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Equal Access to Quality Education For Roma

Serbia

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Monitoring report

2007

Equal access to quality education for
Roma

Serbia

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List of abbreviations and acronyms

CIP	Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Serbia (<i>Centar za interaktivnu pedagogiju</i>)
EMIS	Education Management Information System, in the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia (<i>Jedinstveni informacioni sistem u obrazovanju</i>)
FOSS	Fund for an Open Society – Serbia
MES	Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia (<i>Ministarstvo prosvete i sport</i>)
RCD	Roma Centre for Democracy (Valjevo) (<i>Romski centar za demokratiju</i>)
REF	Roma Education Fund
REI	Roma Education Initiative
RTA	Roma Teacher Assistant
REC	Roma Education Centre (Niš) (<i>Romski edukativni centar</i>)

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

1.1 Executive Summary

Serbia has gone through a period of dramatic change over the past seven years. The ongoing process of reform has acknowledged Roma children's unequal access to quality education, particularly through the country's participation in the "Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015". In practice, however, progress remains uneven: as promising initiatives are developed, a host of obstacles are identified and not adequately addressed. Political changes have disrupted progress in this area, but the current Government should follow through on commitments made at the national and international levels, to ensure that Roma receive a quality education in an integrated setting. Basic data on Roma in education should be collected and maintained, both to tailor policy and to track progress. Serbia's active and experienced civil sector is a rich resource on which the Government can draw, able to offer a medium for more direct communication with Roma communities themselves.

As in most other countries, there is a lack of reliable data on Roma in the Serbian education system. The existing estimates should be treated with a degree of caution, but generally it is agreed by the Government and by NGOs that there are up to 500,000 Roma living in Serbia. Only about two per cent of children in the relevant age ranges are attending pre-school education, and fewer than 40 per cent are included in primary education. Between 70 and 90 per cent of Roma children who enrol in primary school drop out at some point. According to the official censuses, over 60 per cent of Roma have not completed even primary school. As the proportion of Roma children is increasing, immediate Government action is needed, to ensure that future generations receive a quality education that would give greater access to employment and enable them to actively participate in society.

Although there are no data on the extent of segregation of Roma children in Serbian education, evidence does point to its existence. The most frequent forms of segregation are as follows: segregation of children into separate classes; segregation of children in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities – often following improper placement procedures; segregation in adult education where Roma children under 15 are placed in schools for adult learners with an abridged curriculum. According to official information, there is only one physically segregated school in Serbia, the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Niš. However, due to a lack of research and monitoring nationwide, the true extent of this problem is unknown. Although physical segregation may not be as common a phenomenon in Serbia as in other countries, the existence of other forms of segregation points to the failure of the mainstream system to appropriately educate diverse populations in Serbia, and reveals its overall weakness, as evidenced by the fact that Roma make up an estimated 50 to 80 per cent of children enrolled in special schools.

Roma education issues have entered the mainstream, being addressed in general policy documents, in addition to separate policy documents targeting Roma education specifically. Serbia has joined the “Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”, and has adopted action plans covering the Decade’s four priority areas, including one for education (*Decade Action Plan on Education*). Several Serbian municipalities have also adopted local strategies and/or action plans for improving Roma access to education. All national policy documents accept that the main obstacles for Roma access to education are as follows: exclusion from education and high drop-out rates; poor quality of education and overrepresentation in schools for underachievers; discrimination and segregation; lack of respect for Roma identity. However, there is a clear gap between declarations and practical implementation. A comprehensive, systematic approach to carrying out these policies is needed, as the isolated projects that have been established to date cannot effectively address the breadth of the problems identified.

Despite evidence of segregation across Serbia, formally the State does not recognise the existence of segregation, and desegregation has not so far been dealt with seriously as a matter of policy. However, in some strategic documents certain preventive measures have been proposed, and the Government should begin the research needed to gain a clear picture of the scope of segregation.

Policy documents envisage the introduction of Roma Teaching Assistants (RTAs) in pre-schools and primary schools. After piloting projects, the existing school practice has revealed serious obstacles to greater engagement of RTAs. RTAs were sometimes perceived as “intruders” by the teaching staff. Furthermore, since teaching is generally not based on interactive methodology, many RTAs had essentially nothing to do in the classroom. Importantly, the rigid required qualifications often become a barrier to RTA employment. When appropriately implemented, Roma teaching assistant programmes can be an important means to enhance participation of Roma in education. The true inclusion of RTAs in the teaching and education process in Serbia will require establishing the legal ground and financing mechanisms, working with teachers to change their practice, as well addressing practical obstacles.

Roma are officially recognised as a national minority, and Romanes as a mother tongue of a national minority. Yet, in practice, education in Romanes is only offered as an elective course in primary school – and currently only in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The educational curriculum in Serbia is not very sensitive to the values of multiculturalism and identity of national minorities, and envisioned changes to the curriculum to include multiculturalism and elements of Roma culture and language have not as yet materialised. In schoolbooks, Roma are mentioned at best in the context of World War II and the Holocaust, but more often Roma are mentioned in a stereotyped and negative manner. Official teacher training programmes do not have courses on tolerance and multicultural education (including bilingual education), or a methodology for working with children from deprived backgrounds, nor other aspects of inclusive education. The Ministry of Education and Sports should work with these

training institutions to address the lack of an in-service teacher provision, and develop standards in this area to improve practice in the classroom.

Roma are often exposed to various forms of covert as well as open discrimination by members of school administrations, teachers, other children and non-Roma parents. However, there is no specific and comprehensive anti-discrimination law or anti-discrimination monitoring body in Serbia. Although the Law on Foundations of the Education System forbids discrimination, in practice there have been no cases of sanctions against alleged perpetrators of discriminatory acts in education. The European Union (EU) and other international bodies could be an important force to encourage the adoption of improved anti-discrimination mechanisms in Serbia.

There are serious structural constraints on Roma access to education. Roma children often lack pre-school preparation and as a result fare badly in schools or drop out completely. The physical capacities of existing pre-schools are not sufficient to meet the needs for pre-school-age children in general, and this particularly affects Roma children, who make up a higher proportion of this age group. In addition, the legal and administrative requirements, such as for birth and medical certificates and residence papers, as well as the practice of pre-schools defining their own (internal) criteria for admission, among other factors, pose serious obstacles to the access of Roma to pre-school education. The amended Law on the Foundations of the Education System envisions the introduction of a free and mandatory zero year to prepare all children for primary school. However, the existing infrastructure is clearly insufficient to ensure its effective implementation and the Government should allocate funds to ensure adequate places for all children to comply with such legislation.

Administrative and legal barriers, as well as hidden costs of education, are important barriers to the access of Roma to primary education. Even though children with incomplete paperwork may still be enrolled in a primary school, subject to the good will of the school's administration, expenses for school supplies, clothing, transport, and extracurricular activities become prohibitive for the majority of Roma families, who are often living in poverty. Many Roma parents agree to their children being sent to special schools, in part because these schools relieve the economic burdens of education (school supplies, transport, meals and even boarding). However, these schools deprive children of future educational and professional opportunities. The Government should make available financial assistance for disadvantaged children in mainstream education to remove these incentives.

The residential isolation of Roma settlements and bad housing conditions are also obstructing Roma access to education. In addition, insufficient knowledge of the official language of instruction and absence of bilingual education in Romanes, or of the use of bilingual techniques in early childhood education, coupled with insensitive or discriminatory assessment procedures, may often result in misplacement of Roma pupils in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities.

Roma are systematically exposed to a lower quality of education. Most schools in Serbia are run-down and in need of renovation and newer equipment. Given that many Roma live in impoverished settlements lacking adequate infrastructure and local tax investments, the quality of school buildings in Roma settlements could be even worse than average, although official information is not available.

While, formally, teachers in majority-Roma schools are equally qualified, the phenomenon of “white flight” affects both the student body and the teaching staff. This results in lowered expectations and lowered quality of instruction, and worse achievement of Roma pupils, as demonstrated by the results of standardised tests. Half of the Roma children tested in one study had not mastered elementary mathematical knowledge after the third grade, and an estimated 56 per cent have not mastered even basic knowledge of the Serbian language grammar after the third grade. In the absence of official curricular standards, Roma pupils are reportedly taught an abridged curriculum, and often automatically passed from grade to grade without acquiring basic literacy in the early grades of the primary school, precipitating their drop-out in the higher grades of the primary school. A set of clear and coherent criteria for grading, and a monitoring system to confirm that teachers respect these criteria, should be developed and put in place to address this issue.

Teachers’ prejudices play a significant role in lowering the quality of education for Roma pupils even when Roma are educated in the same classroom as non-Roma. Teachers allegedly disregard racist bullying and harassment of Roma pupils by non-Roma peers and their parents, and often themselves display discriminatory attitudes towards Roma, manifesting prejudices deeply entrenched in the local communities and society at large. Cooperation between schools and parents, if it exists at all, is superficial. Communication with Roma parents is allegedly limited to meetings at which teachers criticise Roma parents about their children.

The newly established Educational Supervision Service could, in theory, be a systematic tool for monitoring barriers and obstacles to the quality of Roma education, and also for supporting real pedagogical innovation and change on the school level. However, there is no indication that this really happens in practice, and on the local level some school inspectors appear unaware even of the existence of State educational policies to improve Roma access to education. The Ministry of Education and Sports should provide better training for inspectors, coupled with a clear mandate to identify and address cases of discrimination.

1.2 Recommendations

1.2.1 Recommendations on monitoring and evaluation

Data Collection

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

1. Ensure that the Electronic Management Information System (EMIS) contains full and reliable information, to enable systematic monitoring of the quality of education that Roma pupils receive, with a view to improving their quality of education.
2. Make regular annual reports containing information on the education of Roma children public and freely available to all relevant stakeholders.
3. Take steps to improve the overall collection of data disaggregated according to ethnic groups, including Roma and other ethnic minorities, with adequate safeguards for protecting sensitive information and identity and privacy of individuals.
4. Develop data collection procedures and mechanisms for education, to ensure that data on education disaggregated on the basis of ethnicity and gender are made publicly available.

Monitoring and evaluation

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

5. Regularly monitor and evaluate the implementation of the *Common Action Plan for Advancement of Roma Education in Serbia*¹ (hereafter, *Decade Action Plan for Education*), revising its priorities, measures and activities, in accordance with real achievements.
6. Develop clear indicators to monitor and evaluate the implementation of Roma-related education initiatives.
7. Evaluate the results of the implementation of the “zero year”, in cooperation with schools and kindergartens, as well as Roma stakeholders; on the basis of this evaluation, develop an action plan to improve the inclusion of Roma children.

The Education Inspectorate should do the following:

8. Establish a clear system of monitoring and sanctioning of discrimination in education.

¹ *Jedinstveni akcioni plan za unapredjivanje obrazovanja Roma* (Common Action Plan for Advancement of Roma Education).

Civil society organisations should do the following:

9. Monitor and report the emergence of segregated classes and schools, and make their research available to the public and policy-makers.

1.2.2 Recommendations for improving access to education

Structural Constraints, Legal and Administrative Requirements, Costs

The Government of the Republic of Serbia should do the following:

10. Fulfil the measure detailed in the *Decade Action Plan for Education* on “Legal regulation of non-segregated inclusion and continued schooling” by passing an official regulation to enable the enrolment of children with incomplete personal documentation in pre-schools and schools, and to set legal criteria for the priority enrolment of disadvantaged children in pre-school.

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

11. Pending the adoption of binding legislation, send a recommendation to all schools to enrol children with incomplete personal documentation in pre-schools and primary schools.
12. Develop financial and other incentives for pre-schools to enrol children from disadvantaged families, to counteract the tendency for pre-schools to give priority to families with two working parents.
13. Fulfil the measure detailed in the *Decade Action Plan for Education*, on “Legal regulation of non-segregated inclusion and continued schooling” to ensure that all children have access to free full-day two-year pre-school, and to ensure that adequate space is available to accommodate all children.
14. Develop financial and other incentives for schools and local self-governments, with the active participation of Roma NGOs and organisations, to actively identify local Roma children left outside the school system and ensure their enrolment.
15. Ensure that mainstream primary schools can offer the same benefits to disadvantaged children as do special schools for children with intellectual disabilities (for example free school meals and school materials, including textbooks), such that these incentives do not encourage disadvantaged families to send their children to special schools rather than mainstream primary schools.
16. Introduce a national system to provide necessary educational materials (in particular textbooks and exercise books) free of charge to disadvantaged children in primary schools.

Residential Segregation/Geographical Isolation

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

17. Fulfil the measure detailed in the *Decade Action Plan for Education* on legal regulation of non-segregated inclusion and continued schooling, that defines concrete measures for the prevention of segregation as well as desegregation mechanisms; in particular, provide support (via the local inspectorates) to pre-schools and schools with a tendency to have exclusively or majority Roma children, to develop desegregation programmes.
18. Redesign the local schools networks, such that pupils from residentially segregated Roma communities are equally distributed among schools in the locality.
19. Further revise the new Draft Law on Pre-School Education, to provide free transport to children coming from settlements that are one kilometre or more away from the nearest pre-school.
20. Establish a system for the ongoing monitoring of segregation in educational institutions.
21. Initiate professional and public debate about the issue of segregation.

School and Class Placement Procedures

The Government of Serbia should do the following:

22. Make it legal to allow Romanes language translators to be present when Roma children with insufficient knowledge of Serbian are put before a medical commission (Commission for Categorisation of Children with Developmental Disabilities, or “Categorisation Commission”), to assess their abilities.
23. Enact official regulations that would prohibit the formation of special or segregated “Roma” classes in primary schools.

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

24. Abolish testing as a requisite for access to the first grade, and provide support within mainstream schools for educating children with learning difficulties.
25. Develop mechanisms for retesting children already committed to special schools and adult education schools, and provide them with adequate educational support to assist their return to mainstream schools.
26. Reevaluate the diagnostic and assessment tools/instruments used in the assessment of children with special educational needs, especially in terms of cultural bias.

27. Provide training to the medical commissions (the Commissions for Categorisation of Children with Developmental Disabilities, or “Categorisation Commissions”) and raise awareness of the reality of differences in language background and cultural context, which can affect a child’s performance on exams.
28. Create clear policy and procedures for transferring children from special to mainstream schools, or from segregated to mixed classes.
29. Prohibit the enrolment of Roma children of school age in schools for adult education, and transfer those pupils who are of school age from these schools to mainstream schools.

Language

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

30. Develop pre-school programmes that strengthen readiness for school among Roma children, by placing particular emphasis on language acquisition and bilingual techniques.
31. Introduce an elective course on “Roma Language with Elements of National Culture” in primary schools, based on the model used in Vojvodina, and make the necessary provisions for its implementation for all of Serbia.
32. Support and foster in-service and pre-service teacher training courses covering language acquisition and methodologies for bilingual education.
33. Ensure that teacher training institutions have the proper curriculum and courses to prepare teachers of Romanes.

1.2.3 Recommendations on improving quality of education

School Facilities and Human Resources

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

34. Allocate financial resources for school infrastructure reconstruction and maintenance, in order to bring up to par the quality of buildings in deprived areas and regions.
35. Counteract the process of “white flight” by improving the quality of education, through the provision of incentives to teachers working in schools showing a tendency to enrol higher numbers of Roma children; such incentives should be linked with assuring a better quality of education for Roma children.
36. Ensure formal conditions for the immediate implementation of the measure on legal regulation of non-segregated inclusion and continued schooling of

employing Roma Teacher Assistants (RTAs) in pre-school and primary school institutions.

37. Define recruitment criteria, procedures, job description and secured financing for Roma Teacher Assistants (RTAs), and ensure their continuous education and support through mentorship by experienced RTAs.

Curricular Standards

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

38. Prioritise the development of national level curricular standards and standards of textbook quality.
39. Issue criteria for teachers to assess and grade student achievement, to prevent the subjective lowering of expectations and the inflating of grades for underachieving students.
40. Introduce standardised testing, for an independent assessment of student achievement.
41. Review the educational curricula for all schooling in pre-tertiary education with regard to diversity and multiculturalism, and make amendments to the curricula as necessary.
42. Ensure that the criteria for textbook development, creation and selection include ethnic diversity issues for all school levels, and that elements of national cultures (including Roma) are included in mandatory teaching materials
43. Accredite and support training and good quality learning materials developed by Roma NGOs, which take into account Roma history, culture and values, and support their distribution to schools in Serbia.
44. Train a national-level expert team that would provide leadership in developing multicultural education materials, taking into consideration the experience of university centres with longstanding experience in the field of Romology.

Classroom Practice and Pedagogy

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

45. Urgently create a system of in-service teacher preparation, with clear criteria for the accreditation of training and services, and allow for the provision of those services by NGOs and university faculties as well as State institutions.
46. Create a system to ensure the continuous training of teachers, education advisors/inspectors, and school managers in pre-service and in-service training, in the following: child-centred pedagogy, interactive teaching methodology, individualised approach, anti-bias education, methodologies for second

language learning, multi-cultural education, and effective ways of involving parents and communities.

47. Accredite in-service teacher training providers to offer new models and practices of school-based leadership and management, student-centred instruction and parent and community involvement.
48. Clarify immediately the distinction in roles and responsibilities between the Education Inspectorates and School Supervision Services of the regional ministries of education.

The School Supervision Service should do the following:

49. Support and assist school management and teaching staff so that they can respond to the needs of Roma pupils, by developing annual working plans, adjusting curricula and introducing extracurricular activities.
50. Provide opportunities for future teachers and educators to receive experience in real educational settings (schools and pre-schools), especially with children from disadvantaged communities.
51. Conduct in-service training for school management and teaching staff on the specificities of problems encountered by the Roma community in education.
52. Encourage school management and teachers to use training resources developed by other providers.
53. Enforce equality regulations and sanction instances of providing lower quality education to children from deprived backgrounds.

Pre-service teacher training institutions should do the following:

54. Sensitise university professors to the educational needs of Roma and the importance of bilingual education, with a view to amending the curriculum of the teacher training institutions and introducing new courses that would help to educate competent human resources, to work with children from deprived surroundings.
55. Include school improvement theory and practice into the official curriculum of the teacher training institutions.

School–Community Relations

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

56. Encourage and better utilise civil society experience and expertise in improving access and quality of education for Roma children, in cooperation with relevant stakeholders on the community level.

The School Supervision Services should do the following:

57. Support schools to find create ways to involve parents and communities in school life and the learning process.

Discriminatory Attitudes

The Government of the Republic of Serbia should do the following:

58. Pass without delay comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation, including in the field of education, and ensure its effective implementation.

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

59. Translate the anti-discriminatory provisions of the Law on the Protection of National Minorities and the Law on the Foundations of the Education System into practical mechanisms and procedures, to ensure their effective implementation.
60. Educate teaching staff, pupils and parents on their rights in education and against discrimination.

School Inspections

The Ministry of Education and Sports should do the following:

61. Give appropriate authority and support to the newly formed school supervisors to act as mentors and support to schools and teachers, and to monitor the barriers and obstacles to quality of education for Roma.

The Education Inspectorate should do the following:

62. Provide information to school inspectors on the Roma-related educational initiatives that form part of the official educational policies, with a view to inspecting their implementation.
63. Instruct school inspectors to better identify and sanction instances of discrimination against minority pupils.

2. BASIC EDUCATION INDICATORS

As in most other countries, there is a lack of reliable data on Roma in the Serbian education system. The existing estimates should be treated with a degree of caution, but generally it is agreed by the Government and by NGOs that there are up to 500,000 Roma living in Serbia. Only about two per cent of children in the relevant age ranges are attending pre-school education, and fewer than 40 per cent are included in primary education. Between 70 and 90 per cent of Roma children who enrol in primary school drop out at some point. According to the official censuses, over 60 per cent of Roma have not completed even primary school. As the proportion of Roma children is increasing, immediate Government action is needed, to ensure that future generations receive a quality education that would give greater access to employment and enable them to actively participate in society.

Although there are no data on the extent of segregation of Roma children in Serbian education, evidence does point to its existence. The most frequent forms of segregation are as follows: segregation of children into separate classes; segregation of children in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities – often following improper placement procedures; segregation in adult education where Roma children under 15 are placed in schools for adult learners with an abridged curriculum. According to official information, there is only one physically segregated school in Serbia, the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Niš. However, due to a lack of research and monitoring nationwide, the true extent of this problem is unknown. Although physical segregation may not be as common a phenomenon in Serbia as in other countries, the existence of other forms of segregation points to the failure of the mainstream system to appropriately educate diverse populations in Serbia, and reveals its overall weakness, as evidenced by the fact that Roma make up an estimated 50 to 80 per cent of children enrolled in special schools.

2.1 Data collection

As in most other countries, there is a lack of reliable data on Roma in the Serbian education system. Among the principal reasons behind the insufficient data are the following: lack of personal documentation and/or registration of Roma, mobility of many families in search of seasonal work, and widespread unwillingness of Roma to declare themselves as such in order to avoid persistent prejudices and stereotypes.²

The deficit of disaggregated statistics is also caused by the somewhat arbitrary interpretation of the provisions of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System,³ as precluding ethnic data collection. But there is no legal regulation that would expressly forbid data collection on ethnic background in Serbia.

² Petar Lađević, secretary of the Republic Council for Minorities, meeting to present the working strategy of the Roma Education Fund (REF) for Serbia, held at the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade 20 April 2006.

³ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, *The Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia* (hereafter, *Official Gazette*) No. 62/03 (in force since 25 May 2003), 64/03, and Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, 58/04 and 62/04 (in force since 5 June 2004) (hereafter, Law on the Foundations of the Education System).

The Education Management Information System (EMIS)⁴ is currently in the process of development, in the framework of the World Bank “Education Improvement Project (2002–2006).” EMIS is a database containing information on all students, teachers, and other staff in schools; it also contains financial indicators, such as school budgets. EMIS is supposed to be updated regularly in order to ensure reliable data on all important aspects of education system at any moment. If implemented properly, this system could potentially provide the basis for monitoring the improvement of educational achievements of Roma students.

2.2 Enrolment data and trends

According to the latest population census of 2002 (hereafter, 2002 census), the population of Serbia is 7,498,001, of which Roma constitute 1.44 per cent (108,193).⁵ However, both Government and NGOs admit that the number of Roma is underestimated in the census.⁶

There are various unofficial estimates of the Roma population, but their accuracy is also affected by the presence of large numbers of unregistered persons, particularly those who came to Serbia in the 1990s as refugees or internally displaced persons (IDPs) from other countries of the former Yugoslavia and the territory of Kosovo. In addition, from 2000 onwards, repatriation of Roma from the European Union (EU) countries began, resulting in tens of thousands of new arrivals, often also without papers.⁷ Some estimate that the total number of Roma in Serbia may be as high as 800,000. However, the consolidated estimate is 450,000 to 500,000,⁸ or over 6 per cent of the overall population.

According to official statistics (2002 census), 15.4 per cent of the Roma population (total 108,000) is of pre-school age, aged up to six years old (see Table 1). Taking into account the unofficial estimates of a total Roma population of between 250,000

⁴ Further detailson the Education Management Information System (EMIS) available in Serbian on the Ministry of Education and Sports website at <http://www.mps.sr.gov.yu/code/navigate.php?Id=441> (accessed on 1 March 2007).

⁵ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, information available in Serbian at <http://webzrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/index.php> (accessed on 7 March 2007) (hereafter, 2002 census)

⁶ Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Minorities, *Nacionalne manjina u SR Jugoslaviji* (National Minorities in FR Yugoslavia), Belgrade, 2001 (hereafter, Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Minorities, *National Minorities*).

⁷ An NGO report suggests that about 11,000 Roma have been repatriated to Serbia just from Germany (in the period 2000–2004), with no data for other EU countries. See Save the Children and the Centre for Children’s Rights, *Više od nezvanične procene – položaj romske dece u Srbiji* (Beyond an Unofficial Estimate – the Position of Roma Children in Serbia), Belgrade, Save the Children, Serbia 2006 (hereafter, Save the Children and the Centre for Children’s Rights, *Beyond an Unofficial Estimate*), p. 8.

⁸ Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Communities, *National Minorities*.

(estimate I) and 500,000 (estimate II), the corresponding number of Roma children of pre-school age would be between 38,500 and 77,000,⁹ of whom 22,000 to 44,000 are aged between three and six (see Table 2).

According to the 2002 census, Roma children of primary school age (between the ages of seven and 14) constitute 16.4 per cent of the total Roma population (see Table 1). Again, taking into account the unofficial estimates of a total Roma population of 250,000 to 500,000, there may in fact be between 41,000 and 82,000 Roma children who are supposed to be covered by primary education; of these, between 5,125 and 10,250 children could be seven years old, and therefore eligible to enrol in the first grade of the primary school every school year (see Table 2).

Table 1: Official statistics on the population aged under 20 – for Roma and the national population (2002)

Age group (years)	National level		Roma	
	Total	per cent	Total	per cent
0–4	342,344	4.6	12,287	11.4
5–9	394,596	5.3	11,545	10.7
10–14	439,830	5.9	10,573	9.8
15–19	495,651	6.6	10,099	9.3
Total (under 20)	1,672,421	22.3	44,504	41.1
0–6 (estimate)	515,858	6.9	16,682	15.4
3–6 (estimate)	294,776	3.9	9,533	8.8
7–14 (estimate)	667,540	8.9	17,694	16.4

Source: 2002 census

⁹ If 15.4 per cent of Roma are in the 0–6 age range, then an estimate of the number of Roma children in that age group is obtained by applying this percentage to 250,000 and 500,000, respectively (the two unofficial estimates of the Roma population).

Table 2. Estimates of the number of Roma children of pre-school and primary school age

Age group (years)	Official statistics (2002 census)	Unofficial estimate I (minimum)	Unofficial estimate II (maximum)
0–6	16,682	38,500	77,000
3–6	9,533	22,000	44,000
7–14	17,694	41,000	82,000
7	2,309	5,125	10,250
Total Roma population	108,000	250,000	500,000

Source: 2002 census; the Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic Communities.¹⁰

A comparison of the data from the population censuses of 1991¹¹ and 2002 reveals that the number of non-Roma children has decreased by about 2 per cent per year, while the number of Roma children has increased by about 1.5 per cent per year. Any educational policy planning aimed at increasing the net enrolment of Roma children should take into account this increase, as well as the possibility that in the coming years there may be a considerable influx of children of school age, following the mass readmission of Roma from the EU countries.

2.2.1 Roma children in pre-school education

According to an analysis by UNICEF, 11.8 per cent of all children aged under three, and 44.4 per cent of children aged between three and six, are covered by pre-school education; in total, therefore, around 30 per cent of the total population aged under seven in Serbia is covered by pre-school education.¹² These data are corroborated by information obtained by the Serbian Statistics Institute.¹³

There are no official data concerning pre-school education (for children aged under seven) of Roma children specifically. However, according to a representative of the

¹⁰ Federal Ministry of National and Ethnic and National Communities, *National Minorities*.

¹¹ Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, information available in Serbian at <http://webzrs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/index.php> (accessed on 7 March 2007) (hereafter, 1992 census)

¹² UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia*, Belgrade, UNICEF, 2001, available at http://www.unicef.org/serbia/resources_868.html (accessed on 2 March 2007) (hereafter, UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education*).

¹³ For example, in 2003, there were approximately 160,000 children covered by pre-school facilities, which is around 30 per cent of children under seven. Statistical Office of the Republic of Serbia, information available in Serbian at <http://webzrs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/index.php> (accessed on 8 March 2007).

Roma National Council,¹⁴ no Roma children enrol in pre-school institutions before the age of six, and even among six-year olds only a very small number are covered by pre-school education.¹⁵

The study *Roma and Education* found that around seven per cent of Roma children of pre-school age attend pre-schools.¹⁶ This proportion is much lower than that for the population as a whole (27 per cent).¹⁷ However, even this figure of seven per cent appears to be an overestimate, as the research sample was not sufficiently representative (respondents were all from the four major cities). The *Needs Assessment* prepared by the Roma Education Fund (REF), as part of the preparations for the “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”,¹⁸ stated that around 1,000 Roma children attend the pre-school programmes designed and carried out by NGOs; this represents around 1.3 to 2.6 per cent of Roma children aged up to six years old (Table 2).¹⁹ Yet NGO projects are not a systematic solution, and there is no guarantee that these 1,000 Roma children will in future still be covered by pre-school education. For example, in Belgrade two pre-schools that had been set up in Roma settlements, and that applied the “Step-by-Step”²⁰ methodology within the framework of the Open Society Institute (OSI) programme “Kindergarten as family centre in Roma communities”, were closed when this programme ended.²¹

There are expectations that the situation with regard to Roma enrolment in pre-schools will improve with the introduction, from 2006, of a compulsory and free of charge

¹⁴ According to Article 19 of the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, “The persons belonging to national minorities may elect national councils [...] with the purpose of exercising rights of self-government regarding the use of language and script, education, information and culture.” The first Roma National Council was elected in May 2003.

¹⁵ Interview with Mr. Ljuran Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the Roma National Council, Belgrade, 12 March 2006.

¹⁶ N. Kočić-Rakočević and A. Miljević, *Roma and Education*, Belgrade, Roma Children’s Centre, 2003 (hereafter, Kočić-Rakočević and Miljević, *Roma and Education*).

¹⁷ Kočić-Rakočević and Miljević, *Roma and Education*.

¹⁸ The “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”, an initiative supported by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the World Bank, is an unprecedented international effort to combat discrimination and ensure that Roma have equal access to education, housing, employment and health care. Launched in February 2005 and endorsed by nine Central and Eastern European countries, the Decade is also supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. For further details, see the Decade website (www.romadecade.org).

¹⁹ M. Mihajlović, *Needs Assessment Study for the Roma Education Fund – Serbia (without Kosovo)*. Budapest, REF, 2004 (hereafter, REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*).

²⁰ “Step-by-Step” is a child-centred educational programme based on interactive methods of teaching and individualised educational process.

²¹ Interviews with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 28 November 2006.

“zero grade” in pre-schools.²² However, due to the limited capacities of pre-schools, and the fact that in many cases the pre-schools are not geographically accessible to all communities, coverage of children of pre-school age could end up benefiting mostly non-Roma children, owing to the less favourable social status of Roma. In other words, these new opportunities may only deepen the inequalities of the Roma children of pre-school age.

2.2.2 Roma children in primary education

Some data are available on Roma children in primary education, but these are not systematic. For example, there are figures for the 2002–2003 school year²³ for the number of Roma pupils in the individual grades of primary school (see Table 3). Overall, 16,337 Roma pupils were in primary education that year (including 2,105 Roma pupils in special schools),²⁴ representing 2.0 to 2.4 per cent of Roma pupils of the entire population of primary school pupils in Serbia. However, there is no similar information for other school years, so it is not possible to draw any conclusions on enrolment trends.

²² Under Article 85 of the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, the primary school preparation programme (at least six months, four hours a day) is part of pre-school education. The preparatory pre-school programme becomes compulsory starting in the 2006–2007 school year, and will cover all children born between 1 March 2000 and 1 March 2001.

²³ At that time Tunde Kovač, senior education advisor at the Roma Education Fund, was Deputy Minister of Education, and she initiated the data collection. The data are cited from an internal document.

²⁴ REF *Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 19.

