma families and community leaders in solving the problems of children and youth, the current model being along the lines of “we ask for something, they ought to provide”;

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<sup>1</sup> The French terms corresponds, respectively, to “know”, “know-how”, “know-to-live”, and “know to live together”.

- Absence of formal, non-formal and/or informal education and “loisir”<sup>2</sup> institutions for Roma children and youth, as well as quasi-absence thereof from the entire Romanian educational system.

## 6. Recommendations

- Introduction in the optional/compulsory disciplines focused on the day-to-day, social and cultural life of Romanian communities, of the necessary information related to knowledge each other (norms, rules, and taboos that regulate the life of Roma communities with regard to the life of children and youth.
- Introduction in the compulsory curriculum of information regarding the rights and obligations of any child or young citizen of a democratic state, particularly in Romania.
- Facilitation of exchanges in cultural-educational values between the majority culture and the culture of the Roma minority with regard to the individual and collective needs of children/youth, through non-formal or informal educational activities.
- Elimination of clichés and stereotypes from inter-personal and inter-community relations at the level of children and youth, in accordance with legislative norms stipulating the full equality in rights and obligations of the citizens, through the promotion, in the mass-media, of inter-cultural subjects with an educational-formational profile, through the establishment of mixed pilot loisir centres, through correlations with the school demands of children/youth from all disadvantaged areas, through special programs of social and economic support.
- Improvement of the situation of human/material resources for the development of a flexible formal education system, efficient and correlated with the current individual and collective demands, through specialised training of the teaching staff, cultural and educational facilitators for inter-cultural and/or other types of education — for values, for health, for entrepreneurship, for family matters etc.
- Establishment, at national level and, hence, at the level of Roma communities, too, of efficient structures for the promotion of informal and non-formal “long-term” education of children and youth, in order to achieve the four major objectives of 21<sup>st</sup> century education: “savoir”, “savoir-faire”, “savoir-être” and

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<sup>2</sup> French for “leisure and/or entertainment”.

“savoir vivre ensemble”, through: centres, clubs, cultural tourism agencies, inter-area exchanges, and the like.

- Introduction, at the level of the entire Romanian society, of “success models” of education, acknowledging that education is a process of modelling in relation to validated models, through a redefinition of pedagogic relations, highlighting Roma personalities and their contribution to Romanian civilisation, important names of Roma ethnicity in Romanian culture, pedagogy, music, arts etc.
- Initiation of a process for completing the legislative package (through specific legislative initiatives) that would facilitate the expansion of the educational system according to the needs of certain target population groups.
- Participation in the programs of the public or private educational structures (established according to Government Decision 430 of 2001) that would fill the gaps regarding non-formal or informal education.
- Establishment and implementation of mixed working groups, at local level, for the needs assessment of the target Roma population and for the elaboration of appropriate programs for educational support/assistance.
- Presentation of the non-governmental organisations’ projects that respond to the directions for action included in the current strategy.
- Elaboration, in collaboration with competent institutions, of annual reports on the educational situation of the target groups.
- Formulation of a national program for stimulating the school participation of pupils coming from Roma communities.
- Realisation of studies regarding the opportunity and feasibility, on medium- and long-term, of establishing institutions for the primary and secondary education, as well as for the vocational formation of the Roma.
- Support for NGOs in order to develop a distance-education program for the study of Romani language.
- Provision of logistical support for a program on training school mediators and for the formation and specialisation of teaching staff in inter-cultural education.
- Introduction in the core curriculum of subjects related to the prevention and elimination of discrimination, as a result of efficient lobby and collaboration with the competent institutions.

- Organisation of bi-monthly meetings for the leaders of Roma communities with Roma parents and teaching staff, in order to encourage the school participation of Roma children and youth.
- Formulation, in collaboration with Roma leaders, of a national organisation plan, to be submitted for approval to the competent authorities, for the development of a local level program for the school recovery of Roma through all of the approved forms of education.
- Participation of civil society organisations to the formulation, promotion and implementation of the “Food in Schools” national program, meant to provide one meal per day for all pupils, in order to facilitate school attendance and reduce school abandonment during primary and secondary schooling.