

BULGARIA

REGULAR MONITORING REPORT of the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science on the implementation of the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education

According to The UNESCO Convention, the term “discrimination” implies each and every difference, exception, restriction or preference based on race, skin colour, gender, language, religion, political or other convictions, national or social origin, economical situation or birth, which is intended to degrade or undermine equal treatment as far as education is concerned. In the acting legislation in the field of education – the National Education Act have been outlined specific measures against manifestations of discrimination, in any form. According to Art. 4 of the National Education Act, no restrictions or privileges are permitted on the grounds of race, nationality, gender, ethnical and social origin, religion, belief and social status. The text incorporated in the National Education Act provides for evidence that in the Bulgarian education system as well as in the rest of the normative arrangements enforced, are foreseen guarantees that do not permit discriminatory attitude and behavior toward children and pupils, including those of different ethno-cultural groups.

The measures undertaken against the manifestations of discrimination in school are as follows:

For those of pupils, who are found out to be at risk of dropping out, the school in partnership with the regional inspectorates for education, together with the municipality, school boards and other bodies and organizations provides for additional possibilities for education by organizing and carrying out: individual programmes aimed to provide psychological assistance and help to pupils; occupy pupils by providing extra free classes to pupils during their vacations or regular school-time classes; extracurricular or out-of-school activities, complying with the individual needs and interests of the pupils; consultations and guidance for further professional training.

The acting legislation foresees free access to education in the state and public schools (Art. 6 of the National Education Act; Art. 5, Para 1 of the Rules for the application of the National Education Act). According to the provisions set out in the Art. 2 of the CM Decree № 104 as of 10.05.2003 regulating the free use in the state-run, municipal and private kindergartens and schools, of:

- a whole set of study materials for every child enrolled and attending a preparatory kindergarten group;
- a whole set of textbooks and study materials for every pupil enrolled and attending school classes from 1st to 4th degree;
- a whole set of textbooks for every pupil enrolled and attending school classes from 5th to 7th degree.

The provision of free textbooks and study materials/educational resources to all learners – children and pupils up to 7th school grade is regarded also as a means to ensure the equal access to education and training in the education system and guarantees the right to quality education of all children and pupils across Bulgaria.

With a view of enhancing the school attendance as well as of the quality education for those children, living and residing in rural areas or villages located high in the mountains, the National Education Act foresees in the supplemental regulations /§ 6B., (1) § 6e., (1)/ the establishment of the so-called community schools and of protected by the State schools. „Community school" as referred to in the National Education Act, is a kind of school that is located in the nearest residential area on the territory of the municipality, where pupils living in areas with no schools, are taught. „Protected by the State school" is a kind of school, which, if closed down, the access to education would be obstructed. The protected by the State schools cannot be closed down.

By the enforcement of the Law on Protection against Discrimination as of 01.01.2004, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science disseminated a note to the school heads and directors of kindergartens across all regions in the country, stating their duty to include since then in the job descriptions of the teachers the obligation to not allow any forms of discrimination at school and in class.

By a special Order of the Minister of Education, Youth and Science as of 2003, a Consultative Council was established and assigned with the task to deal with the issues relating to the education of the children and pupils from ethno-cultural groups. This Council was set up as a specialized advisory body reporting to the Minister of Education on the issues concerning the educational integration of the children and pupils from the ethno-cultural groups. As of 2010 the National Strategy on the Educational Integration of the children and pupils from ethno-cultural groups has been updated and adopted in a reformed version.

In implementation of this Strategy, every school from across the country has the responsibility to draw up an annual plan and to report to the Regional Inspectorate for Education for what has been carried out.

Similar obligations have been also imposed on the experts attached to the Regional Inspectorates of Education, who are assigned with the responsibilities relating to the educational integration of the children and pupils from ethno-cultural groups.

The job position of the “teacher-assistant” was listed in National Classification for the professions and job positions for 2010, following the Ministerial decision issued in 2003 to introduce it in the educational system. The teacher-assistants facilitate the educational integration of the children and pupils from different ethno-cultural groups, including of those who are of Roma origin. Thus the access to education is further enabled and supported.

The List comprising of professions that require vocational education and training features the following “job positions”:

- a school educator - assistant
- a kindergarten educator-assistant
- a social activities collaborator
- a social worker with children at risk

Teacher-assistants at school and teacher-assistants at kindergarten are appointed at their employer’s discretion in order to support the educational integration of the children and pupils from ethno-cultural groups. The observations conducted as part of the implemented projects aimed at the educational integration, found out that where teacher-assistants are also involved in the ongoing learning process, the benefits for the learners are far more tangible and in particular in favour of building up a respectable and equal in terms of ethno-cultural characteristics, educational environment. **The job position of the teacher-assistant was introduced at the proposal of Roma non-governmental organizations and was incorporated into the body text of the Framework Programme for equal integration of Roma into the Bulgarian society, adopted by a CM Decision as of April 1999. The job description for the position opened for teacher-assistants was approved by the Minister of Education and Science as of 25.08.2003.**

The draft Pre-school Education and School Education Act envisages that the educational integration of children and pupils from ethno-cultural groups should prevent from any forms of discrimination. A specific new educational standard outlining the requirements toward the civic, intercultural and health education has been drawn up in this regard.