Table 3: Total number of Roma and non-Roma pupils in mainstream primary education – breakdown by grade (2002–2003 school year)

Grade	Non-Roma	Roma	
	Total	Total	per cent
1	84,096	3,206	3.81
2	82,804	2,348	2.84
3	83,120	1,882	2.26
4	82,710	1,747	2.11
5	87,408	1,732	1.98
6	85,686	1,355	1.58
7	85,841	1,018	1.19
8	88,795	944	1.06
Total	680,460	14,232	2.09

Source: Republic Institute for Statistics; and Ministry of Education and Sports²⁵

It is not clear what proportion of the eligible Roma children (aged seven to 14) are actually covered by primary school education. According to official statistical data (Table 4), there are a total of 17,694 Roma children of primary school age in Serbia, of whom a high proportion are covered by primary education. However, based on the unofficial estimates of the Roma population (between 41,000 and 82,000 Roma children aged seven to 14), more than half may be outside the school system. Therefore, assuming that the Roma population in Serbia is at least 250,000, the most probable enrolment rate estimate does not exceed 40 per cent, according to research conducted by the Ministry Human and Minority Rights.²⁶

²⁵ Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity, *Romska naselja, uslovi života i mogućnosti integracije Roma u Srbiji* (Roma Settlements, Living Conditions and Possibilities for Roma Integration in Serbia), Belgrade, 2002 (hereafter, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity, *Roma Settlements*).

²⁶ Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity, *Roma Settlements*.

Table 4: Number of Roma children covered by primary school education

Population estimate	Total Roma population	Roma population aged 7 to 14	Proportion of Roma children covered by primary education (per cent)
Official statistical data (2002 census)	108,193	17,694	92.3
Unofficial estimate I (minimum)	250,000	41,000	39.8
Unofficial estimate II (maximum)	500,000	82,000	19.9

Source: 2002 census; also, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights²⁷

However, like all information concerning Roma, the estimates of net enrolment should be viewed in a broader context. Thus, a possible explanation for high net enrolment figures in the official statistics (around 92 per cent) may be the fact that they only take into account those Roma who are integrated and are covered by the population census. A considerable part of the Roma population remains outside the census (and society at large), and thus does not feature in the official educational data. Hence, with regard to the number of Roma children not covered by primary school education, there is a significant discrepancy between unofficial estimates (between 23,000 and 64,000) and the official statistics (1,300). This discrepancy reflects the unreliability of statistics on Roma in general for Serbia, which leaves policy-makers guessing at reality.

2.3 Retention and completion

Table 5 illustrates the educational status of the adult Roma community in Serbia, according to the 1991 and 2002 censuses. Over this eleven-year period there has been a marked improvement in the proportion of Roma who have enrolled in (but not completed) primary school (from 26.1 per cent to 34.7 per cent). However, overall the situation has not changed; according to both censuses, about 62 or 63 per cent of Roma have not even completed primary school.

²⁷ Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Centre for the Study of Ethnicity, *Roma Settlements*.

Table 5: Educational status of adult population (aged 25 and over) – for the national and Roma populations (1991, 2001)

Educational status	Proportion of the population (per cent)		
	Roma population		Total population
Educational status	1991	2002	2002
No education	36.6	27.4	12.5
Primary school not completed	26.1	34.7	20.5
Primary school completed (eight grades)	27.1	28.2	25
Secondary school completed	8.1	9.2	32.2
College and university degree	0.9	0.4	8.9
No information	1.2	0.1	0.9
Total	100	100	100

Source: 1991 census and 2001 census

The 2005 UNDP survey *Vulnerable Groups in Central and Southeastern Europe*²⁸ found that Roma in Serbia spend half as much time in education as non-Roma who live in the same settlements – 5.5 years as opposed to 11 years (Table 6). Thus, on average, Roma in Serbia do not even complete primary school, which indicates that the State does not manage to ensure that Roma children obtain the level of education guaranteed under the Constitution.²⁹

²⁸ UNDP, *Vulnerable Groups in Central and Southeastern Europe*, 2005, available at <http://vulnerability.undp.sk/> (accessed on 1 March 2007) (hereafter, UNDP, *Vulnerable Groups*).

²⁹ Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, 1990 (hereafter, Constitution), Section II Freedoms, Rights and Duties of Man and Citizen, Art. 32, “Education shall be accessible to everyone under equal conditions. Primary education shall be obligatory. Citizens do not pay tuition for regular education financed from public fund. Members of other nations and national minorities have the right to education in their own language in accordance with law”.

Table 6: Duration of schooling for Roma and non-Roma (2005)

Duration of schooling (years)	Population (aged 6+)			
	Majority population living in close proximity to Roma		Roma	
	Total	per cent	Total	per cent
None	35	3	288	18
up to 5	113	9	435	28
5–8	145	12	598	38
9–12	590	49	235	15
13–15	185	15	24	2
16+	134	11	0	0
Total	1,202	100	1,580	100
Average duration	11		5.5	

Source: UNDP³⁰

It is also estimated that Roma children on average enrol in primary school at an older age than non-Roma; an estimated 70 per cent enrol at the age of seven, around 20 per cent at the age of seven and a half, and around ten per cent at the age of eight.³¹

According to the Roma National Council, not all Roma children actually enrol in the first grade of the primary school.³² Of those who do enrol, a considerable number drop out already in the first grade, but the most dramatic drop-out begins in the second and third grades, when about half of Roma children enrolling in primary school are believed to terminate their schooling. The next phase of massive drop-out is between the fourth and the fifth grade of primary school, coinciding with a change from classroom teaching (having one teacher for most subjects) to subject teaching (having a different teacher in each subject). It seems that, for a considerable number of Roma children, this turning point is actually an exit point. Of those who continue their schooling after the fourth grade, some drop out after the sixth grade, and only an estimated ten per cent enrol in the seventh grade. In other words, if ten Roma children

³⁰ UNDP, *Vulnerable Groups*.

³¹ Interview with Mr. Ljuan Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Roma National Minority in Serbia and Montenegro, 12 March 2006.

³² Interview with Mr. Ljuan Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Roma National Minority in Serbia and Montenegro, 12 March 2006.

enrol in the primary school, five of them will enrol in the fifth grade, but only one will enrol in the seventh grade and possibly complete primary education.

Table 3 (above) illustrates the drop-out rates among Roma children in the different grades. In the 2002–2003 school year, 3,206 Roma pupils enrolled in the first grade, but only 944 enrolled in the seventh grade, implying that only 29.4 per cent of Roma children who enrolled in the primary school reached the final grade of the primary school. It should be noted that there is some discrepancy in these numbers, caused by using different sources. No one source can be treated as entirely accurate. But the compound estimate is that between 70 and 90 per cent of the Roma children who enrol in primary school drop out at some point, compared to the national average of an estimated at 4.4 per cent.³³

This drastic gap suggests that mechanisms to ensure universal completion of compulsory primary education are far from effective in Serbia. (For details on the Serbian education system, including the ages for compulsory education, see Annex 1). There is a need for a broad range of policy measures targeting various social, family, and educational factors contributing to the high drop-out rate of Roma pupils.

2.4 Types and extent of segregation

There are no comprehensive data about the extent of segregation in education in Serbia. The lack of data, however, is not an indication that the phenomenon of segregation of Roma is not a significant problem in Serbia. Rather, more thorough and comprehensive research is needed on the types and extent of segregation.

2.4.1 Segregation in pre-school institutions

No information is available about the segregation of Roma children in pre-schools. The proportion of Roma children covered by pre-school education hardly exceeds one per cent. However, there are no data on whether the children are placed in mixed groups or Roma-only groups in pre-school. Also, Roma NGOs do not have information on groups where Roma children are a majority, or groups that completely consist of Roma children.

In the past ten years, the non-governmental sector has conducted various pre-school programmes, in particular under the “Step-by-Step” programme of the Fund for an Open Society – Serbia (FOSS). These programmes were organised in the Roma settlements. This was in order to make accessibility real, and the trust between the families and sending their children to pre-school in a trusted local institution made attendance more regular as well. Community pre-schools have been opened with the

³³ Data are for the 1999–2000 school year. UNESCO Institute for Statistics, *Education for All – Global Monitoring Report*, UNESCO, 2007, available at <http://gmr.uis.unesco.org/> (accessed on 1 March 2007).

aim of ensuring equal access to pre-school education to Roma children, to prepare children for school using adequate methodology, and thus to prevent their unjustified enrolment in special schools. According to the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), under whose expert guidance these programmes have been carried out, all children from these groups have enrolled in mainstream schools and been placed in non-segregated classes.

In addition, in the past three years efforts have been made to integrate community-based pre-schools into the mainstream pre-school system. The transference of pre-school groups into mainstream pre-schools has helped to change the mono-ethnic makeup of these groups (except in the case of a pre-school group in the above-mentioned Vuk Karadžić Primary School).³⁴

2.4.2 Segregation in primary education

On the basis of information available through civil society organisations,³⁵ as well as through the Roma National Council and the Federal Ministry of Human and Minority Rights,³⁶ between the 2002–2003 school year and now, only a handful of cases of segregation have been recorded in primary education:

- Segregated classes in three primary schools: in Subotica (Sečenji Ištvan primary school), Belgrade (Vlada Obradović-Kameni primary school – one class), and Bujanovac (Branko Radičević primary school – six classes from the first to the sixth grade).
- A segregated primary school in Niš (Vuk Karadžić, where over 80 per cent of pupils are Roma children).

The Minority Rights Centre reported that the school representatives and teachers gave the following reasons for forming the so-called “Roma classes” in mainstream schools: the children’s insufficient knowledge of the Serbian or Hungarian³⁷ language; the older

³⁴ Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, *Reports of the Roma “Step by Step” Project “Kindergarten as a Family Centre 1998–2005,”* Belgrade, 2005.

³⁵ For example, the Minority Rights Centre (MRC/CPM), the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), the Roma Education Centre (REC) and the Roma Children’s Centre (RCC/DRC).

³⁶ After the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro ceased to exist, no ministry with corresponding jurisdiction has been set up at the level of the Republic of Serbia. One of the acts passed to ensure that Serbia should continue to exercise jurisdiction as the State successor of the State Union and enacted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia at its meeting on 8 June 2006 was the Act Setting Up the Office for Human and Minority Rights, which has partially taken over areas of jurisdiction of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights. Regulation on the Establishment of the Department for human and Minority Rights, *Official Gazette* No.49/2006.

³⁷ This problem exists in certain areas in Vojvodina, where Roma attend schools with classes taught in the Hungarian language.

age of children enrolling in the first grade;³⁸ and the protests of non-Roma parents who request that the Roma children be put into separate classes.³⁹

Sometimes segregation is a consequence of the belated enrolment of Roma children in school (in late September) when all classes have already been formed. According to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights and the Roma Children's Centre, this was the case with schools in Belgrade and Subotica.⁴⁰ The Ministry of Education and Sports sent a communiqué to all schools about the dangers of forming segregated classes.⁴¹

Educational policy in Serbia (which is analysed in more detail in section 3), is explicit in its requirement that the principle of non-segregation be observed in forming classes. If segregated classes were already formed, introduction of desegregation programmes has been envisaged. There is no legislation that explicitly treats this issue. However, until desegregation policy has been fully implemented, the problem of segregated classes is dealt with on a case-by-case basis.

It is claimed that there are no other segregated classes in Subotica and Belgrade.⁴² However, a sprouting of new schools with segregated classes in junior grades of primary schools in Senta and Horgoš has been recorded, which again points out to the lack of information concerning segregation in Serbia.⁴³

Although it has been insufficiently researched, the existence of segregated classes in village schools has been noted. This is illustrated by research at the local level carried out in the framework of this report in 2006.⁴⁴ Thus, a subsidiary of the Andra Savčić

³⁸ In some instances, due to interventions of NGOs, schools have accepted older Roma children (aged eight to ten) to the first grade of the primary school.

³⁹ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

⁴⁰ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006; interview with Ms. Milica Simić coordinator of the Roma Children Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

⁴¹ REF, *Draft Strategy for Serbia*, by Tunde Kovač Cerović, presented at the roundtable meeting at the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights, 20 April 2006.

⁴² Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006; interview with Ms. Milica Simić coordinator of the Roma Children Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

⁴³ OSI Roundtable meeting, Belgrade, 31 October 2006. Explanatory note: the OSI held a roundtable meeting in Belgrade in October 2006 to invite critiques of the present report in draft form. Experts present included representatives of the Government, parents and non-governmental organisations.

⁴⁴ For each country report in this series of EUMAP reports on "Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma", three case studies were carried out to supplement and corroborate data gathered from other sources. Information from the case studies are integrated throughout the body of each country report. Annex 2 includes additional details from each of the case study sites. In Serbia the three sites are Niš, Valjevo and Zemun.

Primary School, located in the village of Grabovici near the town of Valjevo, contains a segregated class with 95 per cent of Roma children from the first to the fourth grades. From the fifth grade onwards, the children commute to attend classes in the parent primary school, at which point they are placed in ethnically mixed classes. In interviews, however, parents stressed the point that they would like their children to continue attending the school in the village subsidiary of the school, primarily because it is nearby, but also because “everyone is the same there.”⁴⁵ This may indicate the existence of discriminatory treatment that makes Roma pupils feel uncomfortable in the school where they are a minority (see also section 3.8).

Generally, rural schools in Serbia face complex problems due to the dwindling population, and this example of the segregated class is just one in a series of problems that are difficult to solve. Another recorded case is about two Roma settlements near Brankovina, in Valjevo Municipality. Children living in the settlements have to travel five kilometres each way to reach the nearest school. As a consequence, especially in bad weather, children skip school.⁴⁶

However, according to official information, there is only one segregated school in Serbia: the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Niš. The school is in the vicinity of a large Roma settlement comprising 4,500 inhabitants. The second-nearest school is more than two kilometres away from the settlement, and the road there is full of heavy traffic. The population gravitating towards this school is mostly of Roma origin. The process of segregation of this school has been gradual, over a period of ten years. Over this time, not only Serbian children, but also Roma children whose parents are more educated and better-off, started to avoid this school, due to poorer quality of teaching and lowered educational criteria (see sections 5.3 and 5.4).

The following assessment of school segregation has been made by the NGO Roma Education Centre *Romski edukativni centar*, hereafter REC) in Niš:

One of the key reasons is that Roma live isolated in their settlements, in ghettos. As soon as a certain number of Roma children enrol in a school, this school gets a reputation of being bad, a “Gypsy school.” As a rule, the quality of teaching diminishes in classes in which the number of Roma children is sizeable, because of lowered expectations from both sides. Parents always want to send their children to better schools. What impact do these facts have on segregation? Discrimination on the part of non-Roma parents; the pressure that “respectable” (non-Roma) parents exert on a school’s administration; a climate which is generally unhealthy, social distance, stereotypes on both sides, self-segregation of Roma; the rising tendency

⁴⁵ Interviews conducted in Valjevo in the period May–June 2006 by researcher Slavica Vasić. See Annex A2.2: Valjevo Case Study.

⁴⁶ Interviews conducted in Valjevo in the period May–June 2006 by researcher Slavica Vasić. See Annex A2.2: Valjevo Case Study.

among non-Roma children to withdraw from “Gypsy schools”, the so-called “white flight.”⁴⁷

The Vuk Karadžić Primary School was included in the Roma Education Initiative (REI) project in Serbia, “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth into the Education System” (hereafter, the “Equal Chances” project).⁴⁸ For three years, a desegregation programme has been implemented in cooperation with the local NGOs, the REC and the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), implementing partners, the Ministry of Education and Sports and the local self-government. Resources have been invested by city government in reconstruction and redecoration of the school. Quality education programmes for children have been introduced under the OSI’s “Step-by-Step” programme, and management and teaching staff have been continually trained. Roma teaching assistants (RTAs) have been engaged. Nevertheless, the progress made has not solved the problem of segregation in this school, as can be seen from the last project report:

The biggest challenge was, and still is, the primary school “Vuk Karadžić” in Niš. The school remains marginalised, in spite of actions taken in its immediate environment, with a poor turn-out of local authorities at the events organised. There are evident changes in the school environment and increase of enthusiasm among the staff, but there is still a lack of real motivation to preserve what had been achieved and to move forward. The future of the school is not clear, which affects its planning. Even the relationship with RTAs is changing due to the prevailing atmosphere in the school. In 2004/2005 academic year there were 13 non-Roma children in the first grade, this academic year (2005/2006) there are only three. This confused and discouraged them, and again cast doubts whether this project was good for the school. The survey done by the school’s social worker has

⁴⁷ Interview with Ms. Refika Mustafić, director of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 22 March 2006.

⁴⁸ The “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth into the Education System” (hereafter, “Equal Chances” project) of the Fund for an Open Society – Serbia (FOSS) was implemented from the 2002–2003 to the 2004–2005 school year, within the framework of the OSI’s Roma Education Initiative (REI), with the financial support from various donors. The main implementing partner was the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), and the primary Roma local partners were the Roma Education Centre (REC) in Niš and the Roma Information Centre (RIC) in Kragujevac. The Project implementers created and tested, in practice, a comprehensive model for the quality education and integration of Roma children by operating at the local and national levels, including working with educational institutions, and by involving all stakeholders and supporters of the educational process (including the Ministry of Education and Sports, regional departments of the Ministry of Education and Sports, local governments, schools, Roma NGOs, pupils and their families). Project activities were implemented at the local level in Niš and Kragujevac, at the pre-school, primary and secondary school levels.

shown that non-Roma families are moving from that part of the town, so objectively the number of non-Roma children is rapidly decreasing.⁴⁹

2.4.3 Segregation in special schools

In Serbia, there are 80 special schools in total (there are different types of special school, including those for children with different types of disabilities). According to an OECD study these are regularly attended by a total of 8,829 pupils – 7,560 at the primary level and 1,269 at the secondary level.⁵⁰ Within mainstream education, for children with special needs it is possible to form developmental groups in pre-schools, as well as special classes in primary schools; however, these classes form a part of the special education system, rather than mainstream education.⁵¹ An analysis is underway, conducted by the Institute for Advancement of Education of the Republic of Serbia, which is expected to provide more accurate information on special schools in Serbia.⁵²

There is no consistent information about the number of Roma children in special education. According to some estimates, Roma make up 50–80 per cent of children in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities (hereafter, “special schools”) and in special classes of mainstream schools; in Belgrade, the proportion is as high as 80–85 per cent.⁵³ Allegedly, most of these children have been wrongly assigned.⁵⁴

Research conducted by Save the Children – using as a sample of eight special primary schools and four special secondary schools – found that Roma children make up 37.07 per cent of the pupils in special primary schools, and 39.34 per cent of those in special secondary schools.⁵⁵ A study conducted on behalf of the Roma Education Fund (REF) found that 2,000 Roma children are placed in special schools.⁵⁶ Combining these two data sources, it appears that about 25 per cent of Roma children are educated in special

⁴⁹ Fund for an Open Society – Serbia (FOSS), *Report on the Project “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Education System”*, 2002–2005, FOSS, 2005, an internal document. The project information is available on the organisation’s website <http://www.fosserbia.org/programs/project.php?id=411> (accessed on 1 March 2007) (hereafter, FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*).

⁵⁰ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), *Educational Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in South Eastern Europe*, OECD, Paris, 2006, available at https://www.oecd.org/document/34/0,2340,en_2649_34531_36507298_1_1_1_1,00.htmlpp (accessed on 2 March 2007), 347–348 (hereafter, OECD, *Educational Policies*).

⁵¹ Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

⁵² The Institute for the Advancement of Education of the Republic of Serbia is a public and professional institution established by the Government of Serbia to work on improvement of the quality of education in Serbia.

⁵³ REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 23.

⁵⁴ REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 23.

⁵⁵ Save the Children and the Centre for Children’s Rights, *Beyond an Unofficial Estimate*.

⁵⁶ REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 23.

schools. Assuming that this is a reliable estimate, this indicates a lower figure than the Save the Children estimate, but nevertheless, it cannot be considered good news that Roma children make up a quarter of the student body in Serbian special schools.

The ramifications for Roma children who have been placed in special education are negative and long-lasting. Compared to mainstream schools, the curricula of special schools are reduced, their educational standards are lower, and as a consequence, progression to higher levels of education is limited. Schooling can be continued mostly in secondary special schools training children for various trades. Needless to say, their job prospects are also very limited.

2.4.4 Segregation in adult education

Another important phenomenon is the significant presence of Roma children under the age of 15 in adult education. Adult education is a formal system of education, financed through the same channels as elementary education. Adult education schools exist in all major towns in Serbia, organised either through lessons organised on a consultative basis or through regular daily classes. Such schools were originally meant to equip (adult) pupils merely with basic literacy. However, currently these schools are mostly used by those pupils who are late in enrolling in primary school, or who gave up schooling at some point, but after several years decided to return to school. The curriculum of an adult education primary school normally consists of only two subjects, mathematics and Serbian language, in addition to technical education. Once they finish the school, the graduates' diploma is, in theory, valid for enrolment in any secondary school. But in practice, based on the accelerated schedule (for example, students can complete two grades in one school year), which reflects on the decreased criteria and lack of systematic scholarship, opportunities for secondary education are usually very limited.

The research conducted by the Roma Children's Centre, *Roma and Education*, suggests that Roma, including children of school age, constitute over 90 per cent of the student body in these schools. Allegedly, Roma children attend adult education schools because they have failed to enrol in mainstream primary schools on time, or have dropped out.⁵⁷ The latest data provided by Save the Children indicate that the situation is even worse. Research conducted in three schools for primary adult education in the 2005–2006 school year shows that as many as 98 per cent of the children attending the schools for adult education are Roma.⁵⁸

According to the teaching staff in adult education schools, the prospects for Roma children educated in adult education schools are grim. The curriculum of an adult education primary school, containing only two academic subjects, is meant to equip pupils merely with basic literacy. Once they finish the school, their opportunities are

⁵⁷ Kočić-Rakočević and Miljević, *Roma and Education*.

⁵⁸ Save the Children and the Centre for Children's Rights, *Beyond an Unofficial Estimate*.

limited to the possibility of enrolling in a trade apprenticeship lasting several months at best, and with resulting limited employment options.

Faced with the problem that the curriculum in adult education is ill-suited to the increasingly younger population of children who attend these schools (aged 10 to 15) in 2003 the school boards requested, and were granted, the approval of the Ministry of Education and Sports to make their curriculum more comprehensive. However, in 2006 the Ministry revoked this approval, allegedly because the new staff disagreed with certain decisions of the previous Ministry. However, all the schools, across all of Serbia, agreed to continue working in accordance with the more comprehensive curriculum, despite the Ministry's decision.⁵⁹

It appears that the Ministry of Education and Sports has not taken any steps to solve the problem. The inclusion of children in adult education schools is not in compliance with the existing legal regulations. Under the Law on the Foundations of the System of Education, the age limit for children to enrol in primary school is nine (see also Annex A1.1). The Law on Primary Education of Adults regulates enrolment in the adult education schools from the age of 15. It has been noted that for a certain number of Roma children, this type of schooling has become the only opportunity for them to acquire any education. Although these schools are not adequate for educating children, the staff in these schools are making efforts to adjust the school curriculum and the teaching process to their pupils as much as possible.⁶⁰

Although the physical segregation of Roma children and the existence of "Roma schools" may not be as common a phenomenon in Serbia as it is in other countries of the region, nevertheless segregation does exist in other forms, as is demonstrated by the data presented here. As long as a desegregation education policy is clearly mandated, and educators are informed of the consequences of segregating into separate classes – and with proper supports in place – perhaps such a type of segregation in Serbia can be rectified before it becomes too deeply engrained in the system. For the other types of segregation, appropriate measures will have to be taken. The mere existence of such types of segregation, however, points to the failure of the mainstream system to appropriately educate diverse populations in Serbia, and reveals its overall weakness.

⁵⁹ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

⁶⁰ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

3. GOVERNMENT EDUCATIONAL POLICIES AND PROGRAMMES

Roma education issues have entered the mainstream, being addressed in general policy documents, in addition to separate policy documents targeting Roma education specifically. Serbia has joined the “Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”, and has adopted action plans covering the Decade’s four priority areas, including one for education (Decade Action Plan for Education). Several Serbian municipalities have also adopted local strategies and/or action plans for improving Roma access to education. All national policy documents accept that the main obstacles for Roma access to education are as follows: exclusion from education and high drop-out rates; poor quality of education and overrepresentation in schools for underachievers; discrimination and segregation; lack of respect for Roma identity. However, there is a clear gap between declarations and practical implementation. A comprehensive, systematic approach to carrying out these policies is needed, as the isolated projects that have been established to date cannot effectively address the breadth of the problems identified.

Despite evidence of segregation across Serbia, formally the State does not recognise the existence of segregation, and desegregation has not so far been dealt with seriously as a matter of policy. However, in some strategic documents certain preventive measures have been proposed, and the Government should begin the research needed to gain a clear picture of the scope of segregation.

Policy documents envisage the introduction of Roma Teaching Assistants (RTAs) in pre-schools and primary schools. After piloting projects, the existing school practice has revealed serious obstacles to greater engagement of RTAs. RTAs were sometimes perceived as intruders by the teaching staff. Furthermore, since teaching is generally not based on interactive methodology, many RTAs had essentially nothing to do in the classroom. Importantly, the rigid required qualifications often become a barrier to RTA employment. When appropriately implemented, Roma teaching assistant programmes can be an important means to enhance participation of Roma in education. The true inclusion of RTAs in the teaching and education process in Serbia will require establishing the legal ground and financing mechanisms, working with teachers to change their practice, as well addressing practical obstacles.

Roma are officially recognised as a national minority, and Romanes as a mother tongue of a national minority. Yet, in practice, education in Romanes is only offered as an elective course in primary school – and currently only in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina. The educational curriculum in Serbia is not very sensitive to the values of multiculturalism and identity of national minorities, and envisioned changes to the curriculum to include multiculturalism and elements of Roma culture and language have not as yet materialised. In schoolbooks, Roma are mentioned at best in the context of World War II and the Holocaust, but more often Roma are mentioned in a stereotyped and negative manner. Official teacher training programmes do not have courses on tolerance and multicultural education (including bilingual education), or a methodology for working with children from deprived backgrounds, nor other aspects of inclusive education. The Ministry of Education and Sports should work with these training institutions to address the lack of an in-service teacher provision, and develop standards in this area to improve practice in the classroom.

Roma are often exposed to various forms of covert as well as open discrimination by members of school administrations, teachers, other children and non-Roma parents. However, there is no specific and comprehensive anti-discrimination law or anti-discrimination monitoring body in Serbia. Although the Law on Foundations of the Education System forbids discrimination, in practice there have been no cases of sanctions against alleged perpetrators of discriminatory acts in education. The European

Union (EU) and other international bodies could be an important force to encourage the adoption of improved anti-discrimination mechanisms in Serbia.

3.1 Government policy documents

Since 2000, following democratic changes in the country, Roma issues have been placed on the social and political agenda of Serbia, and have been addressed in general policy documents, as well as being featured in entirely separate policy documents.

In the period from 2002 to 2005, several strategic documents were developed, dealing with the problems of the Roma community, including education. The Ministry of Human and Minority Rights has prepared the *Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma*,⁶¹ and the Ministry of Education and Sports has prepared the *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in the Republic of Serbia*.⁶² Although these strategies have not yet been formally adopted,⁶³ they articulate the strategic objectives and provide the basis for taking a targeted action.

Some Roma education issues have also been integrated into the general policy of development of Serbia, such as in the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP),⁶⁴ the National Strategy of Serbia for the Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union,⁶⁵ the Serbian Plan of Action for Children, or at minimum have been made a priority goal of the general educational policy – the Ministry of Education and Sports' Strategy of Education 2005–2010.⁶⁶ Importantly, the Strategy of Serbia for the

⁶¹ Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, *Nacrt strategije za osnaživanje i davanje većih ovlašćenja Romima* (draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma), not formally adopted.

⁶² Ministry of Education and Sports, *Strategija za unapredjivanje obrazovanja Roma u Srbiji* (Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia), 2003, available at http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/str-improv-roma-educ-rep-ser-yug-srb-enl-t02.pdf (accessed 16 March 2007) (hereafter, *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*). The Strategy was developed by the Ministry of Education and Sports, on the initiative of the Fund for an Open Society Serbia (FOSS), as part of the Roma Education Initiative (REI) project "Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Education System" (hereafter "Equal Chances" project). The project's team members have taken an active part in drafting the Strategy.

⁶³ The drafts were prepared by the former Federal Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, but since then Serbia and Montenegro have split up, and the documents are awaiting approval by the Serbian Government, when it is formed in 2007.

⁶⁴ Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP)*, Belgrade, May 2004 available in English at <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/scr/2004/cr04120.pdf> (accessed on 7 March 2007).

⁶⁵ Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Strategija Srbije za pridruživanje Srbije i Crne Gore Evropskoj uniji* (Strategy of Serbia for the Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union), 2005, (hereafter, *Strategy of Serbia for the Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union*).

⁶⁶ Ministry of Education and Sports, *Strategija obrazovanja 2010-2015* (Strategy of Education, 2005–2010), Belgrade, 2005 (hereafter, *Strategy of Education, 2005–2010*).

Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union, in its chapter on education, makes a brief but significant point: “The Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education is undergoing a stage of adoption as a priority area. From the point of view of equality, education of this national minority is the greatest challenge for the education system of Serbia.”⁶⁷

Serbia-Montenegro⁶⁸ has joined the multilateral regional initiative, “The Decade for Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”.⁶⁹ In accordance with its commitments under the Decade, in 2005, Serbia adopted action plans on the Decade’s priority areas, including employment, housing and health, as well as one on education – the *Common Action Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion* (hereafter, *Decade Action Plan on Education*).⁷⁰

The *Decade Action Plan for Education* is focused on the following four areas:

- Access to compulsory education;
- Enhancement of the quality of education;
- Implementation of integration and desegregation;
- Increasing access to pre-school, primary, secondary and adult education.

Within the framework of the Decade, projects developed by NGOs have facilitated the development of local level educational strategies and action plans in some municipalities (such as in Niš, Kragujevac,⁷¹ Valjevo⁷² and Subotica⁷³). In these towns,

⁶⁷ *Strategy of Serbia for the Accession of Serbia and Montenegro to the European Union*, p. 87.

⁶⁸ At the start of this monitoring project, the Union of Serbia-Montenegro was still one country; however, following a referendum on independence, in May 2006 Montenegro became an independent State. Even before the dissolution of the Union, Serbia and Montenegro had developed separate Decade Action Plans.

⁶⁹ The “Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015”, an initiative supported by the Open Society Institute (OSI) and the World Bank, is an unprecedented international effort to combat discrimination and ensure that Roma have equal access to education, housing, employment and health care. Launched in February 2005 and endorsed by nine Central and Eastern European countries, the Decade is also supported by the European Commission, the Council of Europe, the Council of Europe Development Bank, and the United Nations Development Program. For further details, see the Decade website (www.romadecade.org).

⁷⁰ Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Jedinstveni akcioni plan za unapredjivanje obrazovanja Roma* (The Common Action Plan for the Advancement of Education), adopted on 27 January 2005, Belgrade, available at <http://www.romadecade.org/Action%20Plans/ap-education-serbia.doc> (accessed 16 March 2007) (hereafter, *Decade Action Plan on Education*).

⁷¹ Local educational strategies were developed within the REI’s “Equal Chances” project, in 2004.

⁷² The Roma programme of the Civic Initiatives, financed by NOVIB, supported the project of the Roma Centre for Democracy in Valjevo to make a local educational strategy (2005).

⁷³ Roma Cultural Club (Subotica), *Akcioni plan za obrazovanje Roma u Subotici* (Action Plan for Education of Roma in Subotica), 2006. The Plan was drafted within the framework of a Save the Children project.

strategic documents have been made in partnership with local self-governments, school boards and Roma civil society. The positive experiences from these towns facilitated initiatives to make local strategies and action plans in a further 12 new localities, also in the context of the Decade, so as to improve the position of Roma in the four priority areas of the Decade, including education.⁷⁴

In all national policy documents, there is a more or less uniform view about the obstacles that Roma face in access to education. These problems have been analysed most systematically in the *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, which formed the basis for the *Decade Action Plan for Education*. These problems can be categorised as follows:

- Exclusion from the education system and early drop-out (for example, due to language barrier, costs);
- Poor-quality education (for example, overrepresentation in schools for underachievers);
- Discrimination and segregation;
- Lack of respect for Roma identity.

The *Strategy of Education in Serbia (2005–2010)* was adopted in 2005 after the *Decade Action Plan for Education* had been prepared. The Strategy has integrated 35 planned activities for advancing Roma education. In addition, portions of the *Decade Action Plan for Education*, on availability and quality of education, have been directly copied into the Strategy.⁷⁵

The *Decade Action Plan for Education* provides such measures as the following: inclusion of Roma children in pre-schools; assistance to pupils who underachieve in school (supplementary classes and preparation for final exams); preparation for taking the exam to enrol in a secondary school; campaigns aiming to support enrolment in secondary schools and universities, and to ensure accommodation in pupils' and student's dormitories.

The basic problem is the fact that, although policies concerning Roma education are very thorough and have been integrated in general policies, they typically remain on paper. There is an evident gap between declarations and practical implementation of policies. The implementation of educational policies is still taking the form of isolated

⁷⁴ Local strategies are made as part of the project "Introduction of Local Roma Coordinators – Commissioners in Local Self-Governments" carried out jointly by the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the OSCE Mission and the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI).

⁷⁵ *Strategy of Education (2005–2010)*.

projects or affirmative action measures⁷⁶ (see section 3.2), rather than pursued in a comprehensive, systematic manner.⁷⁷

3.2 Government education programmes

In February 2002, the Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities was adopted, which granted Roma the status of a national minority.⁷⁸ In accordance with this Law, as well as the Constitution⁷⁹ and the Charter on Human Rights, Minority Rights and Civil Rights,⁸⁰ Roma have the right to education in their own language in pre-school, elementary and secondary education, and the State is under an obligation to ensure that “pre-school nurses, as well as teachers and language teachers in elementary and secondary schools, will receive education in the language of national minorities or bilingual education.”⁸¹

Starting in the 2006–2007 school year, the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, which regulates all educational activities in Serbia, has introduced free and compulsory “zero grade” for all pre-school-age children.⁸² It is expected that this measure, which is consistent with the priorities of the *Decade Action Plan for Education*, will prepare Roma children for enrolment in mainstream schools. Currently, Roma enrolment is complicated due to language problems and lack of pre-school preparation, which often results in the referral of Roma pupils to special schools (see section 4.1). However, there is no information as to how many children have benefited from the new Law. At present, the pre-school capacities are clearly insufficient to accommodate all children, and thus the Law’s implementation needs to be carefully monitored, in order to ensure that Roma pupils genuinely benefit from this measure (see section 4.5).

The Ministry of Education and Sports and the Roma National Council have the initiative and responsibility for most of the measures implementing the policy of inclusion of Roma in the education system and ensuring continuity in their education. Projects by NGOs are also underway, deriving directly from the adopted policies and carried out in cooperation with the Ministry.

⁷⁶ Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, *Official Gazette* No. 11/2002. This Law affords special opportunities to implement separate support measures for the Roma national minority. Neither the Law nor other documents define these measures, but they most frequently appear in practice in the form of favoured enrolment in secondary schools and faculties.

⁷⁷ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

⁷⁸ Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Art. 13.

⁷⁹ Constitution, arts. 75 and 79.

⁸⁰ Charter on Human Rights, Minority Rights and Civil Rights art 52, available at http://www.mfa.gov.yu/Facts/charter_min.pdf (accessed 15 March 2007).

⁸¹ Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, Art. 14.

⁸² Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

For example, the project on “Increasing Access to Pre-School Education for Roma Children”, which is supported by the Roma Education Fund (REF), has been carried out since 2005 in 30 pre-schools in Serbia. Up to 600 Roma children aged six and seven have been included in the pre-school programme in ethnically mixed groups. Participating educational institutions were guaranteed small grants and pre-school teacher training. 30 local Roma coordinators have been engaged. Their role primarily concerns facilitating cooperation between family and institutions.⁸³

Furthermore, the Institute for Pedagogy and Adult Education of the Philosophy Faculty in Belgrade has been carrying out a project since 2005 with the aim of enabling young people aged 15–30 to complete primary school education and finish secondary vocational schools.⁸⁴ The project covers 250 young people from ten regions from all over Serbia. The project also engages employment agencies, which provide an overview of professions that are in demand in these localities. Knowledge about qualifications in demand on the labour market is supposed to enable young people to make a more informed decision about adequate vocational education and better employment prospects in the future. The project is expected to result in the elaboration of programmes and models of functional education, which would possibly become disseminated in practice.

The REF also supports research conducted in ten municipalities. It aims to identify barriers to Roma education, with an overview of the work of local self-governments, schools and centres for social work. The should provide answers as to in what way local self-governments,⁸⁵ schools and centres for social work can reduce or eliminate identified barriers and advance their programmes and activities in order to improve the educational status of Roma. The results of the project will serve as a basis for the *Strategy and Action Plan for the Improvement of Roma Education in Vojvodina*.⁸⁶

The obstacles and hurdles that stand in the way of successful policy implementation are formidable. The education reform process has not been as swift and comprehensive as anticipated, reflecting on the implementation of educational policies concerning Roma. Instead of being integrated into the overall reform, Roma policies are carried out only partially and on an *ad hoc* basis. Inclusive education in practice requires serious

⁸³ The project is carried out in cooperation between the Roma National Council and the Ministry of Education and Sports, and is supported by the Roma Education Fund from Budapest. Interview with Mr. Ljuan Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the National Council of Roma National Minority in Serbia and Montenegro, 12 March 2006.

⁸⁴ The project is carried out in cooperation between the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Roma National Council, and is funded by the REF. See the REF website at http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/documents/Annex_2.doc (accessed 16 March 2007), p. 21.

⁸⁵ In cooperation with the Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre, the Union of Roma Students, the Secretariat for Education and the Secretariat for Regulations, Administration and Minorities of AP Vojvodina.

⁸⁶ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

transformation of the education system, as well as sizeable financial investments, which at this moment the system cannot sustain.

Serbia is in the process of setting up mechanisms for the implementation of State policies.⁸⁷ However, this process is also slower than expected, and is not sufficiently coordinated. For example, while the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, which was an important initiator and agent of change, existed, it did not have jurisdiction at the level of the Republic of Serbia. Likewise, the Office for Human and Minority Rights, which took over its jurisdiction to advance the position of Roma in Serbia, does not have the formal power and authority to implement policies.

3.2.1 Minority language education

There are a number of laws regulating minority language education, from pre-school to university level:

- The Law on the Foundations of the Education System;⁸⁸
- The Law on Primary School;⁸⁹
- The Law on Secondary School;⁹⁰
- The Law on Social Child Care;⁹¹
- The Law on Pre-School Education;⁹²

⁸⁷ A Secretariat for the Roma National Strategy was set up as an affiliate of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, as a joint project of this Ministry and the OSCE Mission. After transference of some areas of jurisdiction of this Ministry to the level of the Republic of Serbia, the Secretariat was officially declared an affiliate of the Office for Human and Minority Rights. The Office for Roma Inclusion has been set up as an affiliate of the Executive Council of Vojvodina in 2005 with the support of the FOSS. The Coordinating Centre for Integration of Roma has been set up by the Belgrade City Assembly.

⁸⁸ Supplements are available in Serbian on the Government of the Republic of Serbia website, available at <http://www.parlament.sr.gov.yu>.

⁸⁹ Law on Primary School, *Official Gazette* No. 50/92, 53/92, 67/93, 48/94, 66/94. Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Primary School, *Official Gazette* No. 22/2002, available in Serbian on the Government of the Republic of Serbia website (<http://www.parlament.sr.gov.yu>)

⁹⁰ Law on Secondary School, *Official Gazette* No. 50/92, 53/93, 67/93, 48/94, 24/96, 23/2002, 62/2003, 64/2003.

⁹¹ Law on Social Child Care, *Official Gazette* No. 49/92, 29/93, 53/93, 67/93, 28/94, 47/94, 48/94, 25/96, 29/01, available in Serbian on the Government of the Republic of Serbia website (<http://www.parlament.sr.gov.yu>).

⁹² Ministry of Education and Sports, Draft Law on Pre-School Education, adopted by the Government of the Republic of Serbia on 18 May 2006 and referred to the Serbian Parliament for adoption (hereafter, *Draft Law on Pre-School Education*).

- The Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Aids;⁹³
- The Law on Higher Education;⁹⁴
- The Law on Activities of Public Interest in the Field of Culture;⁹⁵
- The Law on Defining of Competences of an Autonomous Province;⁹⁶
- The Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in Federal Republic of Yugoslavia.⁹⁷

By law, the State must provide education in the languages of national minorities, or bilingually, if 15 (or fewer, with Ministry of Education and Sports permission) pupils in a school request it. Textbooks and teaching aids will be also provided in languages of national minorities, in accordance with the Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Aids, or, pending Ministry of Education and Sports approval, minority pupils may use textbooks from their “kin” state (for example, Hungary).

Romanes has been officially recognised as a mother tongue of a national minority. In the 2002 population census, 76 per cent of citizens who declared themselves as Roma stated that their mother tongue was Romanes. Serbia has ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, making a declaration that it concurred that the provisions of that Charter would apply in the Republic of Serbia in connection with Romanes in education.⁹⁸

However, so far, education in Romanes (or bilingual education including Romanes) has not been offered in any school in Serbia, although some elective courses are available (see sections 3.5 and 3.6).

3.3 Desegregation

Formally, the State does not recognise the existence of segregation, and desegregation has not so far been dealt with seriously as a matter of policy.⁹⁹ However, in some strategic documents certain preventive measures have been envisaged.

The draft *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education* contains one part dealing with the problem of discrimination and segregation in education.¹⁰⁰

⁹³ Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Aids, Draft Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Aids available in Serbian on the Ministry of Education and Sports website (<http://www.mps.sr.gov.yu>).

⁹⁴ Law on Higher Education, Ministry of Education and Sports, *Official Gazette* No. 76/2005, 30 August 2005.

⁹⁵ Law on Activities of Public Interest in the Field of Culture, *Official Gazette* No. 49/92.

⁹⁶ Law on Defining of Competences of an Autonomous Province, *Official Gazette* No. 6/2002.

⁹⁷ Law on Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities in FRY, *Official Gazette* No. 11, 2002.

⁹⁸ Law on Ratification of the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages, Art. 3.

⁹⁹ FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*.

The *Decade Action Plan for Education* defines in more detail concrete measures for prevention of segregation as well as desegregation mechanisms. The Plan's anti-segregation measures include the following:¹⁰¹

- Ensuring legal regulation for non-segregated inclusion and continual schooling and setting criteria for enrolment policy based on desegregation principles;
- Research (by the Ministry of Education and Sports) into the conditions, causes and modalities of segregation in the education system;
- Developing a desegregation programme for schools and pre-school institutions with a tendency to have exclusively or majority Roma children;
- Monitoring of segregation in education on the basis of previously made indicators.

There is no information whether the implementation of any of these measures has in fact begun as of 2006, nor any information about funding.¹⁰² According to the Minority Rights Centre, there have been merely *ad hoc* responses to warnings by NGOs about the appearance of segregation in some schools and local communities.¹⁰³

Concerning the segregation of Roma children into special schools, strategically it has been envisaged that a special enrolment policy for Roma children and young people will be elaborated, to prevent their unjustifiable enrolment in special schools.¹⁰⁴ For children already attending special schools, it has been envisaged that they will be transferred to mainstream schools after retesting; adequate transitory programmes should be provided facilitating their enrolment in a corresponding grade of a mainstream school.¹⁰⁵ However, in practice, these measures have not yet begun to be carried out, ostensibly because they require elaboration and implementation of a complex set of activities of which the system is not yet capable. The resistance of experts and practitioners in the field of special education has been noted, deriving from their fear that introduction of inclusion in mainstream system of education would make their job redundant.¹⁰⁶

Even though experts and civil sector representatives agree that segregation of children in education is not acceptable, there are dissenting opinions, arguing that Roma children sometimes feel better in separate classes. In mixed classes their exposure to

¹⁰⁰ *Draft Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education*, section 4.3, p. 14.

¹⁰¹ *Decade Action Plan for Education*, pp. 14–15.

¹⁰² REF Strategy for Serbia – presented and analysed at the meeting of Education Committee of the League for the Decade of Roma on April 22, 2006 in Belgrade.

¹⁰³ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

¹⁰⁴ *Decade Action Plan for Education*.

¹⁰⁵ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*,

¹⁰⁶ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

discrimination is greater, and it is claimed that this is a high price to pay.¹⁰⁷ Some Roma parents share the same concern (see section 2.4.1).

Many concur that segregation is not just a political but also a professional issue, since often the professionals are the ones in favour of keeping segregation. For example, the psychologist at the 14. Oktobar Special School, Miša Mladenović says that the staff of special schools fear that inclusion would mean closing their schools and dismissing employees.¹⁰⁸ Accordingly, this phenomenon should be urgently and thoroughly analysed, and desegregation measures ought to be implemented cautiously, bearing in mind the possible negative consequences that they can produce.¹⁰⁹ The experience of organisations dealing with this issue is that each case ought to be solved in the context and in direct communication with all stakeholders.¹¹⁰

3.4 Roma teaching assistants / school mediators

Strategic policy documents for Roma education envisage the introduction of RTAs in pre-schools and primary schools, as well as the employment of mediators to work with families in institutions with a large number of Roma children.¹¹¹ However, there are currently no legal regulations in force to employ RTAs in schools and/or pre-school establishments, although the Draft Law on Pre-School Education¹¹² provides for engaging RTAs.

In the second half of 2006, the Ministry of Education and Sports, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission, initiated the project “Support to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights for Coordination Programmes for Roma.” One of its components specifically aims to introduce RTAs in the process of primary school education. The project implementation is based on experiences of the civil sector in this area, and is a good example of a policy that was implemented based directly on NGO experience. In this project, the education of assistants is conducted by the Centre for Interactive

¹⁰⁷ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹⁰⁸ Case study Niš, conducted in May–June 2006, researcher Ljiljana Simić. see Annex A2.1: Niš Case Study.

¹⁰⁹ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

¹¹¹ *The Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia, and Decade Action Plan for Education.*

¹¹² *Draft Law on Pre-School Education.* Public debate of the proposed Law has been completed and it is soon to enter the decision-making procedure.

Pedagogy (CIP),¹¹³ while teaching assistants who have been included in the teaching process within NGO projects have been engaged for mentor work. Starting from 2005, the Roma National Council and the Ministry of Education and Sports have engaged 30 Roma coordinators for cooperation with the family within a pre-school education project financed by the REF.¹¹⁴

From 1996 until now 44 assistants (24 in pre-schools and 20 in primary schools) have participated in projects of the FOSS and its partners (CIP, REC and RIC), introducing the “Step-by-Step” methodology. Presently, ten RTAs are engaged: eight in pre-schools and two in schools.¹¹⁵ The Roma Children’s Centre similarly engages assistants through its educational project of supplementary classes entitled “Education of Roma Children in Serbia”, carried out in five primary schools in Belgrade for 1,700 children. 30 coordinators have been engaged for cooperation with parents and schools.¹¹⁶ These projects have been approved by the Ministry of Education and Sports and funded by various donors.¹¹⁷

The Ministry of Education and Sports expects RTA posts to become employment positions regulated by a law.¹¹⁸ There is no formal description of the RTAs’ job, however, thus far. An unofficial job description was elaborated within the framework of the REI “Equal Chances” project (see Annex 5).¹¹⁹ It is expected that this job description will be used by the Ministry of Education and Sports for their final version of such a description in the process of legal regulation of this employment position.¹²⁰

In practice, RTAs take part in all curricular and extracurricular activities in which teachers take part, including work meetings, meetings of teaching staff and homeroom meetings discussing education of Roma children. The working week consists of 30 hours. Also envisaged is regular training for RTAs lasting 18 to 30 hours annually. The training is based on the “Step-by-Step” programme methodology, in addition to

¹¹³ The Centre for Interactive Pedagogy from Belgrade provided expert guidance to the project Kindergarten as a Family Centre from 1997 to 2005. That project was using the methodology of the OSI “Step-by-Step” programme, which includes Roma assistants in the process of education and upbringing. The Centre also worked as a partner of the FOSS on the project “Equal Chances” project, from 2002 to 2005, introducing Roma assistants in the teaching process in junior grades of primary school.

¹¹⁴ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹¹⁵ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, 5 March 2006.

¹¹⁶ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, Coordinator of the Roma Children’s Centre from Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

¹¹⁷ FOSS, OSI, Novib, Norwegian People’s Aid, SDC.

¹¹⁸ Vesna Fila, Education Minister Assistant, Meeting Concerning Implementation of Decade Action Plans, September 24, 2006.

¹¹⁹ FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*.

¹²⁰ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

content related to Roma emancipation, their right to education (and other human rights), and integration in the life of the broader community.

According to the same unofficial description, the basic criteria for hiring an RTA are as follows: completing at least four-year secondary school; fluency in the Serbian language and spoken level in the Romani language; readiness to accept professional responsibilities stated in the job description; predisposition and ability to work with children. College education and work experience are assets. Hiring decisions are made by school principals, school teachers, a representative of the partner NGO (Roma NGO obligatory) and a project financier. Supervision and monitoring of the RTAs' work is done by project carriers and donors.¹²¹

Initial NGO experience engaging RTAs in primary schools has not been as favourable as it has been at the pre-school level. In the first year of the pilot REI project (2002–2003), the RTAs faced resistance from the teaching staff, they mostly participated in supplementary classes, rather than in the teaching process proper. However, by 2005, teachers had come to recognise the RTAs' role as one of the most important aspects of the project. Their engagement has been praised highly by pupils, teachers, and both Roma and non-Roma parents.¹²² Thus the key factor for changing the attitudes towards RTAs was the introduction of the “Step-by-Step” programme methodology. This methodology, which is based on interactive teaching practice and individualisation of the learning process, has ensured conditions for engaging RTAs. (In the classical *ex cathedra* style of teaching at the early onset of the project an assistant was redundant.)

Generally speaking, the existing school practice leads to the conclusion that there are serious obstacles to greater engagement of RTAs. For instance, RTAs were sometimes perceived as a form of outside control, or even intruders, and some teachers were inclined either to modify their normal behaviour or to resent the presence of RTAs. Furthermore, since teaching is generally not based on interactive methodology but rather is in the form of lectures, many RTAs had essentially nothing to do in the classroom. Last but not least, since the required profile of an assistant involves at least a secondary school degree, there have been towns where this condition was not met, and no RTAs were hired. The true inclusion of RTAs in the teaching and education process in Serbia will require not only that the legal ground and financing mechanisms are in place for their employment, but that these obstacles are addressed as well.

3.5 Romanes teachers

There is no official information about pre-school or school teachers who speak Romanes and use it for instruction. NGOs claim that if such teachers exist, they are rare. The

¹²¹ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹²² Centre for Testing, *Evaluation and Research, Reports of the External Evaluation of the Project “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Education System,”* Centre for Testing, Evaluation and Research, Belgrade, 2004–2005.

“Step-by-Step” pre-school programme cooperated with four pre-school teachers who spoke Romanes, two of whom were not ethnic Roma. The programme also included 17 assistants, two of whom were not Roma but spoke Romanes. They provided for the presence of Romanes in the classroom, and facilitated bridging the language gap. Such approach has made a significant impact and helped children to master the official language more quickly, and has given a boost to the self-respect and confidence of Roma children, since Romanes has been given equal recognition by their teachers.¹²³

In the process of education, Roma are able to use their mother tongue only if they take the elective primary school subject “Roma Language with Elements of National Culture”, but even this is currently possible only in the territory of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.¹²⁴ So far, 21 Roma teachers of this subject have been trained in NGO projects. However, their education is still not officially a part of the system of education and has not been systematically developed. Educational policies envision the nourishing of Roma ethnic identity in the process of mainstream education, but it would seem that capacities are still lacking to more fully implement envisaged measures.¹²⁵

3.6 Educational materials and curriculum policy

So far, the educational curriculum in Serbia has not been very sensitive to the values of multiculturalism and identity of national minorities. Strategic documents envisage changes to the curriculum so as to include multiculturalism and elements of Roma culture. In the long term, a curricular reform, as well as the new Draft Law on Textbooks and Other Teaching Aids, are expected to bring positive changes, but it is not certain when they will occur in practice. At this moment, there are neither curricular standards nor standards of textbook quality. The commissions in charge of approving textbooks for publication have been set up so far in an *ad hoc* manner.¹²⁶ In the meantime, the Centre for Textbooks¹²⁷ was set up in 2004. In other words, presently only an institutional framework for this area has been put in place. In the last few years, several publishing houses developed their textbook sections, and progress in quality has been noted, but contents stressing multiculturalism, appreciation of differences, and cultural values of other nationalities are still rare.

¹²³ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

¹²⁴ Law on Defining of Competences of an Autonomous Province, *Official Gazette* No. 6, 2002.

¹²⁵ Interview with Mr. Ranko Jovanović, coordinator of the Association of Roma Teachers, 15 October, 2006.

¹²⁶ Commissions are set up outside the Ministry of Education and Sports and are made up of various experts, including from Universities and the Institute for Psychology. A commission’s makeup is not permanent.

¹²⁷ The Centre for Textbooks has been set up as an affiliate of the Institute for Advancement of Education and will be tasked with the quality of textbooks.

In Serbia there are no bilingual classes or bilingual curricula, although members of national minorities may have education in their languages. In these schools minority history and literature are taught in greater detail, but the curriculum is not based on educational content of other cultures and ethnicities. Even though the law provides for the right to be taught in Romanes, there are rather few materials in Romanes, most were created by NGOs rather than State structures, and they are used mainly in optional language classes.

The school subject “Roma Language with Elements of National Culture” is taught only in Vojvodina, which has a tradition of minority education. Elective classes are carried out in cooperation between the Roma National Council and the Ministry of Education and Sports. The programme for the first four grades of primary school has been developed and implemented in 42 schools with 1,266 children. The pupils have four Roma languages lectures per week.¹²⁸ However, this welcome initiative has not been replicated elsewhere. Still, the bigger problem is the fact that the curriculum in general does not accommodate this kind of educational needs. Introduction of elements of national cultures, including Roma, in education could help to make education much more appealing to Roma children, because it would reflect their life milieu and contribute to a better acceptance of Roma children by other pupils and teachers, and help to develop educational environment based on mutual appreciation and tolerance.

Teacher training for bilingual education techniques has been carried out so far only through the REI “Equal Chances” project and has not been further extended.

In schoolbooks, Roma are mentioned at best in the context of the World War II holocaust (history textbook for the eighth grade of the primary school). Roma are also mentioned in junior grades in texts such as “The Gypsy Praises His Horse” (literature reader for the third grade), or “A Gypsy Nightingale” (literature reader for the fourth grade). However, in literary texts, Roma are usually presented in a stereotyped and ridiculed manner, as carriers of negative characteristics.

A rare positive example is a textbook for the third grade of primary school issued by the publisher Kreativni Centar, in which all national minorities living in Serbia are mentioned in the lesson “Population of Our Land.” The overview is accompanied by relevant photographs, illustrations and information (such as see how a particular term is translated into in a language of a national minority). This textbook has been approved by the Government, and is approved for textbook selection. However, it depends on teachers to select what textbooks to use, and it appears that so far this textbook has not been widely used.

There are currently no teaching materials in the Serbian language about Roma history and culture, although some initiatives are underway. The REI “Equal Chances” project

¹²⁸ Interview with Mr. Ranko Jovanović, coordinator of the Association of Roma Teachers, 15 October 2006.

prepared a teachers' manual ("*Ciganeska* – Introduction to Roma History, Language and Culture"¹²⁹) containing materials that teachers can use in the classroom. FOSS supported a trilingual edition (Romanes, Serbian and English) of Roma fairy tales, which also could be used in classrooms.¹³⁰ The Institute for Textbooks and Educational Materials pioneered a picture book in Romanes entitled "Let's Live Together". The Ministry of Education and Sports, in cooperation with the OSCE Mission and councils of national minorities, has prepared a manual "Ethno-historical Guide to National Minorities", involving an expert proposed by the Roma National Council. It is planned that this book will become supplementary teaching material in schools.¹³¹ A conclusion can be drawn that all initiatives to introduce Roma culture in education come primarily from the civil sector, as well as from Roma artists and experts.

3.7 Teacher training and support

Officially, teacher training faculties and institutes do not have courses dealing with tolerance, multicultural education and training against prejudice, nor methodology of work with children from deprived surroundings, or other aspects of inclusive education.

The formal education of pre-school and school teachers is largely focused on scientific disciplines/subjects that they are going to teach. It contains some psychological and pedagogical disciplines, as well as teaching methodology for various school subjects. However, future teachers mostly acquire theoretical knowledge, with no instructions as to how to implement it in practice, and have little opportunity to acquire practical experience in classrooms working with children. They are trained as though the school were a mono-ethnic institution with homogeneous classroom makeup. The consequence is the fact that many end up not knowing how to work with real children from different backgrounds.¹³²

According to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, there are initiatives at certain faculties that can contribute to attaining the objective of educational integration of Roma, envisaged under the *Decade Action Plan for Education*.¹³³

¹²⁹ Roma Education Centre, *Ciganeska – uvod u romsku istoriju, jezik i kulturu* (*Ciganeska – Introduction to Roma History, Language and Culture*, Niš, 2006).

¹³⁰ A. Krasnići, *Bože, pretvori me u mrava- romske bajke sa Kosova i Metohije* (Please God, Turn Me into an Ant – Roma Fairy Tales from Kosovo and Metohija), Belgrade, Centre for Youth Creativity, 2001.

¹³¹ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

¹³² OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹³³ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy of the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

- “Open Classroom – Inclusive Programme Intended for Roma Children”, volunteer work of students and teachers at the Teacher Training Faculty in Belgrade.
- Seminar papers dealing with prejudice against Roma prepared by students of psychology of the Philosophy Faculty in Belgrade.
- “Romology Studies”, a specialist course at the Philosophy Faculty in Novi Sad, with the support of FOSS, to be integrated in the regular postgraduate programme.

However, such initiatives are largely a result of the personal efforts of a handful of university experts in Serbia concerned with Roma issues. They often lack institutional foundation, and thus risk disappearing. For example, in 2000, the Alternative Education Network (AAOM) organised a series of postgraduate lectures on the religion of Roma “Religion – Point of Cultural Merging or Separation?”¹³⁴ As a result, the University of Niš offered an elective course “Sociology of Roma Identity” in the 2001–2002 school year.¹³⁵ It was not repeated, however.

In Serbia at present there are no standards of professional training and advancement of teachers (in-service), no required compulsory contents or frequency of such training. The previous staff of the Ministry of Education and Sports (2001–2003) attempted to develop a policy for teacher training, inviting all interested organisations to apply for accreditation of their teacher training seminars. Criteria for evaluation and accreditation were defined and published in advance, and subsequently an extensive catalogue was published with the list of accredited teaching training seminars, the *Catalogue of Teacher Training Programmes for the School Year 2003/2004* (hereafter, the “Catalogue”).¹³⁶ The then policy was that teachers needed 100 hours of in-service training (from the Catalogue) in the course of five years. However, after the change of Government the policy was discontinued. Teachers received their licence regardless of participation in teacher training seminars, and their career development was not tied to further training. Even though the Catalogue was not officially cancelled, in practice it was not used.

Currently, schools can undertake training and pay for it from funds that are ensured through local sources. This practice is becoming more and more frequent, especially since the course of the education reform changed in 2004, and the cycle of seminars accompanying it was stopped.¹³⁷ The Institute for the Advancement of Education

¹³⁴ FOSS, *Report for 2001*, an internal document.

¹³⁵ D. Djordjević and M. Filipović, *Sociologija romskog identiteta- dva izborna kursa* (Sociology of Roma Identity – Two Elective Courses), Romology Library Komren, Niš, 2002.

¹³⁶ Ministry of Education and Sports, *Katalnog programa stručnog usavršavanja zaposlenih u obrazovanju* (The Catalogue of Teacher Training Programmes for Education Employees), Belgrade, 2003.

¹³⁷ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

reportedly prepared several seminars in 2004 for in-service teacher training that are supposed to be paid from the State budget, but in practice there seems to be confusion and varying interpretations of this.

In the Catalogue, five seminars and training courses dealing with Roma education and intended for the education of primary school teachers were accredited. All of them were developed by the civic sector. They tackled various educational aspects:

- Education for social justice; education for overcoming prejudices; development of tolerance and appreciation of diversities;¹³⁸
- Advancement of educational practice based on child-centred methodology and on interactive teaching methods and individualisation of teaching;¹³⁹
- Educational support to Roma children in school – methodology of remedial classes as a form of compensatory education.¹⁴⁰

All these programmes were developed through projects involving direct work with children, and were externally evaluated by competent experts of the Centre for Evaluation, Testing and Research (CETI).¹⁴¹ The resulting teacher seminars were accredited by the previous makeup of the Ministry of Education and Sports.

The Institute for Advancement of Education conducted a repeated accreditation of teaching training seminars in the course of 2006, and at the end of that year a new catalogue of teacher training seminars was published. This time, there was not any advance public invitation to submit seminars for accreditation and the selection of the accredited programmes appears rather arbitrary. The majority of programmes from the 2003/2004 Catalogue were not accredited – including those concerning Roma education, mostly seminars carried out by NGOs. However, the Ministry of Education and Sports nevertheless continues to cooperate with NGOs for some of these courses, despite the Institute's decision. This situation suggests that the accreditation criteria, as well as procedures, the decision-making process, and the application of decisions in practice, are insufficiently clear.¹⁴² In the meantime, more unaccredited training

¹³⁸ The OSI Rome Education Initiative (REI) programme, and the “Neither Black Nor White” programme of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy from Belgrade.

¹³⁹ Series of training courses designed by the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy. The training courses are based on the OSI “Step-by-Step” programme.

¹⁴⁰ Teacher training developed within the project of the Society for the Advancement of Roma Settlements “Developmental Education Centres in Southern Serbia” (2001–2004), carried out by UNICEF, the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC), and FOSS.

¹⁴¹ This is an NGO specialising in educational research and evaluation of educational policies, programmes and projects.

¹⁴² OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

programmes have been designed; for example, the seminar by Roma Education Centre “*Ciganeska – Workshop for Teachers on Roma History and Culture.*”¹⁴³

Educational policies envisage measures to train expert practitioners for the specificities of Roma education. In practice, it often happens that the field of Roma education is still very much an individual, personal effort or a project activity. Professional know-how and experience is there, which, if integrated into the system framework and/or made to be a foundation for development of university courses and continual education of professional staff, could contribute to better quality education for Roma children and youth.

3.8 Discrimination monitoring mechanisms

Policy documents treat the problem of discrimination as one of the key obstacles to equal access to education for Roma, since Roma are often exposed to various forms of covert, as well as open, discrimination by members of school administration, teachers, other children and non-Roma parents.¹⁴⁴

Prevention of discrimination in education is one of the specific objectives in the *Decade Action Plan for Education*.¹⁴⁵ Measures for its implementation entail establishing the mechanisms for monitoring and sanctioning discrimination in educational institutions, and educating Roma parents on human rights and possibilities for their protection.

The Law on the Foundations of the Education System defines and bans all forms of discrimination in education, including that based on race, religion, ethnic, social or cultural identity. The Law defines grave violations of work obligations including the following: undermining or violating the physical or psychological integrity of a pupil (physical punishment, moral, sexual or other abuse); insulting children, pupils and employees repeatedly or in a way that affects the education process; and expression of national or religious intolerance.¹⁴⁶

A complaint concerning a discriminatory behaviour can be submitted by a pupil or his parent/guardian to the principal or the school board. Employees of the educational institution are also obliged to report a violation of pupils’ rights.¹⁴⁷

The same Law envisages sanctions for pupils, employees and educational institutions:

- A reprimand or a strong reprimand against a pupil, for expressing national and religious intolerance;¹⁴⁸

¹⁴³ Workshops designed by the Roma Education Centre (REC), in the framework of the REI “Equal Chances” project.

¹⁴⁴ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, p. 10.

¹⁴⁵ *Decade Action Plan for Education*, Preventing discrimination in education.

¹⁴⁶ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, art. 131.

¹⁴⁷ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 46.

- For a grave violation, the dismissal of a staff member until disciplinary proceedings have been completed;¹⁴⁹
- A fine of 30,000 to 100,000 dinars (€320–1,120), for an institution if it, “jeopardises, depreciates or discriminates against groups and individuals on grounds of racial, national, linguistic, religious or gender identity, mental or physical constitution, social or cultural origin, that is, political orientation, or if it encourages such actions.”¹⁵⁰

An institution can be punished on the basis of a decision brought by an inspection. The inspection can be conducted at the local level (by a municipal, i.e. city, inspection) or at the national level (by a Republic-level inspection). The Republic-level inspection and the Ministry conduct a direct inspection, if the municipal authorities fail to do so. The Ministry is to decide on an appeal to a first-instance decision of a municipal inspection.

There is, however, no specific anti-discrimination body in Serbia.

In practice, cases of discrimination appear very rarely. This is corroborated by the example of a school inspector in Valjevo who said that he was not aware that there has ever been discrimination against Roma children in school, that is, that the school inspection has never received a complaint of this kind.¹⁵¹ Even if reported, cases of discrimination are insufficiently visible and rarely have a positive outcome. According to the Fund for Humanitarian Law report, *Roma in Serbia*, in a case concerning two brothers who had been continually abused by their peers in school, their mother addressed the school principal, but the situation has not changed despite his promises. The children dropped out of school, and the case was forgotten.¹⁵²

The Minority Rights Centre in the past three years has filed over 30 complaints to primary schools concerning alleged discrimination. A number of the Centre’s complaints concerning segregated classes in primary schools in Subotica have been solved positively: the segregated classes were dismantled and children placed in mixed classes. The decisions have been reached through dialogue and communication between the Centre and the schools, which is a good model for addressing the problem.¹⁵³

There is no information whether any cases of alleged discrimination in education have actually reached the court. The Roma Children’s Centre claims that most of their cases have been settled at meetings of school boards or through communication with

¹⁴⁸ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 135.

¹⁴⁹ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 128.

¹⁵⁰ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 145.

¹⁵¹ Case study Valjevo.

¹⁵² Fund for Humanitarian Law *Roma in Serbia*, “Under the Magnifying Glass” edition, Fund for Humanitarian Law, Belgrade, 2003.

¹⁵³ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

principals. No case has ever ended in a courtroom. In their opinion, judicial proceedings would only expose Roma pupils to even graver problems.¹⁵⁴

Within the study, *The Art of Survival – Where and How Roma in Serbia Live*,¹⁵⁵ a survey of discrimination has been conducted. The respondents were asked where they experienced discrimination the most: in public places, in a courtroom, in a police station, when visiting social services, at a doctor's, in school, or when they were getting a job. The available information indicates that Roma have experienced discrimination the most when getting a job (24.9 per cent) and the least in a courtroom (7.1 per cent). In schools 16.6 per cent of Roma have been exposed to such acts. However, in the opinion of the authors of the study, discrimination in Serbia may be much greater than the perception of Roma themselves would suggest:

Many acts which the majority population perceives as discriminatory, Roma do not experience as such. The sensitivity to discrimination against other and different people manifests itself in different ways in the culture of the majority population and in the culture of Roma. It is possible that Roma have become “insensitive” to thousands of various forms of discrimination and petty provocations.¹⁵⁶

It can be concluded that discrimination in education is still a topic that is not sufficiently discussed in Serbia. The fact that, in practice, cases of discrimination are rarely reported indicates several things: that Roma themselves do not have enough knowledge about their rights and opportunities of protection if these rights are violated, that they fear possible negative consequences if they file a complaint, that they do not trust that official institutions are willing and able to solve this kind of problem, that they do not recognise certain discriminatory acts as discrimination or violation of their rights, or perhaps that the system itself is not very effective.

Discrimination has found its place in policies and legislation, but for the state of affairs in the field to change it would be necessary to do much more in order to establish efficient sanctioning mechanisms. In the light of this, the Minority Rights Centre initiated, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports, the project “Preventing Discrimination in Education against Roma Children”, which was funded by REF. Within the framework of this project, training has been organised for 22 Republic-level and ten municipal-level inspectors, to enable them to identify discrimination and respond adequately. The training of 25 NGO representatives for monitoring and reporting on discrimination in the education system has been organised, ten of whom will acquire the status of monitors and will cooperate with a

¹⁵⁴ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Children's Roma Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

¹⁵⁵ B. Jakšić and G. Bašić, *Umetnost preživljavanja – Gde i kako žive Romi u Srbiji* (The Art of Survival – Where and How Roma in Serbia Live), Disput Library, Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory, Belgrade, 2005 (hereafter, Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*).

¹⁵⁶ Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*, p. 130.

solicitor who will provide legal assistance. Under these projects, instructions for institutions will be made enabling them to identify, monitor and respond to cases of discrimination, along with an informative bulletin for children, young people and parents about human rights and how to protect them.¹⁵⁷

The Council for Roma Integration, established as an affiliate of the Executive Council of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, will, in cooperation with the Ministry of the Interior, set up operating teams to permanently work on issues of discrimination. It plans to launch a similar activity involving school inspectors.¹⁵⁸

It is expected that an anti-discrimination law, supposed to be enacted in the course of 2007, will more specifically define the issue of discrimination and provide conditions for more effective action in this area.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁷ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹⁵⁸ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹⁵⁹ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

4. CONSTRAINTS ON ACCESS TO EDUCATION

There are serious structural constraints on Roma access to education. Roma children often lack pre-school preparation and as a result fare badly in schools or drop out completely. The physical capacities of existing pre-schools are not sufficient to meet the needs for pre-school-age children in general, and this particularly affects Roma children, who make up a higher proportion of this age group. In addition, the legal and administrative requirements, such as the need for birth and medical certificates and residence papers, as well as the practice of pre-schools defining their own (internal) criteria for admission, among other factors, pose serious obstacles to the access of Roma to pre-school education. The amended Law on the Foundations of the Education System envisions the introduction of a free and mandatory zero year to prepare all children for primary school. However, the existing infrastructure is clearly insufficient to ensure its effective implementation and the Government should allocate funds to ensure adequate places for all children to comply with such legislation.

Administrative and legal barriers, as well as hidden costs of education, are important barriers to the access of Roma to primary education. Even though children with incomplete paperwork may still be enrolled in a primary school, subject to the good will of the school's administration, expenses for school supplies, clothing, transport, and extracurricular activities become prohibitive for the majority of Roma families, who are often living in poverty. Many Roma parents agree to their children being sent to special schools, in part because these schools relieve the economic burdens of education (school supplies, transport, meals and even boarding). However, these schools deprive children of future educational and professional opportunities. The Government should make available financial assistance for disadvantaged children in mainstream education to remove these incentives.

The residential isolation of Roma settlements and bad housing conditions are also obstructing Roma access to education. In addition, insufficient knowledge of the official language of instruction and absence of bilingual education in Romanes, or of the use of bilingual techniques in early childhood education, coupled with insensitive or discriminatory assessment procedures, may often result in misplacement of Roma pupils in special schools for children with intellectual disabilities.

4.1 Structural constraints

According to the data from 2004, in Serbia there are 160 pre-school management institutions, managing a total of 1,840 pre-schools.¹⁶⁰

The number of children who are able to enrol in any pre-school depends on its size. The new Draft Law on Pre-School Education¹⁶¹ provides for the maximum number of

¹⁶⁰ One pre-school management institution can manage several kindergartens, located in several buildings. Source: Serbian Statistics Institute (Republički zavod za statistiku), information in Serbian from the Institute's website, available at <http://webrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu> (accessed on 2 March 2007).

¹⁶¹ *Draft Law on Pre-School Education.* The Draft Law is now in urgent procedure in the Serbian Parliament, and is expected to be adopted before the 2006–2007 school year. This issue has a complicated history. Pre-school education was part of social care and was under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Social Affairs until 2003. Pre-school education (including the number of children per group) was regulated by the Law on Social Child Care. Since the Law on the Foundations of the Education System was first adopted, in 2003, pre-school education became part of the education system, under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Education and Sports. Presently, the Law on Social Child Care has expired. Hence the draft of the new Law on Pre-School Education needs to be approved urgently.

children, in the different age categories, that can be included in one pre-school group (see Table 7). The number of groups in any pre-school is not regulated by the law, but depends on the physical capacity of the pre-school (namely, one group per room).

Table 7: Maximum number of children per pre-school group, by age group

Age groups	Number of children per group
From six months to one year	7
From one to two years	12
From two to three years	16
From three to four years	20
From four to five and a half years	22
From five and a half (school preparation group)	26

Source: draft new Law on Pre-School Education

As shown below in Table 8, as of 2004, overall only 27 per cent of children in Serbia are covered by pre-school education. For the 3–7 age range, 40 per cent of children are enrolled in pre-school education, while for the 5–7 age range, the corresponding proportion is 48 per cent (see Table 8). This information is corroborated by the Ministry of Education and Sports, which estimates that up to 80 per cent of children in pre-school education are aged between five and seven.¹⁶² Taking into consideration the fact that existing pre-school institutions are full, these data show that the physical capacities of pre-schools are not sufficient to meet the needs for pre-school education in general, which has consequences for the access of Roma children to pre-school education.

¹⁶² Interview with Ms. Ljiljana Merlot, advisor on pre-school education at the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 6 April 2006.

Table 8: Number of children enrolled in pre-schools, by age group (2004)

Age range	Single age range groups		Mixed groups (3–7 years)	Total (inc. mixed groups)	
	Number of children	Enrolment rate (Proportion of all children in the age group)	Number of children	Enrolment rate (Proportion of all children in the age group)	Number of children
Up to 18 months	4,211	3.3	–	–	–
18 months–2 years	7,202	16.7	–	–	–
2–3 years	13,079	15.2	–	–	–
<i>Total: 3–7 years</i>	<i>24,492</i>	–	–	–	–
3–4 years	20,145	23.4	–	28.2	–
4–5 years	22,812	26.5	–	31.3	–
5–7 years	78,426	45.6	–	48.0	–
<i>Total: 3–7 years</i>	<i>121,383</i>	–	<i>16,381</i>	–	<i>137,764</i>
<i>Total: 0–7 years</i>	<i>145,875</i>	<i>27.0</i>	<i>16,381</i>	–	<i>162,256</i>
Number of institutions	1,840	40.0	–	–	–

Source: Serbian Statistics Institute¹⁶³

There are no nationwide data on pre-school education capacities. The available data pertaining to Belgrade indicate that capacities of pre-schools are far below needs. According to the Secretariat for Social and Child Care of Belgrade, each year over 8,000 children in Belgrade who apply to local pre-schools are turned down; between 30 and 40 new units are needed in order to provide pre-school education to all children who require it.¹⁶⁴ The situation in Belgrade could be also indicative of the scale of the kindergarten places shortage in other Serbian cities.

¹⁶³ Serbian Statistics Institute (Republički zavod za statistiku) information from the institute's website available at <http://webzrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/en/index.php> (accessed on 3 March 2007).

¹⁶⁴ V. Nedeljković, *Upis u vrtić samo preko veze* (Access to Kindergarten Only for the Well-Connected), *Blic* daily newspaper, 10 May 2006.

Private pre-schools have capacities to accommodate more children, but costs are prohibitive. Thus, in Belgrade the cost is between €150 and €200 a month,¹⁶⁵ which practically equals or exceeds an average monthly salary in Serbia, and is effectively out of reach for poor families.

The new legal provisions envision the introduction of a free and mandatory “zero grade” for all pre-school-age children, starting in the 2006–2007 school year. However, the Ministry of Education and Sports and the educational institutions have performed this task establishing the zero grade without a complete analysis of their capacities, and with insufficient cooperation with the Roma community. According to information gained from the NGOs, this programme includes far fewer children than the real demand. As in other educational areas, there is neither a system for monitoring the effects of applied measures, nor consequences arising from the lack of implementation.¹⁶⁶

The limited capacities of pre-schools are a major obstacle to accessibility of pre-school education. However, there are also additional constraints. Apart from legal and administrative prerequisites for pre-school enrolment, the pre-schools have themselves developed selection criteria, ostensibly to facilitate access for families whose children need it most (see section 4.2). Accordingly, preference in enrolment is given to children both of whose parents are employed, which is a criterion that most impoverished Roma families cannot fulfil. However, such a policy has produced a situation where kindergartens have the main role in taking care of children, especially at a younger age, when their parents are working.

4.2 Legal and administrative requirements

4.2.1 Pre-school education enrolment

The Draft Law on Pre-School Education specifies that the enrolment of children in pre-schools shall be conducted in accordance with the Law and instructs pre-schools to make detailed regulations in their statutes concerning the method and procedure for enrolment.¹⁶⁷

Although detailed enrolment procedures are issued by individual pre-school establishments,¹⁶⁸ the following is a more or less typical set of documents required in order to enrol a child in the kindergarten:

- Application letter;
- Photocopy of employment card (proof of employment);

¹⁶⁵ Interview with Ms. Ruzica Popovic Trbusković, director of the private kindergarten “Lala i Lili”, Belgrade, 29 March 2006.

¹⁶⁶ OSI Roundtable, Belgrade, 31 October 2006.

¹⁶⁷ *Draft Law on Pre-School Education*, Art. 12.

¹⁶⁸ Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

- Average income certificate (or unemployment certificate from the National Employment Bureau) – this document entitles low-income families to pay a lower fee for the pre-school;
- Recent birth certificate (obtained within the past six months).¹⁶⁹

In addition, upon a confirmation from the pre-school that a place is available, parents obtain forms and instructions regarding a compulsory medical check-up (free of charge); the medical certificate is to be submitted along with the above documents. Information about the child's health status is important, in case there is a need for specific care.

Although there are no data on families unable to furnish the necessary documents, these requirements evidently pose a problem for those Roma parents who do not have residence registration or/and a birth certificate. This problem mostly affects internally displaced persons (IDPs) from Kosovo and returnees from Western European countries, but also domiciled Roma. According to the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, which was running community-based pre-schools within the project "Kindergarten as a Family Centre",¹⁷⁰ up to 70 per cent of children with whom they worked lacked proof of residence and about 20 per cent lacked a birth certificate.¹⁷¹

The absence of personal documents is also a barrier to registering with the National Employment Bureau,¹⁷² which issues additional documents required for pre-school enrolment. The lack of a health insurance card makes persons unable to exercise their right to health care and consequently to obtain a medical check-up certificate and to enrol in the pre-school.

While the capacities of pre-schools are limited, no legal regulation sets criteria for priority enrolment of certain categories of children. Instead, each institution defines its own (internal) criteria. According to the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, which communicated with some pre-schools in Belgrade, the following categories usually enjoy priority enrolment for their children:

- Disabled war veterans;
- Single mothers;

¹⁶⁹ Copies of birth certificates for different administrative purposes can be obtained from the civil registry offices, which keep all the official records of births, deaths, marriages, and other civil status.

¹⁷⁰ CIP has carried out a project in cooperation with Roma NGOs from all of Serbia and with the support of the FOSS. Around 600 Roma children at the annual level have been included in the project.

¹⁷¹ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

¹⁷² Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

- Low-income families;
- Families in which both parents are unemployed;
- Student parents.¹⁷³

In practice, Roma parents are usually unable to meet the conditions. Roma unemployment presents a particularly serious obstacle. Since the existing network of pre-schools cannot accommodate all the children who need them, there are long waiting lists, and parents' employment (especially of both parents) is often the decisive factor for admission of the children. There are few Roma who fulfil this requirement: only an estimated 18.4 per cent are officially employed.¹⁷⁴ This situation, seemingly contradictory (since unemployed people fulfil the low-income criterion), goes back to the socialist period, when pre-schools were seen as an instrument to support working parents rather than to development of children. In addition, research conducted by the World Bank indicates that the unemployment rate among Roma in Serbia is four times higher than that among the majority population,¹⁷⁵ which according to the most recent data (October 2005) stands at 20.8 per cent.¹⁷⁶

4.2.2 Primary school enrolment

The enrolment in the first grade of the primary school is regulated by the Law on the Foundations of the Education System. The following documents are required:

- Birth certificate;
- Proof of residence;
- Medical documentation that a child has undergone a medical check-up;
- Test of preparedness.¹⁷⁷

Under the law, the local self-government (a municipality) must keep track and inform schools and parents on enrolment when the children in the locality reach school age.¹⁷⁸ Obviously, lack of registered residence results in a situation where the local self-government is not aware of families with school-age children, and fails to inform the primary school and parents about enrolment.

¹⁷³ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

¹⁷⁴ Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*.

¹⁷⁵ *REF Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 11.

¹⁷⁶ Serbian Statistics Institute (Republički zavod za statistiku), Labor Force Survey/Tables, available at <http://webzrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu/axd/en/drugastrana.php?Sifra=0018&izbor=odel&tab=152>, (accessed 16 March 2007).

¹⁷⁷ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 90, para. 3.

¹⁷⁸ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 90, para. 11.

Again, there are no official data on the number of children of school age who lack birth certificates or residence papers. According to the Research and Analytical Centre, “Argument” and the Minority Rights Centre, in 2005, in Belgrade, out of the total of 4,584 children surveyed, 13.7 per cent were not registered. 74 per cent of unregistered children were from internally displaced Roma families, and 55 per cent from slums. The lack of documents as a reason for not enrolling their children in school was cited by 20.2 per cent.¹⁷⁹

In recent years, the situation was aggravated by readmissions from Western Europe. According to the Roma National Council, between 3,000 and 4,000 Roma were returned to Serbia this way in the past three years.¹⁸⁰ Although there is no information about the number of returned children of school age, their integration in the education system has proved a massive problem. Most do not have formal evidence of their previous schooling, and while waiting for years for their documents to be transferred, they drop out of the education system. And under the existing legislation,¹⁸¹ a child upon turning 17 loses the right to continue (mainstream) primary education and is directed to adult education.

Unfortunately, this problem has not been addressed systematically. It has been left to schools to deal with it on a case-by-case basis, which has led to a situation in which the same legal regulations have been interpreted differently by the staff of the Ministry of Education and Sports and by local secretariats for education, whose interpretation is normally cited by schools in dealing with such cases.

Primary schools, unlike pre-schools, are not excessively strict as regards the required documents. Many schools reportedly would enrol children even if some documents are missing. Whenever possible, the missing documents could be submitted later in the course of the school year, but there are children who in fact have never supplied all the papers.¹⁸² However, NGOs working with Roma stressed the point that such practice is a result of good will on the part of some school administrations and their good cooperation with NGOs, rather than a binding rule.

At the request of the Education Committee of the League for the Roma Decade,¹⁸³ the Ministry of Education and Sports sent a communiqué to school authorities in the

¹⁷⁹ P. Antic, *Romi i pravo na na pravni subjektivitet u Srbiji*, (Roma and Right to Legal Subjectivity in Serbia) Belgrade, Minority Rights Centre, 2006.

¹⁸⁰ Interview with Mr. Ljuan Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the Roma National Council, Belgrade, 12 March 2006.

¹⁸¹ Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

¹⁸² Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children’s Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006, and Ms. Refika Mustafić, director of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 22 March 2006.

¹⁸³ The League for the Roma Decade is the coalition of (mainly Roma) NGOs established to monitor the implementation of the *Decade Action Plans*.

2004–2005 school year instructing them to enrol children with incomplete documentation.¹⁸⁴ There is no information as to how many schools complied.

Another condition for enrolment of children in primary school used to be permanent residence in the municipality where the school is located. This requirement was a huge obstacle for the enrolment of many Roma children, because their parents moving in search of seasonal jobs were forced to change their residence and often did not possess documents about permanent residence. The rule would be misused by some principals of primary schools who did not want to enrol Roma children in their schools, directing them instead to other nearby schools that did not discriminate. The rule has since changed, and parents are free to enrol their children in whichever school they want, but children registered at the territory to which the school belongs are still given precedence. When all interested children from that territory enrol in the school, children from other areas can apply and will be admitted if there are places. However, some principals allegedly still refuse to enrol Roma children, offering as an excuse the explanation that there are no free places. This leads to a situation in which Roma children often fail to enrol in the first grade at age seven, instead enrolling at a much later age (frequently when they are nine or ten). These children are then late in finishing primary school and cannot continue their schooling because they have “outgrown” the enrolment age for secondary school. Roma aged between 17 and 18 can neither find legal jobs nor continue their schooling, and some end up in the schools for adult education.¹⁸⁵

When the required documents are submitted, children take a readiness test. The test results are an integral part of the documents required for the primary school enrolment. School psychologists can choose which test they will use for assessment from the list of standardised instruments (such as Bine-Simon, WISC or TIP-1).¹⁸⁶ However, most school psychologists use TIP-1, which allows a quick assessment of children’s preparedness for primary school. The TIP-1 is standardised at the national level (it means there are norms defining what score the child needs to achieve in order to be deemed prepared for the primary school). It comprises norms for urban and rural settlements. It is constructed and standardised for the whole population, and there are no data on whether it is culturally fair or biased. However, the test appears to present another major obstacle for the inclusion of Roma children in mainstream education, as attested by overrepresentation of Roma in special schools (see section 2.4 and below).

¹⁸⁴ Ministry of Education and Sports, communiqué to school authorities, 2004–2005. Interview with Ms. Angelina Skarep, educational advisor to the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 10 April 2006.

¹⁸⁵ Case study Zemun, conducted in May–June 2006, researcher Nataša Kočić-Rakočević; see Annex A2.3: Zemun Case Study.

¹⁸⁶ The Bine-Simon scale and the WISC (Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children) tests are internationally recognised assessment instruments for children. TIP-1 is a test developed in Serbia by the Institute of Psychology at the University of Belgrade; its main purpose is to assess a child’s preparedness for Grade 1 of the primary education.

It is estimated that between 25 and 80 per cent of the total number of children in special schools are ethnic Roma (see section 2.4.3).¹⁸⁷

4.3 Costs

4.3.1 Pre-school education

There are both free and fee-based pre-school education programmes. All-day programmes are fee-based, although most costs are covered from the national or municipal budget. Parents pay the remaining amount, about 20 per cent, as specified by the pre-school institution's steering committee and subject to approval by the local self-government.¹⁸⁸ The costs to be paid range from €18 to €58 a month, although poorer families could be partially reimbursed and thus could pay between €7 and €44 a month.¹⁸⁹ In addition, parents also bear the costs of extracurricular activities, such as theatre shows and outings for children, up to €45 a year.¹⁹⁰ Altogether, pre-school education costs can come up to 25 per cent of an average net monthly salary (€240).¹⁹¹

The law¹⁹² stipulates that children from the following categories of families can receive pre-school education free of charge:

- Refugees and displaced persons;
- Children with developmental disabilities;
- Orphans;
- Recipients of social welfare.

Unfortunately, even though some Roma could in principle exercise the right to free all-day pre-school education, since they belong to the category of refugees or displaced persons, in practice it happens very rarely, or not at all. Due to the limited physical capacities of pre-schools, priority is given, as has already been explained, to children both of whose parents are employed, and many Roma do not fulfil that condition.

¹⁸⁷ *REF Needs Assessment Serbia.*

¹⁸⁸ *Draft Law on Pre-School Education.*

¹⁸⁹ Interview with Ms. Ljiljana Merlot, advisor on pre-school education at the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 6 April 2006.

¹⁹⁰ Interview with Ms. Ruzica Popović Trbusković, director of the kindergarten "Lala i Lili", Belgrade, 29 March 2006.

¹⁹¹ Institute for Statistics of the Republic of Serbia, information about the average net monthly salary for April 2006, available in Serbian at <http://webzrzs.statserb.sr.gov.yu> (accessed on 1 December 2006).

¹⁹² *Draft Law on Pre-School Education; Law on Financial Support to Families with Children and Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children, Official Gazette No. 16/2002. Law on the Foundations of the Education System.*

Part-time pre-school programmes (four hours a day), one year prior to school enrolment, are free of charge. This form of pre-school education was previously not compulsory, and its provision depended on pre-school capacities. Under the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, starting in the 2006–2007 school year, pre-school education becomes compulsory and free of charge for children aged between five and a half to six and a half.¹⁹³ However, parents are still responsible for the costs of extracurricular activities.

4.3.2 Primary and secondary education

Even though primary and secondary education is free, families need to set aside about €35 per child each month for textbooks, school supplies and snacks (or more, if additional extracurricular activities are included).¹⁹⁴ Transport costs, which are in most cases necessary at the level of secondary education, may add at least €15 a month to this sum.¹⁹⁵

School costs can come up to 15 per cent of the average net monthly salary (€240). Some information, which probably includes extracurricular activities, has it that the costs of schooling may even make up as much as 30 to 50 per cent of the average net monthly salary.¹⁹⁶ Considering that only 18.4 per cent of Roma have salaried employment, and that the average number of children per family is 2.41,¹⁹⁷ the hidden costs are a significant barrier to education.

One Roma woman from the village of Balačko related the following:

I was a very good pupil, but my parents were very poor, and because of that I had to give up schooling when I finished the third grade. I don't want my daughter to have same destiny as me. The teacher told me that she is very good; she is now in the second grade; but I am also very poor, and I don't know till when I will have an opportunity to educate her.¹⁹⁸

Another Roma woman from the village of Vis village in Valjevo summed this up:

It is true that most of us are uneducated, but what can we do! My parents were poor, and could not send me to school. I am also poor, and my husband is sick; we are living on social welfare; it is not enough for living

¹⁹³ Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

¹⁹⁴ Information about prices has been obtained from bookstores and the publishing houses Kreativni Centar and Institute for Textbooks and Teaching Aids of the Republic of Serbia.

¹⁹⁵ It is difficult to obtain information on average for all of Serbia, because the costs of local transport vary. According to the information of the City Transport, a monthly ticket for transport in Belgrade is around €15.

¹⁹⁶ Case study Valjevo.

¹⁹⁷ Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*, p. 130.

¹⁹⁸ Interview with a Roma woman from the village of Balačko, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

[...] I have a daughter of eight years, and a son of four years. My daughter is now in the second grade, and the school gives her books, but I cannot help her to do homework, because I am illiterate, so she has to do everything alone.¹⁹⁹

Difficult economic circumstances are also a crucial reason why so many Roma parents agree, or even ask, that their children are sent to special schools. In addition to being freed from paying for school supplies and other supplementary costs, poor families who enrol their children in special schools are entitled to social welfare on more favourable conditions.²⁰⁰ Social welfare for a five-member family is between €60 and €90 a month, which is a sufficient subsistence amount.²⁰¹ Also, some special schools are actually boarding schools and besides accommodation provide free meals, textbooks, clothing and shoes.²⁰² For parents, costs of schooling children in special schools can be six to seven times lower than costs in mainstream schools, because of the benefits that special schools provide.²⁰³

4.3.3 Financial support in education

The accessibility of education, as well as school results, largely depends on whether the family can afford supplementary costs. There is no established practice to award free textbooks to pupils from low-income families. The only available relief is the possibility of paying for the textbooks in instalments, if ordered through the school for the next school year.

Free textbooks are occasionally distributed by jurisdictional ministries, publishing houses, or NGOs. Considering that no permanent funds are earmarked for this purpose, this type of support depends on the possibilities of donors.

In the 2003–2004 school year, the Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the Ministry of Education and Sports, the then Ministry of Social Affairs and the Roma National Council, with the financial support from local and foreign donors, ensured

¹⁹⁹ Interview with a Roma woman from the village of Vis, 13 June 2006.

²⁰⁰ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

²⁰¹ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

²⁰² Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

²⁰³ Case study Zemun.

free textbooks for 6,000 Roma primary school pupils (a total of 51,263 book items).²⁰⁴ The Roma Children's Centre, in the period from 2001 to 2003, handed out 1,600 textbook sets for all children covered by their project, and in the past two years 900 sets of textbooks and 1200 school supply sets for the poorest children attending the primary school.²⁰⁵ According to the Centre for Children's Rights and Save the Children, some schools also ensure free textbooks for the poorest pupils in the locality, of whom an estimated 60 per cent are Roma.

According to research conducted by the Centre for Children's Rights and Save the Children, conducted in five towns, certain measures of financial support to socially vulnerable pupils including Roma are being implemented at the local level (Table 9).²⁰⁶ This financial support is provided through centres for social work. Through these centres socially vulnerable families can receive a family allowance, child's allowance, parental allowance, and occasional financial compensation. Support is not given in accordance with any law or State programme, but is rather a matter of local charity.

Table 9: Financial support for socially vulnerable pupils available at the local level (2006)

Beneficiaries	Type of social support:				
	Free textbooks	Free school supplies	Free snacks	Free recreation	Free winter / Summer vacations
Total number of pupils	291	1,102	1,909	109	5
Number of Roma children	174	252	509	11	1
Proportion of Roma children (per cent)	59.79	22.87	26.66	10.09	20

Source: Save the Children UK and the Centre for Children's Rights²⁰⁷

The proportion of Roma children among the total number of children receiving financial support is between 53.7 per cent (Vranje) and 72 per cent (Subotica), which does indicate that there is awareness that the Roma population is economically more vulnerable than others.

²⁰⁴ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

²⁰⁵ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, Coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

²⁰⁶ Save the Children and the Centre for Children's Rights, *Beyond an Unofficial Estimate*, p. 38.

²⁰⁷ Save the Children and the Centre for Children's Rights, *Beyond an Unofficial Assessment*, p. 38.

Schools themselves sometimes ensure some kind of financial assistance to poor pupils. For example, all schools encompassed by the case study in Valjevo Municipality provide free textbooks and snacks to all children from poor families, most of whom are Roma.²⁰⁸

The policy documents on Roma education envisage support measures to poor pupils through the distribution of free textbooks and school supplies. However, the implementation presupposes cross-sector cooperation of several ministries (Ministry of Education and Sports, Ministry of Labour, Employment and Social Policy), and elaboration of support eligibility criteria. This has not happened as yet.

4.4 Residential segregation/Geographical isolation

Residential isolation of Roma settlements, bad housing conditions, lack of an adequate infrastructure, and remoteness from educational and other institutions are important obstacles to accessibility of education on the part of the Roma community.

According to the latest available data (Table 10), there are 593 Roma settlements in Serbia, in which 201,353 indigenous Roma and 46,238 Roma displaced from Kosovo live. These data show that 52.7 per cent of Roma settlements are in urban and suburban areas, as opposed to 44.8 per cent in rural areas.

Table 10: Types of Roma settlements (2005)

Type of settlement	Proportion (per cent)
Suburban settlement	31.0
Settlements in villages	23.1
Settlements in towns	21.7
Village	21.7
The rest	2.5

Source: Jakšić and Bašić²⁰⁹

Many Roma settlements are situated on the fringes of towns and villages, without paved roads and/or with bad or no transport connection with other populated zones in which pre-schools and schools are situated. According to a UNICEF study, as many as 20 per cent of Roma settlements do not have decent roads, and public transport is not

²⁰⁸ Case study Valjevo.

²⁰⁹ Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*.

available on a regular basis.²¹⁰ The geographical distance of such settlements significantly decreases the chances of Roma children to attend school regularly. Under the new draft Law on Pre-School Education, if a settlement is more than 4 kilometres away from an educational institution, transport for children will be provided.²¹¹ However, it appears unrealistic that children of pre-school age could walk the distance of up to 4 kilometres to the nearest school – a clear omission in the draft law.

As shown below in Table 11, only 37.6 per cent of Roma settlements have a preschool in or near (within 1 kilometre) the settlement, while pre-schools are inaccessible for 41 per cent of Roma settlements. There is a school in or near the settlement (within 1 kilometre) in 55.1 per cent of settlements, while for 20 per cent of settlements even a primary school is inaccessible.

Table 11: Accessibility of pre-schools and primary schools from Roma settlements (2005)

Accessibility or distance of the nearest school or pre-school away from the Roma settlement (questionnaire choices)	Proportion of Roma settlements (per cent)	
	Pre-school institution	Primary school
“Accessible”	15.9	21.5
Up to 1 kilometre away	21.7	30.0
More than 1 kilometre away	20.0	27.3
“Not accessible”	41.0	20.0
“The rest”	1.4	1.2

Source: Jakšić and Bašić²¹²

The data show that 15.9 per cent of Roma settlements have a pre-school, and 21.5 per cent have a primary school. Given their location in predominantly Roma-populated settlements, such educational establishments are bound to be all- or predominantly Roma, contrary to the officially available data that segregation is a sporadic rather than widespread phenomenon in Serbia (see section 2.4). However, there is no information about the extent of segregation in Serbia, even based on the place of residence.

According to the official admission, only a handful of segregated schools exist in Serbia, such as the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Niš. It is situated near a large Roma

²¹⁰ UNICEF, *Reproduction of Social Isolation through Education – Roma Children and Education in South East Europe*, forthcoming. The study examines the exercise of the right to education by Roma in seven countries of South-East Europe in 2005.

²¹¹ *Draft Law on Pre-School Education*.

²¹² Jakšić and Bašić, *The Art of Survival*.

settlement, the Beograd Mala slum, with approximately 4,500 inhabitants, and has all the characteristics of a segregated school (namely 80 per cent are Roma children).²¹³ Even better-off and more educated Roma tend to take their children away from this school, in a desire to ensure better quality education. However, the poorest parents usually cannot afford to take their children to the more remote school. Furthermore, schools allegedly do not want to admit children from the so-called “Gypsy addresses”, and often turn them away under the pretext that there are no more places.²¹⁴

In the case of the Jovan Cvijić Primary School in Belgrade, 20 to 30 Roma children were enrolled following a pre-school programme in the Deponija settlement, carried out in 2002–2003 by the Society for the Improvement of Local Roma Communities (DURN). The transfer of Roma children provoked a strong opposition from the parents of non-Roma children. The Ministry of Education and Sports tried to mediate in the situation, but in the end Roma pupils were just transferred to nearby schools, without any consequences for the non-Roma parents who manifested racist attitudes.²¹⁵

It is probable that there are many more segregated classes and schools than is publicly admitted.²¹⁶ In order to assess the extent and scope of the problem of segregation, there is a pressing need for more research and data mapping out segregated schools in Serbia.

4.5 School and class placement procedures

4.5.1 Class placement in mainstream schools

There are no officially formulated school and class placement procedures. Schools enjoy discretion in developing internal criteria, which are usually set by the schools’ psychologists and/or pedagogues²¹⁷ on the basis of tests administered prior to the enrolment.²¹⁸ Sometimes these criteria are included as instructions in schools’ annual programmes, but this is rather an exception than a rule.

²¹³ FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*.

²¹⁴ Interview with Ms. Refika Mustafić, director of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 22 March 2006.

²¹⁵ Interview with Ms. Anne-Maria Cuković of the Secretariat for Roma Education Strategy, Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of the State Union of Serbia and Montenegro, Belgrade, 23 March 2006.

²¹⁶ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

²¹⁷ A school pedagogue is an educational specialist employed full-time to support teachers and students to improve quality of teaching and learning process. He or she is not a teacher in the school, but a staff person whose function is to support teachers in their work. Pedagogues are educated at the Education Departments at Universities.

²¹⁸ Interview with Ms. Angelina Skarep, educational advisor to the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 10 April 2006.

Classes are often formed on the basis of gender, test results, developmental and physical (dis)abilities, socio-economic standing of the family, and so on. Consideration is given to balanced distribution of children in classes along these parameters, maintaining diversity. When a child has any sort of a learning problem, he or she may be placed in a class led by a teacher with some experience or skills dealing with this specific problem. The wishes of parents can also be taken into account, but are not decisive. In fact, children can be placed in a special class even without the parents' consent.²¹⁹

4.5.2 Placement in segregated classes

Occasionally, segregated Roma classes in mainstream schools are formed. This is usually done on the basis of internal (unwritten) school criteria. According to representatives of various NGOs and schools, placement in "special classes" within mainstream schools is most commonly justified by insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction (Serbian, or Hungarian in some localities in Vojvodina). Sometimes, Roma children "outgrow" the enrolment age (i.e. are older than seven or eight). In cases of parents travelling for seasonal work, the school year may have already started and all classes formed, and these children are placed in separate ("special") classes.

According to NGOs, sometimes there are "good intentions" behind forming such classes.²²⁰ This is because, in the opinion of some school psychologists/pedagogues, in uniform conditions (i.e. in a class where children have more or less the same knowledge, the same degree of fluency in a language, and so on), Roma children are able to make faster progress, as in that case teachers most readily adjust their methodology and educational contents to the pupils' level.²²¹ This illustrates a typical approach of the education system in Serbia: lowering expectations and standards, and using a programme- or teacher-centred methodology, rather than an individualised (child-centred) approach. Roma children usually do not have the same level of "expected" knowledge at the beginning of schooling as other children who have been through pre-school training. But teachers are not ready or willing to adjust their methods to the actual needs of these children. Thus, even when there is no overt racist intent, the outcome is racially biased, depriving both Roma and non-Roma children of a diverse learning environment.

²¹⁹ Interview with Ms. Angelina Skarep, educational advisor to the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 10 April 2006.

²²⁰ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

²²¹ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

4.5.3 Placement in “special schools”

Referral to special schools takes place on the basis of a recommendation of a medical commission – the Commission for Categorisation of Children with Developmental Disabilities (or “Categorisation Commission”). Referral to the medical commission is made in accordance with a recommendation of a psychologist/pedagogue who conducts regular pre-school testing in a primary school. The makeup of the medical commission is determined depending on a child’s suspected disabilities or learning problems and consists of a paediatrician from a medical institution, a representative of the health care institution in which the child is treated, an expert working with children with developmental disabilities, the psychologist/pedagogue, a special education teacher, and a social worker of a kindergarten or a school. The medical commission cannot take a final decision determining the type and extent of the developmental handicap, which is a prerogative of the municipal or city authorities. However, in practice, the final decision is almost always made according to the recommendation of the medical commission. Parents can appeal against this decision to a competent ministry.²²²

There is no official Romanes interpreter in the commission. When the commission notices that the child has a problem with understanding, non-verbal tests can be included. Lack of understanding and the child’s inability to answer due to the language barrier are often interpreted as a developmental disability (“pseudo-retardation”). There is no regulation enabling parents to be present at the testing, even if they were experts. NGOs claim that what had been achieved in the past ten years is to have Roma assistants accompany children to tests, to translate questions and help children to understand the task. This to a certain extent helps to prevent unwarranted referrals to a medical commission and subsequent placement in the special school. However, in the absence of the legal right, even such assistance depends on the good will of the school psychologist/pedagogue.²²³

If the commission’s decision does not satisfy the child’s parents, they can make an appeal to a second-order commission. In reality, Roma parents rarely appeal against the referral of their children to special schools. The primary reason is probably ignorance of legal possibilities. The Minority Rights Centre’s experience is that in most cases, psychologists try to persuade Roma parents that the special school is best for their children because of the advantages that it offers: free school supplies, free meals, and so on.²²⁴ Special school education is often a faster and cheaper way to get a diploma and

²²² The Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

²²³ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

²²⁴ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17.March 2006.

job qualifications for many of the poorest families,²²⁵ even though afterwards they cannot go on to higher education, or hold more than low-skilled jobs. The Roma Children's Centre knows of only one case when Roma parents refused to let their child go to a special school, and won their appeal.²²⁶

Under the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, it is possible to reassess the extent of the diagnosed developmental disability.²²⁷ However, there is no clear procedure for transferring children from special to mainstream schools, or from segregated to mixed classes. Nor is there any information as to how often this measure is actually used in practice.

According to the Minority Rights Centre, Roma children are more often transferred from mainstream to special schools, than vice versa.²²⁸ If there are cases of return to mainstream schools, there are usually no records.²²⁹

4.6 Language

There is no information about the levels of proficiency of Roma children in the majority language, in which the most of them study. NGOs estimate that the majority of Roma children do not speak Serbian at home, and that they have only very little knowledge of Serbian at the pre-school age. Even at school age, many Roma children from Romanes-speaking families are not proficient in Serbian or Hungarian, the official languages of instruction. The Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, which has been carrying out the OSI "Step-by-Step" pre-school programme, reported that around 20 per cent of children had had this problem, and stressed the invaluable importance of Roma teaching assistants for faster overcoming of the language barrier.²³⁰

²²⁵ Strategy for the Improvement of Education of Roma in Serbia, Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003.

²²⁶ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, Belgrade, 13 March 2006.

²²⁷ "A reassessment of the extent or the type and the extent of a developmental handicap of a pupil can be made in the course of his or her primary education. The proposal to reassess the extent or the type and the extent of a developmental handicap can be made either by parents or by the school i.e. the medical institution." The Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 86.

²²⁸ Interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

²²⁹ Interview with Ms. Angelina Skarep, educational advisor to the Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, Belgrade, 10 April 2006.

²³⁰ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, 5 March 2006. All children attending their programme have reportedly shown excellent mastery of the Serbian language and have less difficulty doing school assignments than children who have not benefited from the programme.

A psychologist from a primary school in Niš has made the following analysis of factors having an impact on the degree to which children master the language and subsequent ramifications on school achievements:

Those children who attended pre-school groups regularly, or have had an opportunity to socialise with children of non-Roma nationalities, or spoke Serbian at home with family members, have had excellent school achievements. The number of those children is significantly lower than the number of children whose mastery of Serbian language is poor.²³¹

The language barrier is particularly prominent among children who have been readmitted to Serbia from Western European countries. They may be completely or partially ignorant of Serbian and/or Romanes, not knowing the Cyrillic alphabet, inserting foreign words in speech, and making various grammatical mistakes. Owing to the lack of, or poor proficiency in, the Serbian language, such children, who may be old enough to go to the third grade, often enrol just in the first grade of the primary school.²³² There has been no systematic solution to the problem, aside from several NGO projects.²³³

According to Roma NGOs, in Liciki alone (the biggest Roma settlement in Kragujevac), up to ten families returned with a total of 30 children and are experiencing these problems. A third of the children managed to become included in the education system (schools) or to continue schooling in some other form (alternative workshops) after they had been included in the REI “Equal Chances” project. Most children, however, are outside the education system.²³⁴

Policy documents on Roma education recognise the language barrier as a factor responsible for the underachievement of Roma children. NGO experiences, in addition, suggest that this is one of the decisive factors for referring Roma children to special schools.²³⁵

However, there is no information that the Ministry of Education and Sports is conducting special programmes that would help to remove the language barrier.

²³¹ Case study Niš.

²³² Interview with Ms. Refika Mustafić, director of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 22 March 2006.

²³³ FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*.

²³⁴ FOSS, *Report on the “Equal Chances” Project*

²³⁵ Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia, Ministry of Education and Sports of the Republic of Serbia, 2003.

5. BARRIERS TO QUALITY EDUCATION

Roma are systematically exposed to a lower quality of education. Most schools in Serbia are run-down and in need of renovation and newer equipment. Given that many Roma live in impoverished settlements lacking adequate infrastructure and local tax investments, the quality of school buildings in Roma settlements could be even worse than average, although official information is not available.

While, formally, teachers in majority-Roma schools are equally qualified, the phenomenon of “white flight” affects both the student body and the teaching staff. This results in lowered expectations and lowered quality of instruction, and worse achievement of Roma pupils, as demonstrated by the results of standardised tests. Half of the Roma children tested have not mastered elementary mathematical knowledge after the third grade, and an estimated 56 per cent have not mastered even basic knowledge of the Serbian language grammar after the third grade. In the absence of official curricular standards, Roma pupils are reportedly taught an abridged curriculum, and often automatically passed from grade to grade without acquiring basic literacy in the early grades of the primary school, precipitating their drop-out in the higher grades of the primary school. A set of clear and coherent criteria for grading, and a monitoring system to confirm that teachers respect these criteria, should be developed and put in place to address this issue.

Teachers’ prejudices play a significant role in lowering the quality of education for Roma pupils even when Roma are educated in the same classroom as non-Roma. Teachers allegedly disregard racist bullying and harassment of Roma pupils by non-Roma peers and their parents, and often themselves display discriminatory attitudes towards Roma, manifesting prejudices deeply entrenched in the local communities and society at large. Cooperation between schools and parents, if it exists at all, is superficial. Communication with Roma parents is allegedly limited to meetings at which teachers criticise Roma parents about their children.

The newly established Educational Supervision Service could, in theory, be a systematic tool for monitoring barriers and obstacles to the quality of Roma education, and also for supporting real pedagogical innovation and change on the school level. However, there is no indication that this really happens in practice, and on the local level some school inspectors appear unaware even of the existence of State educational policies to improve Roma access to education. The Ministry of Education and Sports should provide better training for inspectors, coupled with a clear mandate to identify and address cases of discrimination.

5.1 School facilities and human resources

5.1.1 The quality of school buildings

There is no official information on the quality of schools where Roma study. The *Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education* does not mention the quality of school buildings among the main barriers for proper education of Roma students. Furthermore, a recent OECD report on students at risk (who are in most cases enrolled in special schools) does not mention the quality of school buildings among

issues and barriers.²³⁶ However, according to NGO representatives,²³⁷ school buildings in which these NGOs carried out their projects were dilapidated, their condition far worse than the condition of an average school in Serbia.²³⁸

At the same time, the average school quality in Serbia leaves much to be desired. UNICEF's 2001 *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education in FR Yugoslavia*, (hereafter, *UNICEF Comprehensive Analysis*) found that there is a total of 4,681 school buildings in Serbia; special schools are housed in 53 buildings, and adult education schools in 19 buildings.²³⁹ Only 40 per cent of all school buildings are in a condition that does not require some repairs; the condition of rural schools is generally worse than of urban schools.²⁴⁰ Although almost all school buildings have electricity, only around 75 per cent have running water, and around 60 per cent have a sewage line. From the pupils' perspective, the situation is somewhat better: around 88 per cent of pupils attend schools with running water and 82 per cent attend schools with sewage lines.²⁴¹ In as much as 65 per cent of school buildings, the legal minimum of three square metres per pupil is not met; around 76 per cent of pupils attend such schools. 12 per cent of rural schools and around 17 per cent of urban schools have only one square metre per pupil. Around 40 per cent of buildings do not have any teaching aids, although 62 per cent of schools have libraries. An average number of books per pupil is 17. A very small number of schools have specialised classrooms (laboratories, and so on), but in most schools some regular classrooms are equipped with a piece or two of special equipment necessary for chemistry, physics and biology lessons.

There is lack of information on the quality of school buildings with proportionally higher number of Roma students. However, it appears that the quality of such buildings could be worse than normal, given lack of infrastructure in Roma settlements, lack of local tax investments in schools, lack of parental contributions due to poverty prevalent in Roma communities, and other factors determining quality of life.

²³⁶ G. Nikolić, B. Jablan, S. Marković, V. Radoman, S. Hrnjca and Z. Djurić, "Educational Policies for Students at Risk and those with Disabilities in Serbia," in OECD, *Educational Policies*.

²³⁷ For example, the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), the Roma Children's Centre (CRC/DRC), Society for the Improvement of Roma Settlements (SIRS/DURN), among others.

²³⁸ Interviews with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

²³⁹ UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education*, p. 61.

²⁴⁰ A. Bogojević, I. Ivić and R. Karapandža, *Optimisation of the Network of Schools in Serbia*, Belgrade, UNICEF, 2002.

²⁴¹ UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education*, p. 35.

5.1.2 Teaching staff

There are no official data on teachers working in classes and schools with majority Roma pupils. NGOs provide some information about this important aspect of the quality of education of Roma.

The 2004 *National Assessment Study*, conducted among the pupils of the third grade of primary schools by the Institute for Evaluation of the Quality of Education, a public institution set up by the Government of the Republic of Serbia, provides reliable information about the quality of educational achievements of pupils.²⁴² The study encompassed a representative sample of pupils in Serbia, excluding Kosovo (a total of 268 classes and homeroom teachers). It found that teachers who work in classes with majority Roma pupils do not differ from other teachers as regards gender, age, formal educational qualifications, teaching experience, and the like. Thus, seemingly, there should be no essential difference with regard to basic socio-demographic and professional characteristics of teachers who work with classes incorporating Roma pupils and teachers who do not. It should be noted that this information concerns the lower grades of the primary school (first to fourth) and that it cannot be applied automatically to the upper grades (fifth to eighth). However, these results provide a generalised picture, camouflaging individual cases where the situation is different.

According to representatives of the CIP NGO, which carried out the REI “Equal Chances” project in the predominantly Roma school of Vuk Karadžić in Niš, there is an apparent tendency among teachers, especially highly qualified ones, to leave this school for work in other schools.²⁴³ One of the crucial reasons cited is the fact that non-Roma community often treats non-Roma teachers from this school as if they were Roma. This experience suggests that at the local level (i.e. at the level of individual schools), there are mechanisms at work that result in schools with a large number of Roma pupils having weaker teaching staff, who cannot easily find work elsewhere, or even insufficient staff. Considering that the overall number of schools in which Roma pupils are in the majority is rather small, these cases cannot affect the global picture. However, such cases indicate that deeply rooted negative stereotypes about Roma, which prompt non-Roma teachers leave such as soon as they have an opportunity to do so, result in a poorer quality of teaching staff in Roma schools.²⁴⁴

Although the authorities usually claim that the Vuk Karadžić Primary School is one of very few segregated schools in Serbia, negative stereotypes about Roma are widespread.

²⁴² A. Baucal, D. Pavlović-Babić, D. Plut and U. Gvozden, *Nacionalno testiranje učenika III razreda osnovne škole. Zavod za vrednovanje kvaliteta obrazovanja i vaspitanja* (National Assessment of Pupils of the Third Grade of Primary School. Institute for the Evaluation of the Quality of Education and Upbringing), Belgrade, 2005 (hereafter, Baucal *et al.*, *National Assessment of Pupils*).

²⁴³ Interviews with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

²⁴⁴ Interviews with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, 5 March 2006.

Therefore, the scenario when better qualified staff might leave “Gypsy schools” (along with non-Roma pupils) in search of “whiter” schools is quite possible in any school with a sizeable percentage of Roma pupils.

5.2 School results

This section analyses school results/achievements of Roma pupils, based on four main indicators: completion rates and passing to the next grade; school marks; results of standardised testing; and grade repetition.

5.2.1 Completion of grades and passing to the next grade among Roma pupils

One possible indicator of the success of Roma in compulsory education is the number of Roma pupils in the individual primary school grades. This indicator provides an insight into the scope of the problem, especially since many Roma students who repeat the first few grades are also those who then drop out. As shown below in Table 12, the REF’s *Needs Assessment* report for Serbia provides information about the number of Roma pupils in the primary school grades, for the 2002–2003 school year.

Table 12: Number of Roma pupils in an individual primary school – breakdown by grade (2002–2003 school year)

Grade	Number of Roma pupils	Proportion of Roma students* (per cent)
1	3,206	100.00
2	2,348	73.24
3	1,882	58.70
4	1,747	54.49
5	1,732	54.02
6	1,355	42.26
7	1,018	31.75
8	944	29.44

*as compared to the number of Roma pupils enrolled in the first grade

Source: REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*²⁴⁵

²⁴⁵ REF, *Needs Assessment Serbia*, p. 20.

These data indicate that a large number of Roma pupils enrolled in the first grade do not pass to the second and third grades. It seems that already in the first two grades around 40 per cent of Roma pupils drop out of school. Between 50 and 60 per cent of those enrolled in the first grade actually go to the third, fourth and fifth grades, while the sixth grade is attended by about 40 per cent of the initially enrolled Roma pupils. This number decreases to merely 30 per cent of pupils who pass to the seventh and eighth grades of the primary school. Thus, merely 30 per cent of Roma pupils who enrol in the first grade actually finish the primary school.

This information should be read in the light of the fact that since the 2001–2002 school year, a comprehensive education reform has been carried out in Serbia.²⁴⁶ At the very beginning of the reform process, priority was given to systematic changes, although the Ministry of Education and Sports encouraged schools to improve the enrolment of Roma pupils taking into consideration many barriers that they face in access to education.²⁴⁷ This was an internal communication, not followed with grants, teacher training courses, monitoring, or other technical or practical assistance. There has been indeed a certain increase in the number of Roma students enrolled in the early grades of primary education, compared to previous school years, although it is not known to what extent this policy was effective in the 2002–2003 school year.

However, it should be borne in mind that the number of Roma pupils who repeat grades is greater than the number of non-Roma pupils (see 5.2.4 below).²⁴⁸ This might be a reason why the number of Roma pupils in junior grades of the primary school appears greater than their number in senior grades. This factor may also indicate that the number of Roma pupils who drop out of school by the third grade could be higher than 40 per cent.

5.2.2 School marks of Roma and non-Roma pupils

The second possible indicator of school results of Roma pupils is that of *school marks*. School marks are graded from 1 to 5 (1 is the lowest mark and 5 is the highest; grades 3–5 are pass marks). When comparing *school marks*, however, it should be noted that these are given to students by their teachers, rather than being based on standardised national tests.

²⁴⁶ See details about conception of the comprehensive reform in T. Kovač-Cerović and L. Levkov (eds.), *Kvalitetno obrazovanje za sve – put ka razvijenom društvu* (Quality Education for All – Path to a Developed Society), Belgrade: Ministry of Education and Sports, 2002.

²⁴⁷ Based on the open invitation, 74 school projects aimed at improving the quality of Roma education were supported financially in the 2002–2003 school year. Further information in Serbian available on the website of the Ministry of Human Rights at <http://www.humanrights.gov.yu/srpski/sektori/manjinska/roma/mere/1-obrazovanje/dosadasnje-mere/1-dosadasnje-mere.htm> (accessed on 2 March 2007).

²⁴⁸ A. Baucal, “Development of Mathematical and Language Literacy among Roma Students,” *Psibologija*, Vol. 39 No. 2, 2006, pp. 207–227.

Through a one-off testing in a representative sample of schools – *National Assessment of Third Grade Pupils in Primary Schools*²⁴⁹ (hereafter, the *National Assessment*) – information was collected about the school marks of Roma and non-Roma pupils in the first three grades of primary school in mathematics (Tables 13) and Serbian language (Table 14).

Table 13: School marks (for mathematics) of Roma and non-Roma pupils in the first three grades of primary school (2005)

School mark		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Total No.
		Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	
1	No.	22	27	28	26	32	36	171
	per cent	9.7	0.6	12.1	0.5	14.0	0.7	–
2	No.	106	367	123	482	122	586	1,786
	per cent	46.9	7.6	53.2	10.0	53.3	12.1	–
3	No.	48	644	35	805	41	914	2,487
	per cent	21.2	13.4	15.2	16.7	17.9	18.9	–
4	No.	28	1,311	28	1,303	23	1,320	4,013
	per cent	12.4	27.2	12.1	27.0	10.0	27.4	–
5	No.	22	2,464	17	2,203	11	1,969	6,686
	per cent	9.7	51.2	7.4	45.7	4.8	40.8	–
Total (1–5)	No.	226	4,813	231	4,819	229	4,825	15,143

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

²⁵⁰ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

Table 14: School marks (for Serbian language) of Roma and non-Roma pupils in the first three grades of primary school (2005)

School mark		Grade 1		Grade 2		Grade 3		Total (No.)
		Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	Roma	Non-Roma	
1	No.	16	20	23	16	25	20	120
	per cent	7.1	0.4	10.0	0.3	10.9	0.4	–
2	No.	102	262	110	351	111	407	1,343
	per cent	45.1	5.4	47.6	7.3	48.5	8.4	–
3	No.	52	600	47	660	50	817	2,226
	per cent	23.0	12.5	20.3	13.7	21.8	16.9	–
4	No.	33	1,215	29	1,275	27	1,330	3,909
	per cent	14.6	25.2	12.6	26.5	11.8	27.6	–
5	No.	23	2,716	22	2,516	16	2,251	7,544
	per cent	10.2	56.4	9.5	52.2	7.0	46.7	–
Total (1–5)	No.	226	4,813	231	4,818	229	4,825	15,142

F= frequency

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁵¹

These data indicate a very significant difference in school achievement between Roma and non-Roma pupils in mathematics and Serbian language. The majority of Roma pupils (45–55 per cent) have the lowest passing mark (2) at the end of the school year. Only between 5 and 10 per cent of Roma pupils get the highest mark (5), while over 40 per cent of non-Roma pupils receive this mark in all three grades and for both subjects. The difference in school achievements is also apparent from the number of pupils who got the failing mark (1) at the end of the school year. Among Roma pupils, it is between 7 and 11 per cent in Serbian, and between 10 and 14 per cent in mathematics, while among non-Roma it is less than 1 per cent.

Gender is an important factor in school achievement of Roma and non-Roma. Both Roma and non-Roma girls tend to outperform boys, although the progress of Roma

²⁵¹ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

girls towards the third grade also coincides with the time when so many of them drop out. Tables 15 and 16, below, demonstrate more clearly these tendencies.

Table 15: Average school marks (for mathematics) for Roma and non-Roma boys and girls, in the first three grades of primary school (2005)

School grade	Average school mark			
	Non-Roma		Roma	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	4.15	4.29	2.74	2.59
2	4.01	4.18	2.55	2.47
3	3.85	4.09	2.33	2.44

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁵²

Table 16: Average school marks (for Serbian language) for Roma and non-Roma boys and girls, in the first three grades of primary school (2005)

School grade	Average school mark			
	Non-Roma		Roma	
	Male	Female	Male	Female
1	4.20	4.47	2.73	2.78
2	4.08	4.42	2.57	2.70
3	3.92	4.35	2.42	2.67

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁵³

5.2.3 The achievements of Roma and non-Roma pupils in the National Assessment standardised tests

The third possible indicator of school achievement of Roma pupils is their *scores* in the standardised tests used in the *National Assessment*.²⁵⁴ Here, pupils' achievements are expressed on a scale where the national average is 500 points, and the standard

²⁵² Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

²⁵³ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

²⁵⁴ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

deviation is 100 points (i.e. approximately two thirds of pupils have a score between 400 and 600 points). The levels are based on the student scores.

The average achievement of Roma pupils in the mathematics test is 366 points, 134 points below the national average, while their average achievement in the Serbian language is 346 points, 154 points below the national average. International studies (such as TIMSS and PISA) found that one year of schooling results in pupils' progress of 60 points on average, using the scale used to express the achievement on the National Assessment.²⁵⁵ If this is also the case in Serbia, then it would mean Roma pupils lag behind other pupils by 2.2 school years in mathematics and 2.6 school years in Serbian language (and these are pupils who on average spend in school three years in total).

The standardised tests in mathematics and Serbian language, used for the National Assessment of Pupils of the Third Grade of Primary School, differentiates between five quality levels for pupils' achievements (A to E, where E is the lowest level). Each level is defined on the basis of what pupils at this level of achievement know or can do in mathematics and Serbian language, respectively.

Table 17: Results for Roma and non-Roma pupils, in the standardised tests for mathematics and Serbian language in Grade 3

Level	Proportion of pupils (per cent)							
	Serbian language				Mathematics			
	National level	Roma	Roma boys	Roma girls	National level	Roma	Roma boys	Roma girls
A	7	0.8	1.3	1.1	7	0.8	-	1.1
B	12	1.6	1.3	2.3	10	1.6	-	2.3
C	23	7.8	5.2	6.9	27	5.5	5.2	5.7
D	28	17.8	13	16.1	27	15.7	14.3	12.6
E	16	16.3	20.8	18.4	18	26	29.9	24
Below E	14	55.8	58.4	55.2	11	50.4	50.6	54
Total (per cent)	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	99.7

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁵⁶

²⁵⁵ Personal communication with Mr. Douglas Willms, Professor and Director of the Canadian Research Institute for Social Policy at the University of New Brunswick (UNB) who served on the technical advisory board for the OECD's PISA study, and is known for the training of new scholars in the analysis of large and complex data sets, on file with the authors.

²⁵⁶ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

As shown above in Table 17, after three years of schooling, an estimated 50 per cent of Roma pupils have not mastered basic knowledge and basic terms and are not capable of applying mathematical knowledge in simple situations (below Level E). For the sake of comparison, at the national level, only 11 per cent of pupils have not managed to master level E. In addition to this 50 per cent, a further 26 per cent of Roma pupils have managed to master merely basic mathematical skills and understand the simplest terms after three years of schooling (Level E). At the national level, around 29 per cent of pupils are at level E or below, while among the Roma pupils the corresponding proportion is 76 per cent.

Analysis of the achievements of Roma pupils at the National Assessment in the Serbian language shows similarities with the assessment of mathematical skills. Even after three years of schooling, around 56 per cent of Roma pupils have not mastered fundamental knowledge and skills in the Serbian language (below Level E), while at the national level this is the case with 14 per cent.

For both the mathematics test and the Serbian language test, the results of Roma boys and girls essentially do not differ.

A UNICEF study from 2001²⁵⁷ found that around 80 per cent of the Roma population in Serbia is functionally illiterate.

5.2.4 Grade repetition rate among Roma and non-Roma pupils

The fourth indicator of school achievements of Roma pupils is the number of pupils repeating a grade. The available data show that at the national level, the repetition rate is 1 per cent, while among Roma pupils in the first three grades of the primary school it is 11 per cent.²⁵⁸

5.2.5 Background versus education quality as cause for underachievement

The four indicators of school achievement of Roma pupils in Serbia point to considerable underachievement in school among Roma pupils in the first three grades of the primary school. It is highly probable that the gap widens exponentially in the senior grades of the school.

A possible explanation for Roma pupils' underachievement is their social background: they come from poorer families and have parents whose educational qualifications are lower. According to this explanation, it would be almost unrealistic to expect Roma pupils to perform any better. If the disadvantaged background of Roma pupils were

²⁵⁷ UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education*.

²⁵⁸ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

solely responsible for their underachievement, then non-Roma pupils with the same background should have the same level of achievement as Roma pupils. It would also mean that schools were providing the same quality of education and incentive for advancement to both Roma and non-Roma pupils, and not contributing to the existing gap in achievements.

However, an analysis of achievements in mathematics of Roma and non-Roma pupils with similar socio-economic backgrounds indicates that there is still a difference in achievements, although in this case the difference is not 134 points but around 80 points. Thus, 40 per cent of the difference in school achievements between Roma and non-Roma pupils can indeed be attributed to the socio-economic disadvantage. However, about 60 per cent of the gap cannot be explained by socio-economic factors alone. Rather, it seems that the gap in achievements stems from the school itself: Roma pupils are probably not provided with the same quality of education as non-Roma pupils are.²⁵⁹ It is important to stress here the point that these data concern Roma and non-Roma in the same classes (not physically separate, or segregated classes). The difference in results occurs evidently because teachers deliver a lower quality of education to Roma.²⁶⁰

Accordingly, the gap in school achievements between Roma and non-Roma students can be decreased significantly by improving the quality of education for Roma pupils, without waiting for an improvement of the general socio-economic status of the Roma population in Serbia. Furthermore, such a dramatic gap warrants urgent development and implementation of policy measures that would help to improve the quality of education and decrease this gap.

5.3 Curricular standards

There are no national-level curricular standards as yet in Serbia. While the standards are in the process of development, they do not seem to be among the priorities of the Ministry of Education and Sports. In practice, while teachers use the same (official) curriculum in classes with Roma pupils as in classes without Roma pupils, it appears that some teachers might have different attitudes towards Roma than non-Roma pupils, such as for example lowering expectations for Roma pupils. This evidently results in less encouragement for Roma pupils to advance, and accordingly less achievement.²⁶¹

²⁵⁹ Baucal, "Development of Mathematical and Language Literacy among Roma Students," pp. 211–235.

²⁶⁰ Baucal, "Development of Mathematical and Language Literacy among Roma Students," pp. 211–235.

²⁶¹ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, p. 13; interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

A good illustration of this is the discrepancy in the results between Roma and non-Roma pupils on the National Assessment achievements, as compared to the school marks given by teachers (Table 18). If teachers had the same expectations for Roma and non-Roma pupils, and judged them on the basis of the same criteria, then Roma and non-Roma pupils with the same school mark should have the same average score on the standardised test. However, in reality, Roma pupils fare worse on the standardised test than non-Roma pupils with the same school mark (the difference is around 54 points, or almost the whole mark), which means that Roma pupils probably needed to show less knowledge to get the school mark.²⁶²

Table 18: Scores in the standardised mathematics test correlated to school marks (for pass marks only) – for Roma and non-Roma pupils, at the end of the third grade of primary school (2004)

School Grade	Standardised mathematics test score	
	Non-Roma	Roma
2	382.3	338.4
3	443.4	402.1
4	492.1	458.9
5	558.3	495.4

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁶³

These findings are corroborated by the experiences of NGOs, which claim that there is a considerable difference in school curriculum used by Roma and non-Roma pupils, even though formally the curriculum is uniform across the country. The representatives of CIP, for example, allege that teachers actually abridge the curriculum for Roma pupils, selecting only some parts of it, which they require their Roma pupils to learn. Teachers reportedly justify this practice by the frequent absenteeism of Roma pupils.²⁶⁴

Further to the trend of teachers lowering the standards for Roma, it appears that Roma pupils are also more frequently placed in classes with a lower quality of instruction (see Table 19). Data from the National Assessment of Pupils of the Third Grade of Primary School reveal that over 40 per cent of Roma pupils are in classes with the lowest quality of teaching, while only around 20 per cent of non-Roma pupils are in such classes. The “quality of teaching” is here assessed based on an estimation of student achievements in

²⁶² This comparison was made only for those classes in which there are both Roma and non-Roma pupils.

²⁶³ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

²⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

each class, while applying a control to the data for socio-economic status. The sample included 5,000 students from 212 classes, within 113 schools. The situation is reversed in classes with the highest quality of instruction; around 39 per cent of non-Roma pupils are taught in such classes, as opposed to just above 20 per cent of Roma pupils.

Table 19: The quality of teaching in classes – for Roma and non-Roma pupils

Quality of teaching in the class – for the 20 per cent of classes in which the quality of teaching is:		Proportion (per cent)	
		Non-Roma	Roma
1	highest	17.6	12.6
2	higher than average	21.0	10.9
3	average	21.2	17.6
4	lower than average	20.1	18.4
5	lowest	20.2	40.6

Source: Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*²⁶⁵

There have been some positive examples, even though in a perhaps “wrong” environment, when teachers extended the curriculum for Roma pupils. Thus, the Belgrade-based Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, where Roma children make up the majority of the student body (see also section 2.4.4), works according to the adult curriculum modified by the school itself. So, instead of just two subjects supposed to be taught, the pupils in the first grade have music, physical education, art and English, in addition to Serbian and mathematics. The Ministry of Education and Sports in 2003 approved such curriculum modification, but has since then retracted the approval. The school has been instructed to work according to the official curriculum, which the staff are refusing to do. They feel that they would damage the children’s interests in this manner by depriving them of knowledge to which they are entitled. At the moment, the outcome of this matter seems unclear.²⁶⁶

The *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, produced by expert groups engaged by the Ministry of Education and Sports, also stresses the point that Roma children from mainstream schools receive some shortened version of the National Curriculum. According to the Strategy, the main reasons for such malpractice are as follows: (a) at the systemic level, there is no instruction/support for teachers as to

²⁶⁵ Baucal et al., *National Assessment of Pupils*.

²⁶⁶ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers and parents of children attending this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

how to meet the educational needs of Roma children; (b) teachers are not sufficiently trained to find ways to meet educational needs of Roma children; (c) Roma children attend classes irregularly, they might have troubles with understanding the Serbian language (which is the language of instruction), and so on.²⁶⁷

If the objectives of the *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia* are to be taken seriously, this by no means should serve to justify the continuous provision of low quality education to Roma. At the very minimum, instruction and support for teachers should be improved, as well as measures carried out to support Roma children to attain the necessary language proficiency and other preparation to be able to attend a normal school programme.

5.4 Classroom practice and pedagogy

Although there does not seem to be difference in general characteristics of teachers working with classes with Roma pupils (see above), it appears that some teachers might have different attitudes towards Roma and non-Roma pupils. One of the most important differences in this regard can be different expectations from Roma and non-Roma pupils, and it is often claimed that teachers have lower educational expectations of Roma pupils, which results in less encouragement to advance and less achievement.²⁶⁸

At the National Assessment, Roma and non-Roma pupils were asked to fill out a questionnaire about their relationship with teachers and the method of teaching. Analysis of the responses yields the following tendencies:

- Teachers assess homework more often in the case of non-Roma pupils;
- Teachers give explanations about what is correct and what is wrong in pupils' work in the case of non-Roma pupils
- Roma pupils give a positive assessment of their relationship with teachers more frequently than non-Roma pupils
- Non-Roma pupils think that teachers are strict with them more often than Roma pupils do
- Non-Roma pupils are more prone to say that teachers scold them when they show ignorance
- Non-Roma pupils more often than Roma pupils think that their teachers expect them to have good knowledge of mathematics.

²⁶⁷ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, p. 13.

²⁶⁸ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, p. 13; interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

Thus, there is evidence to indicate that Roma pupils consistently get different – some would say “excessively tolerant” – treatment than other pupils from their teachers. The practice of, and tendency to, lower expectations for students from a ‘weaker’ group is known as ‘didactic fit,’ which effectively leads to lower schooling outcomes for students.²⁶⁹ For example, it has been reported that teachers automatically pass Roma children to the next grade, even if the children had not fully assimilated the required curriculum for the grade. Thus, formally, only ten to 15 per cent of Roma pupils repeat a grade in the Vuk Karadžić Primary School in Niš.²⁷⁰ As a consequence, many Roma children complete the fourth grade without properly learning to read and write, and are functionally illiterate. They may acquire these skills later, in the sixth or seventh grade, although by then for many it is too late and they drop out. Unfortunately, this practice is only too common across Serbia.

The practice that was piloted through the REI’s “Equal Chances” project. This includes the following approaches, among others:

- Child-centred pedagogy;
- Attention to language and bilingual techniques in the case of children coming from different language backgrounds – including working with Roma Teaching Assistants;
- Inclusion of Roma culture in the classroom and school environment;
- Family inclusion in the teaching and learning process.

However, these approaches represent the exception, rather than the norm, with regard to pedagogical practice in Serbian schools. Often, there is resistance on the part of the teachers themselves to any innovative practice or curriculum. For example, there was much resistance on the part of teachers when, at the beginning of the REI project, teachers were faced with changing their practice, to accommodate the involvement of RTAs in the learning process (see section 3.4). In addition, responding to a written questionnaire given to teachers in two primary schools in Niš, 85 per cent of teachers gave a negative answer when asked whether they would attend training for bilingual education or bilingual techniques; among the reasons that they cited were that they are underpaid, and that mandatory education should be in the official (Serbian) language.²⁷¹

The existing school practice permits the conclusion that in the majority of schools in Serbia, practices are entrenched in an older paradigm for instruction, the frontal, teacher-oriented approach, focusing on lecturing rather than on interactive

²⁶⁹ Y. Dar and N. Resh, “Separating and Mixing Students for Learning: Concepts and Research,” *Pedagogisch Tijdschrift*, 19, 1994, pp. 109–126.

²⁷⁰ According to the school principal, there had been no National Assessment, the test for entry/exit of pupils at crucial points of education (usually, grades 5, 8 and 12).

²⁷¹ Case study Niš.

methodology. Such an approach to the teaching and learning process is rather the norm in Serbia, and consequently, most Roma students do not benefit from quality education or equal chances along with their peers. The core of the stagnancy of the practice rests in the pre-service teacher training institutions, where the formal education of kindergarten and school teachers is largely focused on scientific disciplines/subjects, rather than on pedagogical techniques (see section 3.7). As there is practically no standardised system for in-service teacher training, there is little way, other than NGO and individual initiatives, to systematically change teacher practice in Serbia at this time.

5.5 School–community relations

Under the Law on the Foundations of the Education System, the school board is a governance body of the primary school.²⁷² The school board consists of nine members: three representatives of teachers, three representatives of the local government and the representatives of parents. The board members are appointed and dismissed by the local assembly, and the chairperson is elected by the school board.

The Law also regulates competences of the school board.²⁷³ The board enacts its statute and other general acts, decides on the school curriculum, development plan, and annual programme, drafts and enacts financial plans, appoints the school principal, takes measures to improve working conditions and education, and performs other tasks in accordance with the law, the founding act and the statute. Thus, the Law envisages a considerable role for the local government in school management, in accordance with a general tendency of decentralisation of education.

However, since the education system in Serbia has been very centralised in the past 15 years (nearly everything had to be decided at the level of the Ministry of Education and Sports), the application of the new Law varies greatly in local communities. In practice, the new powers conferred on the local community with regard to school management were not used for the purpose of advancing the quality of education.

The majority of interviewed collocutors could not cite one example of a school in Serbia in which a Roma parent would be elected to a school board; some claim that even if there are such cases, they are extremely rare and are by chance rather than as a result of a policy.²⁷⁴

As to cooperation between schools and parents, even when such cooperation exists, it appears superficial. NGOs conducting projects aimed at advancing the quality of Roma education claim that schools involve parents only to make them finance new

²⁷² Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

²⁷³ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 56.

²⁷⁴ Ministry of Human and Minority Rights, the Roma National Council, the Roma Children's Centre, the Minority Rights Centre, CIP and REC.

equipment or meet other school needs. Teachers are reportedly not trained or willing to include parents in a more serious way. The situation with Roma parents is allegedly far worse. Even when communication between teachers and Roma parents exists, it is allegedly limited to meetings at which teachers criticise or lecture Roma parents about their children.²⁷⁵

The experience with Roma assistants included in the work of schools within the “Equal Chances” project is very telling. In some cases teachers supported inclusion of Roma assistants because they allegedly thought that the assistants would take on themselves all the work with Roma parents. The NGO CIP assesses that during this project some changes in real parental involvement took place through mini-projects which the schools designed for advancing their cooperation with parents (especially Roma parents). The mini-projects were financially supported by the “Equal Chances” project, but when financing stopped things quickly went back to the way they were.

5.6 Discriminatory attitudes

Discrimination is named by the State policy documents as one of the key obstacles to equal access to education for Roma.²⁷⁶ Roma are often exposed to various forms of discrimination by members of school administration, teachers, other children and non-Roma parents. Discrimination does not always take overt forms, but it is ubiquitous.

For example, while claiming to have good community relations with their non-Roma neighbours, interviewed Roma in Valjevo Municipality, regardless of their economic status, appear unwilling to identify themselves (the data on Roma in the municipality are very underestimated, reflecting the trend across the entire country). Few Roma would admit to speaking Romanes, and those Roma children who have light complexions apparently do not wish to confess that they are Roma. Even though often dismissed as mere children’s “squabbles”, conflicts with peers make the school environment unwelcoming for Roma pupils. Thus, interviewed Roma pupils of the Andra Savčić Primary School in Valjevo, who finished the first four grades in the segregated class of this school in Grabovica, and then moved on to continue schooling in the main building located in the town centre, claim that they have problems both with their non-Roma peers and with the teachers, who are allegedly unsupportive. Allegedly, non-Roma children often call them “gypsy”, “dirty”, and “stinky”, but when Roma children report this behaviour to the teachers, they are allegedly told by the teachers that the Roma children are themselves probably to blame for that kind of behaviour (of the peers):

Whenever something bad happens in class, like a fight, squabbles, or something like that, the teacher always first asks us if we are guilty of that.²⁷⁷

²⁷⁵ Interview with Ms. Milena Mihajlović, director of the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Belgrade, 5 March 2006.

²⁷⁶ *The Strategy for Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*, p. 10.

²⁷⁷ Interview with a Roma girl from the Andra Savčić Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

So, I am not telling anymore to the teacher what they (non-Roma children) are doing and telling me, because she is always on the side of the Serbs. She would say, you provoked him, for sure. Because of that, when they bother me I fight with them (non-Roma children), I know that I will be punished for that by the teacher, but it doesn't matter, I will be punished anyway.²⁷⁸

The children also expressed a wish that they could go back to the school in Grabovica, because “they were all the same” there.²⁷⁹

The “white flight” from the Vuk Karadžić Primary School is yet another example of discriminatory attitudes towards Roma by non-Roma parents who do not wish their children to share the school with Roma. There have been also instances of racist graffiti on the walls of the predominantly Roma Vuk Karadžić Primary School, and even more aggressive forms of racist abuse, when the police had to be involved because a group of skinheads would often wait for the Roma children after school and terrorise them.²⁸⁰

Discriminatory attitudes towards Roma pupils by teachers in practice may often translate in having lower expectations of Roma pupils and providing lower quality education to them, even when teachers may themselves think they are doing good, or that it is for the benefit of the child. For example, among the main reasons for poorer achievement of the Roma children at school, some Valjevo teachers named “way of life”; “habit”; different “mental and physical abilities” and even “weaker memory compared to other children.”²⁸¹ A psychologist in Niš commented that Roma culture is marked by “dominance of the right brain hemisphere”: it is, allegedly, turned towards movement, rhythm and the body, and not symbolic verbal expression, and this, allegedly, affects the school achievement of Roma children.²⁸²

Allegedly, teachers also often express their prejudices towards Roma openly, even in front of the class, saying that Roma children are “not intelligent enough”, that they “do not need anything else but to learn how to read and write”, that Roma girls should get married as soon as possible “because Roma women are made for giving birth”, and so on. At the same time, there have been hardly any legal or administrative cases against discrimination in education in Serbia. This prompts conclusions that either there is no clear understanding among Roma and non-Roma alike as to what constitutes discrimination, or that Roma have become so accustomed to discrimination that they seem almost insensitive to its manifestation, including racist bullying in school, or most importantly, that the existing anti-discrimination mechanisms are clearly ineffective in

²⁷⁸ Interview with a Roma boy from the Andra Savčić Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

²⁷⁹ Case study Valjevo.

²⁸⁰ Interview with Ms. Dragica Krstić, principal of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

²⁸¹ Case study Valjevo.

²⁸² Case study Niš.

countering racial harassment. Concealing Roma identity then appears a natural defence mechanism in the face of pervasive negative stereotyping.

5.7 School inspections

Until 2003, school inspections were organised according to school subjects (the so-called “subject inspectors”). By definition, they were concerned primarily with controlling the full implementation of the national curriculum (plan and programme), which used to be rigid, detailed and content-oriented. In that context, it was difficult to expect school inspectors to contribute to the improvement of the quality of Roma education. Hence, there is no record of the involvement of school inspections in the prevention of issues and practices outside their mandate. Nor is there any record of Roma ever being appointed to the position of school inspector.²⁸³

According to the Law on the Foundations of the Education System,²⁸⁴ school inspection was transformed into two separate entities. There is still school inspection, but it is now concerned solely with the legal aspects of a school’s functions (not its educational aspects), and it has been transferred to the municipal level.

In addition to the school inspection, there is the School Supervision Services, under the authority of regional departments of the Ministry of Education and Sports.²⁸⁵ It has a more supervisory and supporting role in educational matters: monitoring the school and teaching/learning process; proposing measures to modify noted malpractices; advice and support to school and teachers, and so on.²⁸⁶

To qualify as an education supervisor, the following criteria are set: at least six years of previous experience in education, a record of excellent results, and professional publications (such as articles, books, teachers’ manuals, and so on).²⁸⁷ In theory, educational supervision service could be a systematic tool for monitoring barriers and obstacles to quality of Roma education, and also for supporting real pedagogical innovation and change on the school level, but there is no indication that it really happens in practice today.

For example, interviewed school inspectors²⁸⁸ in Valjevo Municipality claim not to know anything about the local Action Plan, adopted within the framework of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion.” They claim not to have any communications with other

²⁸³ Interview with Mr. Ljuan Koka, president of the Executive Committee of the Roma National Council, Belgrade, 12 March 2006; interview with Mr. Petar Antić, director of the Minority Rights Centre in Belgrade, 17 March 2006.

²⁸⁴ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 53.

²⁸⁵ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 28.

²⁸⁶ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 138.

²⁸⁷ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, Art. 139.

²⁸⁸ Case study Valjevo.

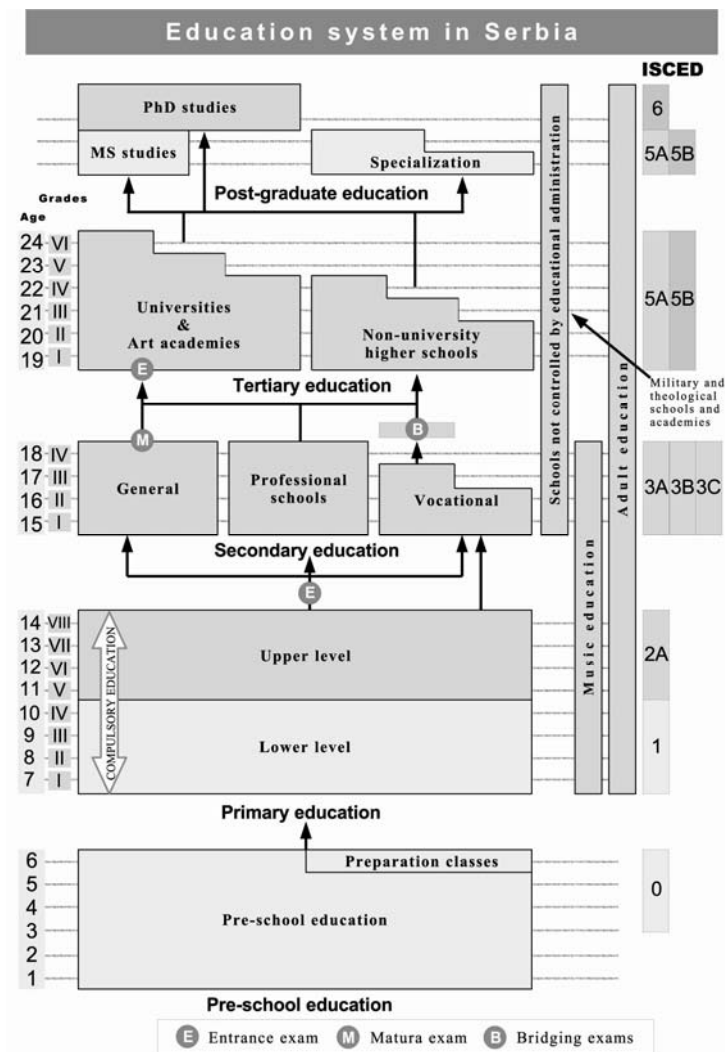
municipal sectors, even though the office of the school inspectorate is located in the same building as the Valjevo municipal authorities. The inspectors state that their job is merely to verify that the programmes of the Ministry of Education and Sports are being executed, even though the Roma educational programmes also form part of the Ministry's programmes.

ANNEX 1: ADMINISTRATIVE STRUCTURES

A1.1 Structure and organisation

The education system in Serbia consists of four levels: pre-school, primary, secondary and higher education (see Fig. A1).

Fig A1. The education system in Serbia



Source: UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of Primary Education*, p. 17.

Pre-school education caters to children under seven. It has not been compulsory, but starting from 2006, the so-called “zero grade” is introduced as part of pre-school education compulsory for each child.²⁸⁹

Primary school consists of eight years (grades), and is free of charge and compulsory. A child can enrol in the first grade not earlier than at age six, and not later than age nine. The first four grades have home-room, teacher-based instruction (one teacher for most subjects), while from the fifth to the eighth grade children attend subject-based instruction (different teachers for different subjects). After completing the fourth grade, children automatically, without exams, enrol in the fifth grade. In most cases children remain in the same school.

In small rural areas, where schools sometimes have only the initial four grades, children continue their schooling in a neighbouring village where there is an eight-year primary school. At the end of the primary school, pupils obtain a degree confirming that they have acquired primary education. Since by law primary education is mandatory (and free) up to the age of 17, a student reaching that age but not completing primary education (due to late enrolment or grade repetition, for example) loses his or right to free education.

Secondary education is not uniform; there are several options which pupils have at their disposal: academic four-year programmes; professional and arts four-year programmes (e.g. economic school); a series of two- and three-year vocational programmes (e.g. economic three-year programme). Pupils who intend to continue their education beyond the secondary school have to enrol in a four-year programme. Three-year programmes gear pupils towards labour. The enrolment procedures differ. Enrolment in a four-year programme is subject to a qualification exam and primary school marks, whereas for a two- or three-year programme primary school marks suffice.

A1.2 Legal roles and decision-making

Education governance takes place on three levels: national, regional and local. The national level of education governance is represented by the Parliament and the Ministry of Education and Sports (i.e. the highest legislative and executive authorities, respectively). At the national level, there is also the National Educational Council, responsible for all levels of pre-university education; it consists of stakeholders and experts, and has a key consultative role in education policy.

At the regional level there are Regional Educational Offices (Školska Uprava). Since the territorial regional units (districts) are not elected bodies by the Constitution, they exist only as displaced “long arms” of the Ministry of Education and Sports. They are not legal bodies, they do not have separate accounts, and their fiscal autonomy is

²⁸⁹ Law on the Foundations of the Education System, art. 89.

significantly limited. The number of regional offices fluctuates. At present, there are 15 regional offices, most of them in middle-sized towns and large cities (responsible for 30 districts).

The local level of governance in education has gradually been reestablished from 2003 onwards. According to the Education Law, the responsibilities for pre-school and primary education of municipalities are as follows:

- establishing the school and pre-school network;
- legal inspection;
- appointing school boards and principals;
- providing financial means for human resource development, capital investment, operating costs, maintenance and equipment, transport costs of pupils and employees, capital investment, current expenditures (shared responsibility), protection and safety of children, and subsidising 80 per cent of the average cost per child in pre-school education.

Table A1. Division of responsibilities in Serbian education

	National	Regional	Municipal	School
Curriculum	General and specific curriculum framework	Support	Can add school-based courses and/or extracurricular activities	Can add school-based courses and/or extracurricular activities; implementation
Textbooks	Approval based on the recommendations of external commissions	Province of Vojvodina – approval of textbooks for minorities		Selection
Examination	Regulation Monitoring	Coordination Support Implementation		Implementation
Quality assurance	Regulation Monitoring Second-instance legal supervision	Coordination Support Implementation	First-instance legal supervision	Self-evaluation
Human resource policy	Accreditation Licensing Financing	Coordination Support	Financing of HR development	Employment
Information system	Development	Implementation	Implementation	Implementation
Financing	Regulation Financing salaries and preparatory pre-school education		HR development Capital investment Operating costs Maintenance Equipment Transport Pre-school education (80 per cent)	Indirect beneficiary Fundraising
Network of schools	Regulation for pre-school and primary school network Establishing the secondary schools network		Establishing the pre-school and primary school network	
School buildings, equipment	Ownership		Maintenance Equipment Capital investment	

Table A2. Decision-making bodies responsible for minority education policy

	Body	Responsibilities
Government of Serbia	Office for Human and Minority Rights	developing legal regulations on, and advocating, human and minority rights monitoring national laws for compliance with international instruments proposing changes to national legislation on human and minority rights
Ministry of Education and Sports	Sector for Development and International Cooperation in Education ²⁹⁰	monitoring and improvement of minority language education planning and development of education according to international commitments and submitting reports on implementation support to developmental initiatives at regional, local and school levels coordination of activities with other sectors and departments
	Sectors for: Pre-school and Primary Education; Secondary Education; Higher Education; Student Welfare and Investments	dealing with minority/Roma education policy issues related to specific sectors and issues (e.g. admission policy; measures of affirmative action; human resource capacity building for work with marginalised groups)
National Communities' Electoral Assemblies	(currently 11 assemblies, including the 18-member Roma Electoral Assembly)	electing national councils for the "purpose of exercising the right to self-governance in the fields of the use of language and alphabet, education, media and culture" participating in education policy-making alongside other bodies
National Educational Council	(among its 42 members, each minority has one representative, elected from the National Communities' Electoral Assemblies ²⁹¹)	development and improvement of quality of pre-school, primary and secondary education

A1.3 School funding

From 2001, the investment in education has been progressively increasing.²⁹² Over the last five years (2001–2006), there has been an incremental increase in the proportion of GDP invested in the education system, from 2.7 per cent of GDP in 2001 to 3.4 per cent in 2003. The data also correspond to the increase of budgetary expenditures

²⁹⁰ It includes one position for education of minorities. Ministry of Education and Sports, *Pravilnik o unutrašnjoj organizaciji i sistematizaciji radnih mesta u ministarstvu prosvete i sporta* (The Organisational Chart of the Ministry), Belgrade.

²⁹¹ Law on the Foundations of the Education System.

²⁹² Ministry of Education and Sports, *Quality Education for All: Challenges of Education Reform in Serbia*, Belgrade: Ministry of Education and Sports, 2004.

earmarked for the education sector until 2004 (around 12 per cent of the State budget). The proportion of the GDP spent on education is expected to reach 4 per cent in 2007.²⁹³

Formally, schools are supposed to get funding for salaries from the central Government, and for other expenses from the local government. Between 80 and 90 per cent of school expenditures are allocated directly to schools from the central Government, (Treasury) to cover costs such as net salaries, contributions, and taxes. The school management has to receive the remaining 10–20 per cent for the operational costs and capital investments from the municipalities.²⁹⁴ Other funding may come from parents' contributions and donations. Although formally based on the rigid and unrealistic Rule Books²⁹⁵ (currently under revision), in practice, financing of other school expenditures is highly arbitrary and negotiable.

For example, the formal levels of financing for both types of expenditures are calculated for each school on the basis of the number and type of classes (although the number of students can vary from ten to 30), the size or type of school premises, and staff qualifications (since salaries are determined by the level of teachers' education, schools with more trained/skilled teachers can get more money). Thus, the real amount of financial resources given to each individual school is open to negotiations between principals and government officials.²⁹⁶ This "flexibility" in turn leaves much room for arbitrary decisions.

At the moment,²⁹⁷ municipalities perform delegated tasks, and for these purposes they receive "limited assigned revenues" (i.e. transfer payments from the central Government) according to the following criteria: size of the municipal territory, number of registered residents, number of classes in elementary and secondary schools and number of schools, number of children included in social child care, municipality

²⁹³ Ministry of Finance, *Memorandum o budzetu i ekonomskoj fiskalnoj politici za 2005. godinu sa projekcijama za 2006. i 2007. Godinu* (Memorandum on budget and fiscal policy for the year 2005 with projections for years 2006 and 2007), Belgrade, 2005, available on the Ministry of Finance website (<http://www.mfin.sr.gov.yu>).

²⁹⁴ Municipalities themselves receive monies partly from the central Government, and partly from tax.

²⁹⁵ Rule books are an old directive by the Ministry of Education and Sports, which prescribes resources that a school must have in order to work as an educational institution. It has not changed in over 20 years. This means that, if the Rule books are interpreted literally, almost all schools in Serbia must be closed down, since they probably do not have certain equipment that existed two decades ago and since then has been discarded (e.g. the Rule books order that a school must have a magnetic tape-recorder, and so on).

²⁹⁶ T. Levitas, *Summary of the Findings to Date on School Finance and Management in Serbia*, Internal document of the Ministry of Education and Sports, 2003 (hereafter, Levitas, *Summary of the Findings to Date*).

²⁹⁷ Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Strategija reforme javne uprave u Srbiji* (Strategy of Public Administration Reform in the Republic of Serbia), Belgrade, 2004.

development level, and the environment.²⁹⁸ The formula refers to some educational indicators, but it applies only to the normative level. Local governments are not obliged to spend the received money on specific functions, such as education, social protection, and so on.²⁹⁹ Furthermore, these transfer payments are usually not sufficient for all the school expenses that municipalities are obliged to cover (i.e. approximately half of the expenses for operational costs).

The actual proportion of funding from municipalities is on average 15–20 per cent (varying across municipalities), representing about 0.9 per cent of the GDP of local administrations, and it corresponds to level of devolved responsibilities (operational costs, professional development, and so on).³⁰⁰ Their authority is limited because they are denied the right to hire/fire teaching staff, and they do not own school buildings. As a consequence, municipalities hesitate to invest in school buildings (which they do not own), even though by law they are obliged to finance school buildings' maintenance, and share costs associated with closing schools.

The structure of costs does not strictly correspond to the responsibilities of the governing levels. Some responsibilities are shared between two layers of governance (see above), which makes money flows and the accountability chain difficult to track. While salaries of school staff are provided from the central budget directly allocated to schools, municipalities are obliged to finance the professional development of the staff (teachers, principals, and the support staff). Municipalities also must provide resources for capital investment, operational costs, maintenance and equipment of schools, and also the limited transport costs (in primary schools). In practice, the situation is quite different. For example, most teacher training courses are delivered from the central level, by the Institute for Advancement of Education, which has a catalogue of teacher training programmes (see section 3.7).

The financing system is not based on a per-pupil formula. Therefore, there are no reliable and exact indicators of costs of the education system. The undeveloped database of school revenues/expenditures is another obstacle to assessment of financial flows in public education.³⁰¹ Only an approximate measure of cost per student could be provided.

According to UNICEF analysis, in 1999 the average yearly spending per student in primary education was \$263 (about €200), and according to the InfoStat unit of the Ministry of Education and Sports it reached approximately €650 in 2005.³⁰² For comparison, in 1999, expenditures per student for the member countries of the

²⁹⁸ Amendments to the Law on Local Self-Government, *Official Gazette* No. 135/04.

²⁹⁹ Levitas, *Summary of the Findings to Date*.

³⁰⁰ Levitas, *Summary of the Findings to Date*.

³⁰¹ Ministry of Education and Sports, *Decentralisation of Education in Serbia. Expert Group for Decentralisation*, Belgrade: Ministry of Education and Sports, 2001.

³⁰² UNICEF, *Comprehensive Analysis of the Primary Education*.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) averaged \$4,850 (€3,670) at the combined primary and secondary level. These expenditures varied widely across these countries, ranging from \$1,240 (€938) in Mexico to \$8,194 (€6,195) in Switzerland at the combined primary and secondary level.³⁰³

³⁰³ Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), Centre for Educational Research and Innovation, *Education at a Glance: OECD Indicators 2002*, 2002, tables B1.1, B2.1c, B6.2, and X2.1, data from the OECD Education Database, unpublished data (December 2002).

ANNEX 2: CASE STUDIES

For each country report in this series of EUMAP reports on “Equal Access to Quality Education for Roma”, three case studies were carried out to supplement and corroborate data gathered from other sources. Information from the case studies is integrated throughout the body of each country report. Annex 2 includes additional details from each of the case study sites. In Serbia the three sites are Niš, Valjevo and Zemun.

A2.1 Case Study: Niš³⁰⁴

A2.1.1 Administrative Unit

The city of Niš is Serbia’s second-largest city. It is made up of five municipalities: Medijana, Palilula, Crveni Krst, Pantelej and Niška Banja. The largest Roma settlement in Niš is Stočni Trg, and the second-largest is Beograd Mala.

According to the last official census (2002), the population of Niš includes 200,000 Serbs, 5,700 Roma, and 2,600 Bulgarians. However, as elsewhere, the actual Roma population of Niš appears to be much higher. According to estimates of the local Roma representatives, there are 15,000–20,000 Roma living in Niš, or up to 10 per cent of the total population.³⁰⁵

Niš is one of the few local communities in Serbia that have initiated activities implementing the *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*.³⁰⁶ This is mostly thanks to projects of the NGOs, some of which have managed to successfully carry out several educational programmes for the Roma pupils. These projects, supported by the Fund for Open Society – Serbia (FOSS) and UNICEF, present positive examples of what can be done to improve the education of Roma, and how. Also, a project to increase Roma access to pre-school education, funded by REF and

³⁰⁴ Case study Niš, conducted in May–June 2006, researcher Ljiljana Simić.

³⁰⁵ Interviews with Ms. Sanja Tošić, representative of the Roma Educational Centre, and Mr. Osman Balić, the Roma representative of the local government, Niš, 7 June 2006.

³⁰⁶ *Strategy for the Improvement of Roma Education in Serbia*. (See also section 3.1).

partly by the Ministry of Education and Sports, was conducted from 1 March 2006 until August 2006, and is expected to be continued.³⁰⁷

Importantly, Niš has a single Roma representative in the local self-government. However, there are no effective mechanisms to enable bigger participation of Roma in local government.

A2.1.2 Roma and the Community

The Niš Roma reside in the settlements of Beograd Mala, Crvena Zvezda, Čair Mala and Stočni Trg, which are an integrated part of the urban area. The Beograd Mala settlement is located inside the city, while the rest are on the periphery. The largest Roma settlement in Niš is Stočni Trg, while Beograd Mala is the second-largest.

The main characteristic of urban Roma settlements is their resemblance to a ghetto. “They are very old-fashioned, conspicuous and recognisable. The houses are run-down and dilapidated, with poor hygiene, lack of sewage lines, and few new buildings.”³⁰⁸ Only 50 per cent of Roma and their homes are legally registered, which makes half of the Roma population living in Niš illegal. Most Roma are also poor. Considering that Roma receive nothing from the local budget, they are essentially left to their own devices in resolving numerous and complex issues. There was one investment in the infrastructure of Roma settlements: a sewage system was constructed in Mramorska St. in the Stočni Trg settlement. However, it was an NGO project, implemented by the YUROM Centre, a Roma organisation in Niš, rather than by the authorities.

One of the biggest problems Roma face is unemployment. Most Roma households make their living by working in the “grey” economy, for example, trading on the markets or working as musicians. The average budget of a typical Roma family with five to six members is estimated at 20,000 dinars (€254).³⁰⁹ The families trading on the flea market may have a slightly higher income, while others may earn even less. The Niš Roma rarely travel for seasonal work, instead working in recycling, particularly collecting cardboard. Recycling has become a principal means of earning income for

³⁰⁷ The project was managed by the Ministry of Education and Sports and the Roma National Council. A total of 24 educational institutions in Serbia have so far taken part in the project: one primary school and 23 pre-schools. The number of beneficiaries was 600 children, aged five to eight. As an important achievement, local Roma coordinators were engaged to establish better cooperation between families and pre-school institutions. The Centre for Evaluation, Assessment and Research has carried an evaluation of this project, finding that children acquired useful skills and knowledge for successful enrolment in the primary school. The implementation of this project is expected to continue during the 2006–2007 school year, subject to the approval of the REF.

³⁰⁸ A. Mitrović and G. Zajić, *Romi u Srbiji*, (The Roma in Serbia), Anti-War Action Centre, Institute for Criminology and Sociology Research, Belgrade, 1998, p. 54.

³⁰⁹ Interview with Mr. Osman Balić, the Roma representative of the local government, Niš, 7 June 2006.

many of the local Roma. The Niš Roma share the fate of Roma across Serbia: according to the local Roma representatives, poverty affects as many as 90 per cent of the Roma population.

The situation of Roma is also affected by the attitudes of the majority population towards them. Roma are stigmatised in two ways. As Roma, or “gypsies”, they are stereotyped as “foreign” and “lazy”. In addition, Roma are stigmatised as the poorest members of society, and while their relations with non-Roma may be on surface “satisfactory and neighbourly”, non-Roma prefer to maintain those relations “at a distance.”³¹⁰ There are also cases when non-Roma neighbours show open signs of intolerance. For example, residents living in Vinaverova St. in the Beograd Mala settlement, where the Roma Educational Centre (REC) is located, tried to prevent the Centre’s opening by signing a petition.³¹¹ Also, there have been instances of racist graffiti on the walls of the predominantly Roma Vuk Karadžić Primary School, and even more aggressive forms of racist abuse, when the police had to be involved because a group of skinheads would often wait for the Roma children after school and terrorise them.³¹²

Members of the Roma minority have preserved their language, and an estimated 85 per cent of the Roma youth in Niš speak Romanes as their first language. However, this becomes a barrier to access to education when the Roma children start school, and often during the better part of it, because schools are simply unprepared to offer supplementary courses in the language of instruction (Serbian), or pre-school bilingual education.

A2.1.3 Education

There are five pre-schools, 22 primary schools, and 21 secondary schools in Niš. The Vuk Karadžić Primary School, located outside the Beograd Mala settlement (about 300 metres), is the only Roma school in Niš.

Enrolment and completion

There are no official data on Roma children attending pre-school and primary school institutions in Niš. According to the data of the REC, among 539 interviewed families in the 2004–2005 school year, the recorded number of Roma children enrolled in primary schools was 567, out of whom 99 dropped out of school; 97 Roma children were of secondary school age, but only 50 of them were actually enrolled in a secondary school after having completed a primary school.

³¹⁰ Interview with Mr. Osman Balić, the Roma representative of the local government, Niš, 7 June 2006.

³¹¹ Interview with Ms. Sanja Tošić, representative of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 7 June 2006.

³¹² Interview with Ms. Dragica Krstić, principal of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

The REC also estimates that in the past few years, as many as 25 per cent of Roma children in Niš have never been enrolled in a school, while only 25 per cent of those enrolled actually complete the school. Usually, 50 per cent drop out of school in the fourth and fifth grades.

Even though enrolment procedures for pre-schools are relatively simple, involving only the child's birth certificate, the number of Roma children enrolled is small. The reason lies in the small number of pre-schools in the whole of Serbia, including the city of Niš, and obligatory payment for this service; these two factors place pre-school education effectively out of the reach of the local Roma.

The completion rates among the surveyed Roma pupils in Niš are estimated as follows:³¹³

- Average number of years spent in a pre-school: one to two years;
- Average age when enrolling in a pre-school: six years;
- Average number of years spent in a school: five to six years;
- Age when enrolling in the first grade of the primary school: 463 children enrolled at age seven; 38 at age eight to 12.

Niš is home to the most infamous segregated school in Serbia: the Vuk Karadžić Primary School (with attached pre-school), located near the Beograd Mala Roma settlement. The total number of pupils enrolled in Vuk Karadžić is 507, out of which 384 pupils, or 76 per cent, are Roma.

In the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, segregation has been a long process, over the course of ten years. Non-Roma parents have been transferring their children and enrolling them in different schools, despite the fact that this school is closer to their homes, because the majority of pupils there are Roma, and because the law permits free choice of school. This tendency has recently started even with the Roma, at least those who are better-off. It seems that the school has "lowered its educational criteria", which made them move their children to other schools.³¹⁴ The school principal, Dragica Krstić, claims that there are no local measures for dispersing schools and classes with a higher percentage of Roma pupils. The school issued several appeals to the authorities, but to no avail. The opinion of the majority of teachers and the school principal is that the Roma pupils should attend classes together with non-Roma, to promote integration. The REC's Sanja Tošić claims that the State offers no help for desegregation, and that there are no plans for transferring children to different schools.³¹⁵

³¹³ Interview with Ms. Sanja Tošić, representative of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 7 June 2006.

³¹⁴ Interview with Ms. Tatjana Pejčić, school administration representative, Niš, 6 June 2006.

³¹⁵ Interview with Ms. Sanja Tošić, representative of the Roma Education Centre, Niš, 7 June 2006.

Another local segregated school in Niš is the 14. Oktobar Special School. It has 18.5 per cent Roma pupils in primary education and 13.3 per cent Roma pupils in secondary education.

The 14. Oktobar Special School does not participate in the inclusive education programme, run by local NGOs, for integration of children from special schools or adult schools into mainstream schools. The school's psychologist, Miša Ljubenović, says that the special school staff fear that inclusion would mean closing their schools and dismissing employees.

School and class placement procedures

Mainstream schools form their classes according to the following criteria: number of pupils, gender, nationality, intellectual and other skills and specific characteristics (sensory and motor functions, and so on). The wishes of parents concerning class placement are also taken into consideration, but are accepted only when it is possible.

In order to enrol in a school, each child needs to pass a test, or a medical commission (the Commission for Categorisation of Children with Developmental Disabilities (or "Categorisation Commission"), which gives an assessment based on which the child is referred to either a mainstream or special school. The procedure includes an assessment of the child by different health care specialists, and a referral made by the school research assistants and the Social Welfare Centre. The parents are also an important factor in the procedure. The child can be placed in a special school based on a decision of the medical decision. Since an estimated 30 per cent of the Roma children in Niš have poor or almost no knowledge of the language in which the tests are given,³¹⁶ this causes problems in comprehending and responding to the questions during the test.

However, there is no official Roma language interpreter in the Categorisation Commission. When the Commission notices that the child has a problem with understanding, non-verbal tests can be included. Lack of understanding and the child's inability to answer due to the language barrier are often interpreted as a developmental disability ("pseudo-retardation"). According to the local member of the medical commission for diagnostics in Niš, Olga Milojković, the Commission should use more adaptable tests, allow more adequate communication, and allow an interpreter to be present in some cases, in order to avoid inaccurate diagnostics. If the Commission's decision does not satisfy the child's parents, they can make an appeal to a second-order Commission, but in practice this does not happen in the case of Roma parents.

School results

The school results of Roma pupils need to be viewed separately for mainstream and special schools. The mainstream school results tend to show that Roma pupils lag behind non-Roma pupils. This can be explained by the fact that the Roma children

³¹⁶ There are many refugees from Kosovo who had lived for years in Western Europe, and were then forcibly returned; their children came to Serbia without a good knowledge of Serbian language.

start school less prepared for classes, which is a decisive factor in children's school achievement. Very few Roma are eligible to participate in academic excellence competitions (such as for mathematics, literature and chemistry).³¹⁷

Furthermore, teachers appear excessively "tolerant" towards Roma pupils, automatically passing them to the next grade, even if the children had not fully assimilated the required curriculum for the grade. Thus, formally, only 10 to 15 per cent of Roma pupils repeat a grade.³¹⁸ As a consequence, many Roma children complete the fourth grade without properly learning to read and write. They may acquire these skills later, in the sixth or seventh grade, although by then for many it is too late and they drop out.

The Roma pupils in the 14. Oktobar Special School appear to have only a basic level of literacy. By the end of primary schooling, most of the children have acquired an elementary level of literacy, while a larger number are functionally literate (knowing how to use these skills in everyday life). The grade in which they acquire these skills depends on their age when starting school. Since most of them are transferred to a special school in the third or fourth grade, they become literate by grade six and seven at the latest. If they are transferred earlier (second grade), they adopt the skills successfully in the fifth and sixth grade. The Roma children have well-developed practical skills: motor skills and non-verbal intelligence. Their knowledge base is usually much poorer than that of other pupils, while their level of social functioning is quite high. They are excellent in sports competitions and music performances. They are poor at tests, and studying at home is infrequent.³¹⁹ However, the obvious underachievement of Roma pupils is only partially explained by the lack of school preparation. Obviously, if Roma children attended a preparatory class, at minimum for one year, but ideally for two years, the school achievement of the Roma pupils could be expected to improve, as their language skills could be expected to improve. But the schools do not have preparatory classes, and they use a uniform curriculum that does not accommodate children speaking a minority language. Being a State institution, the school has rigid regulations. The teachers are not in a position to change the curriculum, and nor are they motivated to work with these children.

Thus, the school reforms, which are still at an initial stage, have not yet reached the curriculum.

Discrimination also plays a big role: if the school staff regards Roma as inferior to other pupils, this is bound to be reflected in education. According to Miša Ljubenic, the psychologist working at the 14. Oktobar Special School in Niš, the reasons why Roma

³¹⁷ Interviews with teachers at the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

³¹⁸ According to the school principal, there had been no National Assessment, the test for entry/exit of pupils at crucial points of education (usually, grades 5, 8, and 12).

³¹⁹ Interview with Mr. Miša Ljubenić, psychologist at the 14. Oktobar Special School, Niš, 8 June 2006.

pupils often have much lower achievement due to cultural differences, and their families do not see education as a priority in a society that discriminates; instead, Roma culture is more dominated by the "right brain hemisphere" and inclines towards music and dance."³²⁰

Language and curriculum policy

There are no curricular differences between schools/classes with a high percentage of Roma, and other schools in the education system. There are no free textbooks, although there are donors who sometimes give out a small number of necessary textbooks. The school library has very few books on Roma culture and history.

The knowledge of the language used in schools was, as discussed earlier, a constraining factor for enrolling in a pre-schools or school and achieving good results. The school psychologist at the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Dragana Mitrović, says that, "Those children who had a chance of attending a pre-school and socialising with non-Roma children, or used Serbian language in their homes with their family members, managed the language quite well and have had excellent school results (this concerns a very small number of children)."

Even though they know that the language is a barrier to Roma pupils, the teachers of mainstream and special schools are not motivated to resolve this problem. In a written questionnaire, 85 per cent of teachers interviewed as part of this study gave a negative answer when asked whether they would attend training for bilingual education or bilingual techniques.³²¹

Roma teaching assistants/school mediators

The Vuk Karadžić Primary School has engaged Roma teaching assistants. The "Equal Chances" project included three assistants, who worked in the school during the three years of the project. The school's assistants attended classes, both mainstream and remedial, and worked with Roma parents, but the resistance of teachers was great, according to the words of the principal. Until 30 June 2006, there was one assistant in the second grade, and two in pre-school education. They were financed by the Fund for Open Society – Serbia (FOSS), hired with the assistance of the REC, and trained by the Centre for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP). The school was monitored by CIP representatives, while supervision was not planned, says the principal. It should be noted that this project greatly enhanced cooperation between Roma parents and teachers, claims the principal, Dragica Krstić. However, currently there are no RTAs at the school.

³²⁰ Interview with Mr. Miša Ljubenović, psychologist at the 14. Oktobar Special School, Niš, 8 June 2006.

³²¹ A total of 21 teachers were interviewed and answered the written questionnaire: six are from the 14. Oktobar Special School, and 15 from the Vuk Karadžić Primary School.

Decision-making, school infrastructure, and human resources

Primary schools have only limited autonomy in developing educational policy and decision-making in the area of education. More specifically, the school is an institution financed by the State. The curriculum is made by the highest State institutions (Ministry of Education and Sports), which makes the school autonomy limited as far as human resources are concerned. According to the local school administration, “the school autonomy is meagre or even non-existent.”³²²

According to the principal of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, in 2005 the local council had assigned 4,399,000 dinars (€55,882) to the school, which is less than 20 per cent of the school’s total budget (the rest coming from the State budget).³²³

The main criterion for budget assignment is the number of enrolled pupils. The criteria for assigning funds for special schools is somewhat different, because these children have disabilities; these schools finance their pupils’ transport, lunches, day trips, medical treatment, and boarding for out-of-town pupils.³²⁴ All these benefits given by the State are not given to children in mainstream schools.

The infrastructure of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School is in good condition because of renovations carried out three years ago, although the building itself is 46 years old. The school area is 2,145 square metres and has 507 pupils. The building interior, classes, and hallways were painted a few years ago, and are in a relatively good state. In 2003, the sewage system was renovated. The building has central heating, while 30–50 per cent of furniture and teaching accessories (the microscope, physics and chemistry instruments, and so on) are not in good shape. The computer room has 14 PCs, and children are organised into groups in shifts, when working in the computer room. The same room is also equipped with an LCD projector. The library is reasonably well-equipped. The school is made up of a sufficient number of qualified staff.

Teacher training and support

According to teachers of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, they have had numerous training courses organised mostly by NGOs (including the Roma Information Centre). There is no information on the exact number of training programmes, but the Roma Information Centre has been carrying out similar programmes for years. The Vuk

³²² Interview with Ms. Dragica Krstić, principal of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

³²³ Interview with Ms. Dragica Krstić, principal of the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

³²⁴ Interview with Mr. Miša Ljubenović, psychologist at the 14. Oktobar Special School, Niš, 8 June 2006.

Karadžić Primary School participated in the REI “Equal Chances” project in 2002–2005, and was involved in all aspects of teacher training within that project.³²⁵

During the last three years, the NGO Society for the Advancement of Roma Settlements (ARS) from Belgrade, together with UNICEF, carried out a school programme for 100 children in Niš. This included programmes, seminars on the tradition and culture of Roma, teamwork and partner communication, education reform, literacy for children educated in a language that is not their mother tongue, and so on.

However, 85 per cent of teachers interviewed as part of this study gave a negative response concerning participation in bilingual education training courses, saying that they saw no reason for it, since the Serbian language is in use in schools. Also, they pointed out that they were poorly paid and had no motivation for more training.

The teachers of the 14. Oktobar Special School also were active in different programmes, such as “Education for citizenship”, “Creation of development plans”, “Project writing”, “Descriptive marking” and “Building partnership for inclusion.” The training was delivered by the Ministry of Education and Sports, and it was a training programme within compulsory school activities. The majority of teachers there also showed no interest in bilingual education training, stating that education should be carried out in the official language, and that Romanes language education could be provided through supplementary classes.

School–community relations

Every school’s governance body consists of the school board and the school principal. The decisions made are most frequently concerned with the work of the teachers’ council. Parents also have a role at school. The Vuk Karadžić Primary School is one of few schools where Roma parents appear to be rather involved in the school activities (without being paid):³²⁶

- Parents’ council – the majority of parents are Roma.
- Parents’ meetings – parents of children who have lower school results or tend to fail in school usually do not attend the meetings.
- Parents’ workshops – poorly attended by parents.
- Joint actions of parents, children and schools – this turned out to be the most successful form of cooperation. The “Cooperation with the family” mini-project

³²⁵ *Report on the Project “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Education System,”* 2002–2005, FOSS, 2005, an internal document. The project information is available on the organisation’s website: <http://www.fosserbia.org/programs/project.php?id=411> (accessed on 7 March 2007).

³²⁶ Interview with Ms. Dragana Mitrović, school psychologist at the Vuk Karadžić Primary School, Niš, 5 June 2006.

as part of the “Equal Chances” project had a good response from the Roma parents and brought results: better cooperation between school and the parents; higher quality of cooperation; motivation for work and for the child; motivation for achieving results and reaching a joint goal.

According to the head of discrimination monitoring for the city of Niš, Mr. Petar Gavrilović, during the last year, there were no major complaints made by Roma parents or their children. There was a complaint concerning the right to a free meal. The Roma parent complained that his eighth-grader child did not receive free snacks in September, or at the beginning of the school year. This occurred due to a “technical mistake” and was resolved at the institutional level as well as by temporary school measures.³²⁷

Only regular school inspections can determine whether any elements of discrimination towards the Roma exist, or if there is any violation of Roma pupils’ rights in schools. Besides that, there are no effective mechanisms to file a complaint. Affected parents and individuals are left on their own in making an appeal concerning irregularities. However, this problem deserves separate and detailed research.

A2.2 Case Study: Valjevo³²⁸

A2.2.1 Administrative Unit

According to the official 2002 census, Valjevo Municipality has a population of 96,761 people, of whom 1,314 are Roma. However, according to the local NGO Roma Centre for Democracy (*Romski centar za demokratiju*, hereafter, RCD), there are about 5,000 Roma living in Valjevo, that is, 4.5 times more than the official figures.³²⁹ The majority of Roma evidently do not wish to identify themselves as such, which, in the words of the local Roma representatives, betrays the little faith that Roma have in the system to protect them against negative stereotyping and discrimination.³³⁰ The lack of reliable information on the Roma population is also a serious impediment to the implementation of policies and programmes aimed at Roma.

In 2005, within the framework of the “Decade for Roma Inclusion”, Valjevo was among the first communities in Serbia to adopt the local *Action Plan for Roma Education*, developed in collaboration with the Roma NGOs, and representatives of the Ministry of Education and Sports, as well as the local self-government. The budget

³²⁷ Interview with Mr. Petar Gavrilović, head of Discrimination Monitoring for the city of Niš, 5 June 2006.

³²⁸ Case study Valjevo, conducted in May–June 2006, researcher Slavica Vasić

³²⁹ Interview with Ms. Danijela Petrović, coordinator of the Roma Centre for Democracy (*Romski centar za demokratiju*, RCD), Valjevo, 12 June 2006.

³³⁰ Interview with Mr. Dragan Stojanović, member of the Town Hall Council, Valjevo, 12 June 2006.

envisioned for the implementation of the *Action Plan's* activities amounts to 500,000 dinars (€6,350), or 1.92 per cent of the overall municipality budget for 2006. The most important activities financed from this budget, from September 2006, were as follows:

- Transport of pre-school-age Roma children: from the village of Grabovica to a pre-school in Valjevo, and from the villages of Balačko and Vis to the pre-school in the Prota Mateja Nenadović School in the village of Brankovina;
- Transport for Roma pupils (grades 1–4): from the villages of Balačko and Vis to the Prota Mateja Nenadović School;
- School kits (with school supplies, and so on): for all Roma first-graders in Valjevo;
- Preparatory classes: for 20 Roma children in the eighth grade of the primary school for the entrance examination for the secondary school.

Despite fairly good publicising of the local *Action Plan* (all local schools have received it), in hardly any school do the interviewed authorities have a clear idea of what the *Action Plan* entails. Furthermore, the local school inspectors claim not to know about it and did not have any communications with other municipal sectors, even though the office of the school inspectorate is located in the same building as the Valjevo municipal authorities. The inspectors state that their job is to verify that the programmes of the Ministry of Education and Sports are being executed, even though the Roma educational programmes also form part of the Ministry of Education and Sports' programmes. There is an apparent lack of interest on the part of the education professionals, as well as poor communication between the local self-government and the schools, neither of which is conducive to the effective implementation of the Roma-related educational initiatives in the community.

Valjevo Municipality has one Roma representative in the town hall, who was engaged in 2005, within the framework of the project to involve Roma representatives in local municipalities in Serbia.³³¹ The Roma representative does not have real power, and his mandate has not been sufficiently defined, making this post more of symbolic than practical significance.

A2.2.2 Roma and the Community

Most Roma in Valjevo Municipality live in rural areas: the village of Grabovica near the town of Valjevo, the Roma neighbourhood of Vis in the village of Brankovina, and the village of Balačko outside Valjevo. Some Roma also live mingled with the majority

³³¹ The project was initiated by the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights with support from the OSCE Mission in Serbia, in 2004 in 12 Serbian municipalities, including Valjevo. The main tasks of the Roma representatives are assisting with the development of local action plans for Roma and mediation between the Roma communities and local authorities.

(Serbian) population in the town of Valjevo. Since the official figures on Roma in the Valjevo area appear to involve an underestimation, it is not possible to provide an accurate breakdown of the Roma population in specific districts of the municipality. The social and financial standing of the Roma families varies, depending on the levels of education, and whether or not they have jobs, which directly determines their status. The place of residence is also a factor that can limit the choice of educational opportunities for the children, because they are physically distant from the nearest pre-school and school.

There are about 300 Roma residents living in the village of Grabovica, who mostly work as musicians for hire, or trade wares in the local markets. They own their houses, built during the “Tito times.” The people of this area consider themselves “in the middle”, compared to, as they say, the overall social-economic situation in the country. The Roma children from Grabovica attend a separate school branch located in the village, and constitute 95 per cent of the student body in that school branch; the school to which the branch belongs is located in the town centre, which requires commuting, and its student body is predominantly Serbian.

Furthermore, there are an estimated 70 Roma families living in the Balačko and Vis area,³³² with an average of four children in each household (or 280–300 persons in total).

However, the situation of the Roma there is abysmal. They live in conditions lacking in the elementary infrastructure, such as running water, with the resulting poor hygiene and health implications. Most are unemployed, and their basic means of income is welfare, which is deemed insufficient for sustaining an entire family. They claim that their unemployment is due to discrimination on the labour market, because allegedly “nobody will hire Roma.” At the same time, they recognise that insufficient education and poverty perpetuate each other, claiming that their parents could not educate them due to extreme poverty, and this goes on for their children.

Due to the remote situation of Balačko and Vis and bad roads, the residents are virtually cut off from the outside world. Children have to commute 5 kilometres each way to the nearest school, which in winter becomes a particular problem: they cannot even get to the bus stop in order to be driven to school, and as a consequence are frequently absent from classes. The closest school, the Prota Mateja Nenadović Primary School in Brankovina, in addition itself does not have drinking water.

What is common for Roma living in different areas of Valjevo Municipality and in different economic situations is the fact that for the most part they believe that they have good community relations with their non-Roma neighbours. This is because, they claim, they live in a small place where everyone knows everyone else, and all nurture good neighbourly relations. They also seem pleased with the attitudes that the teachers

³³² Interviews with parents of the Roma children who attend the Prota Mateja Nenadović Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

show towards their children, and claim that there is no discrimination on the part of the school staff. The allegedly intolerant attitudes occasionally expressed by non-Roma children towards the Roma are seen not as a real problem, but rather as mere children's "squabbles."

What seems to contradict this idyllic picture, though, is the fact that few Roma would admit to speaking Romanes, and the Roma children who have light complexions apparently do not wish to confess that they are Roma. However, living in a small place where everyone knows everyone else means that it is not always possible to hide one's origin, especially when one lives in Grabovica, Balačko, and Vis, where most residents are Roma.

Interviewed Roma pupils of the Andra Savčić Primary School in Valjevo had finished the first four grades in the segregated 'satellite' school in Grabovica, and then moved on to continue their schooling in the main school building located in the town centre (see below). There, the children claim that they have problems both with their non-Roma peers and with the teachers, who are allegedly unsupportive. Allegedly, non-Roma children often call them "gypsy", "dirty", and "stinky", but when Roma children report this behaviour to the teachers, they are allegedly told by the teachers that the Roma children are themselves probably to blame for that kind of behaviour (of the peers): "Whenever something bad happens in class, like a fight, squabbles, or something like that, the teacher always first asks us if we are guilty of that."³³³

So, I am not telling anymore to the teacher what they (non-Roma children) are doing and telling me, because she is always on the side of the Serbs. She would say, you provoked him, for sure. Because of that, when they bother me I fight with them (non-Roma children), I know that I will be punished for that by the teacher, but it doesn't matter, I will be punished anyway.³³⁴

The Roma children also express a wish that they could go back to the school in Grabovica, because "they were all the same" there.

This prompts conclusions that either there is no clear understanding among Roma and non-Roma alike as to what constitutes discrimination, or that Roma have become so accustomed to discrimination that they seem almost insensitive to its manifestation, including racist bullying in school, or most importantly, that the existing anti-discrimination mechanisms are clearly ineffective in countering racial harassment. Concealing Roma identity then appears a natural defence mechanism in the face of pervasive negative stereotyping.

³³³ Interview with a Roma girl from the Andra Savčić Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³³⁴ Interview with a Roma boy from the Andra Savčić Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

A2.2.3 Education

School network, costs, administration and curriculum

Valjevo Municipality has 15 primary schools, with 7,500 students in attendance. There are no special schools, but there is a special class formed within the Nada Purić Primary School located in the village of Brankovina, and there is also a majority Roma class in the ‘satellite’ school of the Andra Savčić Primary School located in the village of Grabovica.

All local primary schools (including the special class) receive financial aid from the local self-government budget, the only criterion for allocation being the number of newly enrolled pupils. For the 2005–2006 school year, the funding for the Andra Savčić Primary School located in the centre of Valjevo was \$72,241.34 (€54,820);³³⁵ the funding for the Prota Mateja Nenadović Primary School in Brankovina was \$26,129.85 (€19,830).³³⁶

Data on the expenses per child in pre-schools are not available. In primary education, according to the local teachers and parents, schooling expenses per child amount to 30 per cent of the average salary when a child is in a younger grade, and up to 50 per cent when a child is in an older grade. This is regardless of whether the child goes to a mainstream or a special class, because the only material benefit provided to special class pupils is free transport, so there is no strong incentive for poor families to send their children to special classes.³³⁷ Obviously, for families that are unemployed or receive less than the average salary, which is the situation of many Roma families in Valjevo, school expenses are prohibitive.

As a way to alleviate the costs, all primary schools supply free textbooks to children from poor families (most of whom tend to be Roma). The local government pays for some books, but it is usually not enough for all children who need this kind of help, so sometimes the school organises collections of second-hand books from the pupils who finished the grade and do not need the books. Also, children from families who live on social welfare receive a free lunch as well, paid for by the municipality.

School principals appear to have complete autonomy over hiring process of new teachers or associates; during the past two years not a single new job was created, because reportedly there was “no need for it.” Thus, no Roma teaching assistants exist in any of the visited schools (and no instruction in Romanes is held). Furthermore, the interviewed school principals in the Valjevo area appear not to have heard of such an option, even though admitting this might help Roma pupils. There are no school books on the Roma language or culture within the scope of the school curricula, nor

³³⁵ Interview with Mr. Zoran Simić, school principal, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³³⁶ Interview with Mrs. Vesna Simović, school principal, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³³⁷ Interviews with teachers at the Nada Purić School, which has a special class, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

any available in school libraries. There is no bilingual curriculum in any of the visited schools. According to some school principals, they have no knowledge of such literature, but they say that if it were proscribed by the curriculum and available to schools, then the schools would be happy to use them. Taken in the context, this may be just another indicator that schools on the local level either have no knowledge of the “Decade of Roma Inclusion” or the National Strategies, or have very little interest in taking practical steps for improving Roma education.

Enrolment and completion

There are no data on the number of Roma children of pre-school and school age, even from NGOs. According to the local school authorities, there have never been problems enrolling any children in schools, and no parents have been unable to comply with the enrolment requirements. Obviously, families living in rural areas are automatically more limited in school choice for their children, sending them to the nearest available school. According to the local government, as well as the local Roma NGO, there are no illegal Roma districts in Valjevo, and nor are there Roma without personal documents. However, the estimated vast discrepancy between the official number of Roma living in Valjevo and unofficial estimates may point to the presence of a number of undocumented Roma, as well as a reluctance to identify oneself as Roma.

Although the data on enrolment and completion are not available, the local school authorities (principals, school inspectors, pedagogues, and so on) claim that the main problem of Roma education in Valjevo Municipality is not drop-out rates of the Roma students, but rather their attendance, especially after the completion of the fourth grade of the primary school. They also seem to believe that this problem can be solved by sanctioning the parents; for example, by imposing high fines on parents whose children skip classes.³³⁸ The members of the Roma NGO, however, estimate that the Roma children in this municipality tend to spend on average a year in pre-schools, enrolling in the first grade of the primary school at the age of eight, and then spending three to five years in school.³³⁹ In other words, Roma children tend to drop out after the fourth grade of the primary school.

Segregation and discrimination

The local school authorities are quick to dismiss the existence of any form of discrimination towards the Roma children in the municipality. Thus, the interviewed inspector, stating that the educational inspection service can act solely upon complaints, claimed that up until now there have been no complaints about the school

³³⁸ Interview with the principal of the Andra Savčić Primary School, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³³⁹ Pursuant to the Law on Obligatory Pre-School Education (in force as of the 2006–2007 school year), a preparatory class for the 23 Roma children of pre-school age was formed at the Grabovica segregated class of the Andra Savčić Primary School. This was a pilot project of the Roma Centre for Democracy and the local self-government, backed by the Roma Educational Fund. Interview with Ms. Danijela Petrović, coordinator of the Roma Centre for Democracy, 12 June 2006.

authorities or the teachers by Roma or non-Roma parents.³⁴⁰ In other words, the absence of specific complaints about discrimination during school inspection is regarded as evidence that discrimination does not occur.

The existence of segregation is also denied, and accordingly there are no measures against it. However, among the training courses organised by NGOs and local government that the local teachers have undergone, including computer training, non-violent communication and educational planning, there has been a training course “The Roma Child and School.” This training was organised specifically for the teachers of the segregated class in Grabovica, which may indicate that the authorities are aware of the existence of specific problems there. There has been no evaluation of any training programmes.

Class and school placement

According to the school psychologists and pedagogues, classes are formed in accordance with the results of the preparedness test, and the social and educational background of the parents, but never based on the ethnic origin. A balance is said to be sought, such as with respect to the number of parents who are divorced and children whose families are on social welfare, or the number of children with the highest and lowest test results. The school also claims to support children from the poorer families, by supplying them with free books,³⁴¹ providing free bus tickets for commuters,³⁴² giving money for excursions,³⁴³ and so on.

The Grabovica Primary School is clearly a segregated school, even though it has a handful of local non-Roma children (5 per cent of the total number of pupils). The Andra Savčić Primary School, of which the school in Grabovica is a ‘satellite’, has 1,185 pupils, of whom 35 (just over 3 per cent) are Roma. In the Prota Mateja Nenadović School in Brankovina, the classes are ethnically mixed, with all children mostly belonging to the same (poorer) economic background.

The special class established within the mainstream primary school of Nada Purić has five Roma children out of a total of 35 in the class, or 14 per cent of the student body. They are diagnosed as having a mild developmental delay. The children are referred to special schools/classes according to a set procedure: if the child does not pass the first grade preparedness test, he or she is automatically sent for “categorisation.” If the child passes but shows weaker achievement over the school year, he or she is proposed for referral to the special class by the pedagogue and the teacher, and with the parents’ consent. According to the interviewed school authorities, so far there have been no

³⁴⁰ Interview with Mrs. Gordana Matić, school inspector in Valjevo Municipality, 12 June 2006.

³⁴¹ Teachers organise used book drives among the pupils in higher grades, in order to distribute the collected books to poor children in younger grades, as a matter of charity.

³⁴² Tickets are paid for by the local government.

³⁴³ Teachers ask for parental contributions for poor children at the parents’ meetings (i.e. as a matter of charity).

cases in Valjevo Municipality when the Roma children were sent to the special class without “objective reason”, but there have been instances when the Roma parents placed their children in the special class on their own initiative, because they allegedly hoped to obtain certain benefits (social assistance, and so on). The school authorities also deny that any referral to the special school may have been linked to the language problem, because, as the interviewees claim, the local Roma children are all fluent in Serbian. Nevertheless, insufficient knowledge of the Serbian language was identified by some teachers among the reasons for the poorer achievement of the Roma pupils in school (see below).

School results

According to the teachers and school principals, the Roma children achieve worse results than other children in the local schools. Thus, they are highly unlikely to be among outstanding students who are sent to represent the school in academic subject competitions.³⁴⁴ Roma pupils reportedly show better results in music and arts subjects, and often play at school concerts, while their success in other subjects is rare. The interviewed school authorities claim that there are very few cases of functional illiteracy among children up to the fourth grade of the primary school, but these are said not to be limited to the Roma children. By the eighth grade, it is claimed, there are no functionally illiterate pupils. Coincidentally, many Roma do not go on studying school up until the eighth grade.

Among the main reasons for poorer achievement of the Roma children at school, the teachers name “weak motivation.” Overall, the reasons identified by teachers betray the presence of negative stereotypes about Roma:³⁴⁵

- Lack of interest in children’s education on the part of the parents;
- Insufficient knowledge of the Serbian language;
- Low importance attached to education, because money can be accumulated by easier means (trade, smuggling, and so on);
- Not doing homework;
- Way of life;
- “Habit”;
- Mental and physical abilities;
- Family background;
- Weaker memory compared to other children.

³⁴⁴ Interview with Mr. Zoran Simić, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³⁴⁵ This information is from questionnaires that the interviewed teachers were requested to fill in as part of research for this case study.

The teachers' responses present a different picture, compared with the responses of the Roma children attending the Andra Savčić Primary School (main building). The children there say that they feel bad in school because of constant conflicts with their peers and because they get no support from the teachers, alongside little or no support from their parents, who often lack schooling themselves. One Roma woman from the village of Balačko related the following:

I was a very good pupil, but my parents were very poor, and because of that I had to give up schooling when I finished the third grade. I don't want my daughter to have same destiny as me. The teacher told me that she is very good; she is now in the second grade; but I am also very poor, and I don't know till when I will have an opportunity to educate her.³⁴⁶

Another Roma woman from Vis said the following:

It is true that most of us are uneducated, but what can we do! My parents were poor, and could not send me to school. I am also poor, and my husband is sick; we are living on social welfare; it is not enough for living [...] I have a daughter of eight years, and a son of four years. My daughter is now in the second grade, and the school gives her books, but I cannot help her to do homework, because I am illiterate, so she has to do everything alone.³⁴⁷

It appears clear that better academic performance of the Roma children will require not only additional work with the children, but also continued work with the teachers and parents, Roma as well as non-Roma, including elements of the Roma culture and language and non-discrimination education.

School–parents relations

No Roma are present among the school board members or the parents' council members. According to the school authorities and teachers, this is because the Roma parents do not attend parents' meetings where the parents' council members are elected. Interestingly, in the interviews, school principals admitted that the motivated parents of good non-Roma pupils are not necessarily represented on the parents' council or the school board, either.

In August 2006, the RCD, in cooperation with the school management and Valjevo Municipality initiated a project entitled "Roma Education – Solution for the Future." Five primary schools, Andra Savčić, Prota Mateja Nenadović, Nada Purić, Sveti Sava, and Sestre Ilić, are involved in this project. The schools were chosen because of a large percentage of Roma students. The project is supported by the Roma Education Fund (REF) and the international NGO Oxfam-Novib from the Netherlands. The goal of the project is to include the Roma parents in the parents' councils and school boards through the creation of a legitimate representative office of the Roma parents, and

³⁴⁶ Interview with a Roma woman from the village of Balačko, Valjevo, 13 June 2006.

³⁴⁷ Interview with a Roma woman from the village of Vis, 13 June 2006.

increasing awareness about the educational and other needs and problems of the Roma children. From September until November 2006 the Roma parents were provided with training organised by NGOs and local government, and in January 2007, five Roma parents (one in every participating school) have been involved as the parents' council members.

A2.3 Case Study: Zemun³⁴⁸

A2.3.1 Administrative Unit

Zemun is a major suburb of Belgrade with a population of 152,950 (according to the 2002 census), of whom 145,751 are living in the urban Zemun, with the rest living in its rural part. Zemun Municipality comprises four settlements: Zemun, Zemun Polje, Batajnica and Ugrinovici. Ugrinovici is part of the rural area, while the rest are part of the urban Zemun.

Zemun is not an independent municipality but rather a district of Belgrade Municipality, with implications for its administrative and financial standing. Zemun was absorbed by the city of Belgrade back in 1934, when its municipality services were united with those of Belgrade.

Even according to the official census, Roma (whose number is seriously underestimated, see below) are the second-largest ethnic group in Zemun (see Table A3). Yet there are no local measures specifically for Roma, even any with regard to improving Roma access to education, and Zemun's local authorities have not earmarked any resources for the needs of the Roma community. Local desegregation measures do not exist, and no activities are carried out to reduce or eliminate segregation. There are no special principles for Roma participation in the local government in Belgrade, and no quota for the representation of ethnic minorities in the local government is legally determined, or enforced.

³⁴⁸ Case study Zemun, conducted in May–June 2006, researcher Natasa Kocić Rakočević.

Table A3. Zemun Case Study – Zemun district population figures

Ethnic group	Population	Proportion (per cent)
Serbs	132,263	86.48
Roma	4,030	2.64
“Yugoslavs”	3,315	2.17
Croats	1,970	1.29
Montenegrins	1,725	1.13
Other	9,647	6.29
Total	152,950	100

Source: 2002 census

A2.3.2 Roma and the Community

The number of Roma living in the Zemun area or in the greater Belgrade area is not known. The local Roma representatives say that there are 152 Roma settlements in Belgrade, but only one settlement is registered. There are 310 registered Roma households in Zemun.³⁴⁹ However, the Roma representatives estimate that only around 20 per cent of the Roma households in Zemun are legally registered.³⁵⁰ Thus, although according to the census there are only 4,000 Roma in Zemun, taking into consideration the fact that an average Roma household consists of five or six members, the number of Roma residents in Zemun may be between 7,500 and 9,000, or about 5 per cent of the Zemun population. The majority of Roma displaced from Kosovo and Metohia, as well as failed asylum seekers returning from Western European countries, live in Zemun, accounting for many of the unregistered households.³⁵¹

The problem of most Roma-populated districts in the Belgrade area, including Zemun, is the fact that they do not comply with even the minimum legislative requirements for legalisation, primarily with regard to the ownership of the land on which the settlements are situated, the poor quality of housing and infrastructure, and missing required building licences. Usually, Roma settlements have no electricity, water, sewage system, or other essential amenities. These claims are corroborated by the data from the *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, which state that 80 per cent of Roma live in poor areas and settlements, around 600 Roma settlements in Serbia have no water, about 65 per cent

³⁴⁹ Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006.

³⁵⁰ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children’s Centre, Belgrade, 10 July 2006.

³⁵¹ Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006.

have no sewage system, and about 45 per cent do not have paved streets.³⁵² Many Roma districts in the greater Belgrade area, Zemun included, are situated on the outskirts of the city, where there is no connection to schools, health centres, and other important institutions. If children go to school at all, they have to first walk to the city transport stop to get to the school. Furthermore, a considerable number of Roma children are not registered at birth or declared as Roma at the census, so the size of the pre-school- and school-age Roma population is not known.

Only an estimated 3–6 per cent of Roma in greater Belgrade, including Zemun, are formally employed. Most Roma work in the “grey” economy: collecting and selling recyclables; working in construction and as handymen, with the majority having only seasonal jobs. Obtaining work as handymen (i.e. doing repair works from house to house, for a small fee) is considered a great success in the Roma community. It can bring monthly earnings of 6,000–10,000 dinars (€76–127), which is the average budget for an average five- or six-member household, provided that at least three family members work.³⁵³

There are no data on the social structure of the Roma community in Zemun, but the Roma representatives assess that only 3–5 per cent of the Roma families can be considered well-to-do or middle-class, while up to 95 per cent are poor or extremely poor.

Although there are individual cases when Roma are well integrated, living and socialising among their non-Roma neighbours, generally there is little contact and exchange between the Roma and non-Roma communities. Allegedly, there are also instances when some Roma parents do not wish to enrol their children in schools where there is a high percentage of Roma, or when they withdraw them from such schools and transfer them to schools with few or no Roma pupils. But there are no records of how many Roma pupils have switched schools due to this.³⁵⁴

A2.3.3 Education

Enrolment and completion data

There is no official information on the enrolment rates referring to pre-school, primary or secondary school education or drop-out rates of Roma pupils in Zemun. According to the interviewed representatives and their experience in the field, the percentages are similar to those on the national level, meaning that only around 20 per cent of the

³⁵² Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Poverty Reduction Strategy*, Belgrade, 2003, p. 32.

³⁵³ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children’s Centre, 10 July 2006.
Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006.

³⁵⁴ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006.

primary school-age children are included in some type of education.³⁵⁵ Even though official statistics vary very little in terms of gender enrolment, the drop-out rates for girls of the most vulnerable groups (Roma, children with intellectual disabilities, rural population) are significantly higher, ranging from 20 to as much as 80 per cent.³⁵⁶ Research by the Belgrade's Roma Children's Centre shows that about 20 per cent of the local Roma women have never attended school, while 28 per cent had started but not finished the primary school. The highest drop-out rate of Roma girls is estimated at 14 per cent. At the same time, the official primary school enrolment rate of all children in the 2000–2001 school year stood at 98 per cent and the drop-out rate at 0.62 per cent.³⁵⁷

Enrolment procedures

There are no data on how many Roma children in Zemun could not enrol in pre-school or the first grade of primary school due to lack of the required documents. Although interviewed teachers and Roma parents claim that the lack of personal documents and resident status is not an obstacle for enrolment, it does affect administration services, which do not communicate to parents of unregistered children inviting to enrol their children in school, and do not follow up on children who are out of school. Interviewed Roma representatives as well as school authorities share the view that this issue is serious enough and must be addressed.³⁵⁸ According to the UNHCR statistics over 50 per cent of the displaced persons from Kosovo do not have any documents.³⁵⁹ Furthermore, Roma often do not live at the address at which they are registered. Adding to this a high number of Roma children who have returned from Western European countries – the majority of them to Belgrade and the surrounding areas, including Zemun – following repatriation of their families, often without necessary documents, the problem appears to have really grave proportions. In addition, these children very often do not speak Serbian, and if at all accepted in

³⁵⁵ Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006. Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers at this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁵⁶ Government of the Republic of Serbia, "Roma and Education" *Poverty Reduction Strategy, Education in Serbia*, Belgrade, 2003.

³⁵⁷ Government of the Republic of Serbia, *Poverty Reduction Strategy, Education in Serbia*, Belgrade, 2003.

³⁵⁸ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, 10 July 2006. Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006; interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers and parents of children attending this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁵⁹ UNDP, *At Risk: Socially Endangered Roma, Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons in Serbia*, Belgrade: UNDP, 2006 (hereafter, UNDP, *At Risk: Socially Endangered Roma*).

schools are placed into lower grades because of the differences in the education system of Serbia and the country from which they departed.

A further problem is the fact that in Zemun, as elsewhere in Serbia, Roma children often enrol in the primary school at a later age. There has been a trend towards channelling such children into adult, rather than mainstream schools.

Adult education is a formal system of education, financed through the same channels as elementary education. Adult schools exist in all major towns in Serbia, organised either through consultative lessons or through regular daily classes. Such schools were originally meant to equip (adult) pupils merely with basic literacy. Currently, these schools are mostly for those who are late in enrolling, or who gave up schooling at some point but after several years decided to return to school. The curriculum of an adult education primary school normally consists only of two subjects, mathematics and Serbian language, in addition to technical education. Once they finish the school, the graduates' diploma is, in theory, valid for enrolment in any secondary school. But in practice, based on the accelerated schedule (namely, students can complete two grades in one school year), which reflects on the decreased criteria and lack of systematic scholarship, opportunities for secondary education are usually limited to the opportunity to enrol in a trade apprenticeship lasting several months.

In Belgrade, there are three adult education schools. Two are located near the Belgrade downtown, with satellite classes nearby the Roma settlements. The Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education does not have satellites, and is located near the centre of Zemun Municipality, approximately at the same distance from all bigger Roma settlements in Zemun. Not all Roma children in Belgrade attending adult schools. However, over 90 per cent of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education's student body are Roma children aged 9–17.

The Law on Primary Schools (Article 90) states that if a child over 8.5 years has not enrolled in the first grade due to illness or some other reason, that child can enrol in the appropriate grade based on the knowledge and skills test and according to the age. In practice, the Roma children who come to enrol in the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education at the age of ten or older, reportedly have knowledge level matching that of the first-graders, because they live in an educationally deprived environment, where the parents are mostly illiterate. Such children then should still be able to enrol in the first grade of mainstream primary schools, because in accordance with the Law, children can enrol in the adult school only upon reaching the age of 15. Clearly, the enrolment policy at the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education was not in accordance with the Law.

Faced with the problem that the adult education curriculum is ill-suited to the increasingly younger population of pupils (aged ten to 15), the school board in 2003 requested, and was granted, the approval of the Ministry of Education and Sports to make the curriculum more comprehensive, so that the pupils in the first grade could have the same subjects as in mainstream primary schools, rather than only two subjects

taught according to the existing curriculum in the adult education schools. The Ministry also allowed the enrolment of children under 15. However, in 2006, the Ministry revoked the approval (allegedly, the new Minister and staff disagree with certain decisions made by the previous Ministry staff). The Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education authorities continue using the modified curriculum, however, because they believe that it would be unfair to their students to deprive them of education, and that the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education may be for many Roma children their last chance to enter the education system and potentially continue with secondary education.³⁶⁰ Nevertheless, educational and job prospects for Roma children educated in adult education institutions are grim.

The school has the usual administrative requirements for enrolment: a birth certificate and proof of a health examination, as well as evidence of all relevant vaccinations. Enrolment of children in the primary school was once conditioned on the permanent address within the municipality in which the school was located, which was often an obstacle for the enrolment of Roma children, because Roma families were forced to move from one place to another in search of work, with no permanent place of residence. This rule was allegedly abused by principals of some primary schools, refusing enrolment of Roma children and directing them to other schools in their districts which did not have such discriminatory practice. The regulation has since changed, but still the children registered in the particular district are given priority. Once all of these children are enrolled, other children have the right to apply, and are accepted if places are available. Allegedly, some principals are still refusing to enrol Roma children under the pretext of having no more free places at their school.³⁶¹ All this also can lead to Roma children enrolling in the first grade not at the age of seven years, as prescribed by law, but much later, usually at nine or ten. These children are then late finishing primary school and cannot continue their education, because they have outgrown the legal age boundaries for the enrolment in the secondary school. The result is the fact that many Roma 17 or 18 years of age cannot either find work or continue their education. There are alternatives, such as fee-based secondary education, but they are very expensive and out of reach for most Roma people.³⁶²

Special schools

Aleksandra Kopanja, a psychologist engaged part-time at the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, as well as at several other mainstream primary schools in Belgrade, stated that the basic precondition for success in mainstream schools is

³⁶⁰ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006.

³⁶¹ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, 10 July 2006; interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006.

³⁶² UNDP, *At Risk: Socially Endangered Roma*.

evaluation of the child's intellectual capabilities.³⁶³ When it appears that a child is not prepared to enrol in the mainstream primary school, the City Secretariat for Education, based on the report of the diagnostic commission, issues a certificate for the child to enrol in the special school.

Kopanja is aware of frequent misdiagnosis of the Roma children, and is of the opinion that the language barrier plays a major role in getting the wrong diagnosis, since Roma children tend to speak Serbian very poorly and often live in a deprived environment. In order to avoid a misdiagnosis, Kopanja believes that it is vital to use non-verbal tests. The parents cannot enrol their child in the mainstream school contrary to the recommendation of the commission, and the only way back from special to normal schools is reassessment by the diagnostic commission.

As a recommendation for the reduction of erroneous diagnosis and referral to special schools of Roma children, Kopanja says that it is necessary to involve the child prior to the start of school, to engage the family through organisation of educational activities, both for the children and for the parents.

A bilingual curriculum can provide another possibility of preventing the viewing of the Romanes language as a handicap, but there has never been bilingual education training for the teachers of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, even though the staff underwent training for the functional education of adult Roma for the teachers of the first eight grades, as well as training on the prevention of sexual violence against children held by the Incest Trauma Centre.³⁶⁴

Costs

According to the assessments of the teaching staff at the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, 12,000–13,000 dinars (€152–165) must be set aside each month for the regular school expenses: textbooks, notebooks, pens, excursions, recreational education, theatre, and so on.³⁶⁵ The textbooks are not free, unless received through donations, as for instance through the projects of the Roma Children's Centre, which frequently provides free books to children whose parents have no means to buy them. Old textbooks from pupils of mainstream schools are collected and then distributed to poor pupils, as was done in the Petar Kocić Primary School in 2005.³⁶⁶

³⁶³ Interview with Ms. Aleksandra Kopanja, psychologist at the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 13 July 2006.

³⁶⁴ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006.

³⁶⁵ Interviews with teachers of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁶⁶ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers at this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

For schoolchildren in special schools, this amount is much lower, standing at approximately 2,000 dinars (€25) a month, because pupils are provided with free transport, lunch, and required school accessories and textbooks. Pupils of special schools do not have recreational education or go on excursions, and one-day field trips are paid directly by the school. Some special schools even have funds for full boarding (free accommodation and three meals a day). These benefits are not provided in mainstream primary schools.

Some, although not all, families that are beneficiaries of financial family support (FFS) get complimentary school books, and some of the needed school material. But bearing in mind that the estimated majority of Roma families are not registered at their actual place of residence, and/or do not have personal documents, only about 20–30 per cent of them are FFS beneficiaries in relation to the actual number of those that should be exercising their right to support based on their low income.³⁶⁷

School results and curricular standards

The Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education works according to the adult curriculum modified by the school itself, so the pupils in the first grade have music, physical education, art and English, even though according to the existing curriculum for adult education they should only have Serbian and mathematics. The Ministry of Education and Sports in 2003 approved this curriculum modification for this school only, but the staff are not certain whether this approval still stands. The school has in the meantime been instructed to work according to the official curriculum, which the school is refusing to do: according to that curriculum the students only have Serbian and mathematics as subjects from the first to the fourth grade. The members of the school staff feel that they would damage the children's interests in this manner by depriving them of knowledge to which they are entitled. At the moment, the outcome of this matter seems unclear.³⁶⁸

According to the school principal, there is a very low percentage of functionally illiterate Roma students in the fourth grade; it happens, but these are students with lower IQ. There are no functionally illiterate children in the eighth grade. None of the pupils from the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education has even taken part in academic competitions, and the teachers emphasise the point that it is to be considered as great success when the Roma children even take the placement test and enrol in the secondary school at all. According to the teachers, this school also appears

³⁶⁷ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, Belgrade, 10 July 2006. Interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006. Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers and parents of children attending this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁶⁸ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers and parents of children attending this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

to be a way out of the special schools: it happens that pupils of special schools abandon schooling, make a break for a year or two, and then enrol in the adult education school, whose diploma enables them, at least in theory, to enrol in a mainstream secondary school. According to the law, there is no difference between adult education and mainstream schools, and one can continue education transferring from one to another. However, in practice, children never manage to go from an adult education school to a mainstream school, even though they often go from a mainstream to an adult school.

Decision-making, financing, infrastructure and human resources

The principal and teachers of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education state that the school's administrative body has little influence in terms of the curricula and human resources.³⁶⁹ The Ministry of Education and Sports adopts a single curriculum according to which all schools must work. The same goes for the human resources policy, and the Ministry in fact determines the number of staff according to the proscribed normative acts. Furthermore, the principals and teachers from the adult school are excluded from communication and cooperation with the mainstream school network, since mainstream and adult schools are supposed to have separate school networks.³⁷⁰ However, in practice, the mainstream school network exists and is very active, while the adult education school network exists only on paper.

The funds that local schools receive are actually city budget resources, since Zemun is not an independent municipality. In the 2005–2006 school year, the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education school received funds at a monthly level of 20,000 dinars (€254). In addition, each school gets 105,000 dinars (€1,334) for its current and maintenance expenses from the Ministry of Education and Sports in particular. All interviewed teachers as well as the principal say that this does not cover the actual costs, which means that schools have to decide which of the expenses are less urgent, and forgo them (for example, building repairs, and so on).

Over the past few years, thanks to the support of the European Agency for Reconstruction (EAR), funds of the Government of the Republic of Serbia and various donors, a vast number of primary schools in Belgrade have been renovated, and run-down windows, doors, toilets and school inventory have been repaired, and some schools have seen an introduction of central heating and running water. Still, most schools are grappling with the problem of shortage of available space and lack of computers. The situation is not the same in all schools, and schools located on the very outskirts of the cities or in rural areas have as a rule worse infrastructure, and are poorer in technical equipment, than city schools. Primary schools located near Roma districts

³⁶⁹ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006.

³⁷⁰ Interviews with teachers at the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

are extremely poorly equipped, without adequate space and with very bad infrastructure. Thanks to good management, the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education's infrastructure is good, which is not common. Practically all other adult primary schools in Belgrade, and in Serbia generally, have very bad infrastructure. Yet, like practically all other schools in Serbia, the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education also has a problem with a shortage of available space and equipment (lack of computers).

There does not seem to be a problem with qualified human resources: teachers working in all schools generally have higher education.³⁷¹ However, despite an overwhelmingly Roma student body, the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education does not have Roma teaching assistants or mediators. All the interviewed school representatives expressed an opinion that it would be a useful measure, acting as a bridge between the families and the school, and possibly reducing drop-out rates. Even though the school's staff or social worker attempt to contact the Roma parents, trying to convince them of the importance of attending classes, a Roma assistant who knows the families would be much more effective.³⁷²

School–community relations

The management team of the school is composed of the principal, research associates, and teachers who wish to actively participate in the operation of the school. The administrative body can create and execute extracurricular activities independently, but all activities must have the prior approval of the Ministry of Education and Sports (as for example with extending the set adult school curriculum from two to several subjects).

According to the principal, the level the involvement and cooperation of Roma parents with the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education is satisfactory, which is logical since the Roma children make up the majority of the school's pupils. (At other schools where non-Roma pupils are the majority, there is usually no active participation of the Roma parents in the parents' council or other school-level activities).³⁷³

³⁷¹ Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers and parents of children attending this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁷² Interview with Ms. Jovanka Stojić, principal of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 15 July 2006; interviews with teachers at this school, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

³⁷³ Interview with Ms. Milica Simić, coordinator of the Roma Children's Centre, Belgrade, 10 July 2006; interview with Mr. Ešref Ramadanović, representative of the local Roma community, Zemun, 3 July 2006; interviews with teachers of the Branko Pešić School for Adult Primary Education, Belgrade, 17 June 2006.

At the same time, Milica Simić claims that she has seen a great number of alleged discrimination cases in her work as the director of the Roma Children's Centre. Allegedly, non-Roma pupils constantly tease Roma pupils, taunting and openly expressing negative prejudices about Roma in various contexts (such as in class, during breaks, and so on). Roma children usually have nobody to address in schools, and often they fight with their non-Roma peers, defending themselves in the only way in which they can. However, allegedly, while Roma children get punished by the school authorities, non-Roma children do not. Allegedly, teachers themselves often express their prejudices towards Roma openly, even in front of the class, saying that Roma children are "not intelligent enough", that they "do not need anything else but to learn how to read and write", that Roma girls should get married as soon as possible "because Roma women are made for giving birth", and so on. However, even if parents decided to file a complaint, it would be very hard to prove that discrimination occurs. The Law on Primary Education envisages sanctioning of discrimination on any grounds. But there have been no cases in practice where a teacher or a pupil has been sanctioned for discrimination.

ANNEX 3: LEGISLATION CITED IN THE REPORT

All references are to the Official Gazette of the Republic of Serbia (hereafter, Official Gazette).

Constitution

Constitution of the Republic of Serbia, 1990

Laws

Law on Activities of Public Interest in the Field of Culture. *Official Gazette* No. 49/92.

Law on Defining of Competences of an Autonomous Province. *Official Gazette* No. 6/2002.

Law on Financial Support to Families with Children and Law on Amendments and Supplements to the Law on Financial Support to Families with Children. *Official Gazette* No. 16/2002.

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Law on Secondary School. *Official Gazette* No. 50/92, 53/93, 67/93, 48/94, 24/96, 23/2002, 62/2003, 64/2003.

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ANNEX 5: JOB DESCRIPTION FOR A ROMA TEACHING ASSISTANT (RTA)

Roma Education Initiative (REI) – Serbia: “Equal Chances – Integration of Roma Children and Youth into the Education System”

Definition

A teaching assistant is a person who acts as a link between the local minority community and system institutions in order to assist in the process of schooling of children from minority and/or marginalised groups. Assistants are from the Roma minority, or some other minority, depending on the demographic makeup in a certain region.

Job Description

a) Activities in the Roma Community

1. Developing a database on children:

- who are supposed to enrol in school
 - assistance in taking the school preparedness test/attendance at the testing and translation to/from the Romani language should the need arise;
- who discontinued schooling for whatever reason and wish to continue it;
- who cannot continue their schooling due to the language barrier (e.g. those deported from Western Europe, refugees from Kosovo, and so on).

2. Visiting families and working with parents:

- establishing contacts with families in order to increase and support their motivation for schooling of their children, reporting on the child’s school achievements and possible problems;
- collecting basic socio-economic information about families;
- screening of pedagogical competences of parents and their need to acquire knowledge and skills concerning upbringing, children’s development, health, hygiene, and so on.

3. Cooperating with Roma NGO

- cooperation with the parent body Roma NGO, attending their training course, inclusion in their activities related to his/her tasks to assist the schooling of Roma children.

b) Activities in school

1. In classes:

- participating in regular classes
 - assisting teachers in the realisation of planned activities, providing direct assistance to children in completing assignments, actively participating in the design and selection of the most adequate teaching contents and aids,
 - assisting children to master the Serbian language and skills necessary for successful schooling,
 - assisting in communication between children and teachers/overcoming language barriers, and
 - monitoring and providing support to children, helping them to form a positive attitude towards the school, increasing their motivation for schooling, identifying needs and planning various activities in accordance with those needs, in cooperation with teachers and research associates;
- participating in planning of classes together with teachers and research associates;
- participating in remedial classes/assisting teachers to deliver planned contents, with a role in the selection of children and ensuring regular attendance of classes;
- assisting in completing school assignments;
- providing necessary information to teachers and research associates/reporting on achievements, problems identified, and the family situation.

2. In school activities:

- necessary intervention in the school and the local community in order to ensure regular attendance of classes/facilitating cooperation between the family and the school, inclusion of Roma parents in school activities;
- attendance of teaching staff conferences and homeroom conferences if required and if problems of schooling of Roma children are discussed;
- initiating the work of hobby group/s affirming Roma culture and tradition, multicultural education and other activities meeting the needs of pupils in multiethnic surroundings;
- developing a database on the situation and needs of Roma children attending junior grades of primary school (and possibly those attending senior grades), which necessarily requires direct cooperation of Roma assistants, teachers and the schools' research associates;

- needs for certain classes, knowledge and skills,
- regularity of school attendance,
- social status of a child in a class,
- special interests and affinities, and
- health and hygienic status.

On the basis of information gathered, a database for each child is made and further activities are planned.

Working hours

The level of engagement of a RTA in one working week is 30 hours: 8 hours working in the Roma Community and 22 hours working in schools.

Teacher training

Minimum:

18 hours a year – one seminar on the “Step-by-Step” methodology and/or pedagogy in general

An asset: *30 hours a year* – one “Step-by-Step” seminar and training on emancipation of Roma, the exercise of the right to education (and other human rights) and their integration in the life of a broader community

Basic employment criteria

Required:

1. Completed four-year secondary school.
2. Languages: full mastery of Serbian and fluency in speaking the Romani language.
3. Expressed personal readiness to accept professional responsibilities enumerated in the job description and affinity for and ability to work with children.

An asset:

1. Begun/completed university-level education.
2. Work experience.

Persons deciding on the selection of an assistant:

1. School principal;

2. A representative of school teachers;
3. A representative of a partner Roma NGO;
4. A representative of the partner NGO implementing the project (CIP);
5. A donor (such as the Fund for Open Society Serbia).