In 2011, the Ministry of Education, Youth and Science conducted a research on the effect and efficacy of the policy tools, intended toward improving the scope of the education and reducing the number of the early school leavers as well as of those children and pupils who are not enrolled in the educational system. The research focused on:

- **widening the scope and facilitating the equal access to secondary education by a set of specific tools:** scholarships; purchasing transport means for pupils to the community schools; free textbooks and learning aids/resources; hostels for the pupils; special measures for educational integration and reintegration of children and pupils from disadvantaged social groups;

- the employed tools for improving the organization of the education, namely: full-day organization of the learning and education for the first-grade pupils as well as for the pupils that commute to the community schools of a given municipality; support for providing full or half board for the kindergarten children enrolled in preparatory group, as well as for the 4th-grade pupils at school; extracurricular and out-of-school activities.

A draft National Strategy for Roma Integration in the Republic of Bulgaria has been elaborated (2012-2020) together with a draft Action Plan for the implementation of the aforementioned Strategy, in close cooperation with experts from non-governmental organizations.

The central educational priority of the National Strategy for Roma Integration in Republic of Bulgaria (2012-2020) targets the enrollment, inclusion and retention of the Roma children and pupils in the education system, ensuring quality education in multicultural educational environment.

Objectives of the Strategy are:

1. to ensure access to quality education;
2. to ensure full integration and mainstreaming of the Roma children and pupils into ethnically diverse kindergarten groups as well as of the pupils of Roma origin into ethnically diverse classes at schools located outside typical Roma residential quarters;
3. to provide education in the spirit of tolerance and non-discrimination both in kindergartens and at schools;
4. to undertake prevention measures against the drop-out of pupils from primary and secondary education;
5. to increase the number of the higher education youth graduates of Roma origin;
6. to further refine the normative base, also the educational setting needed to ensure the quality of learning and teaching mother tongues, the teachers' in-service training and qualification in order to equip them with the necessary skills to work in ethnically diverse classes;
7. to increase the level of literacy either of those who are illiterate or those who don't have sufficient literacy level among the adult Roma population;
8. to further promote the use of innovative educational approaches, developing the cultural identity of the Roma pupils and children;

9. to introduce the practice of the so-called educational mediator in the preparatory kindergarten class as well as in the secondary education;

10. to invite the school boards and the civil society organizations to take part in the elaboration, implementation, supervision and control, and also in the evaluation of the inclusive education policies.

The enlisted above measures are viewed as an integration tool that proved effective for the time being and is to be further elaborated with a view to enhancing the educational level of the children and pupils of Roma origin, their retention in school and, as laid down and in accordance with Art. 29 of the Law on Protection against Discrimination, to non-acceptance of racial discrimination.

The Council of Ministers adopts financial regulations for allocation of funds earmarked for additional financing of the school education of children, which includes the costs for transport, organization of the school day and canteen costs. By the CM Decree № 84/06.04.2009, the List of the so-called “community schools” in the Republic of Bulgaria was adopted. In accordance with Art. 3, Para. 1, item 2, the amount of funds intended for the organization of the school day and canteen costs, for the transportation of pupils from class 1st to 8th, is determined to be up to 474 lev per child per budget year. According to Art. 153, Para. 3 of the Regulations regarding the Application of the National Education Act, the state and the municipal budgets are allocating funds for the meals of the children and pupils in municipal and state schools and kindergartens.

The state budget provides targeted funds to support the food costs of travelling pupils to/from the community schools, who are in the compulsory school age, as well as for the organization of the school process in class 1 and 2. A specially designed National Programme provides for snacks for the children in the preparatory classes in schools and kindergartens and the pupils from class 1 up to 4

The meals costs for pupils and children in kindergartens have been subsidized since 2001, through the following mechanisms:

- The funds necessary to cover the organization of the school day and the canteen costs of travelling pupils to/from community schools, in amount of 427. lev per pupil;
- The funds necessary to cover the organization of the school day and the canteen costs of pupils from class 1 and 2, in amount of 427. lev per student;

- In addition to the unified expenditure standards to support the meals provision for children in preparatory groups in kindergartens and schools and the pupils from class 1 to class 4, in amount of 65 lev per child / pupil.

The meals provision for pupils in municipal and state schools can be supported not only by funds from the state budget, but as well by targeted subsidies for the reduction of the food price and for overhead costs. The necessary funds are provided by the primary institutions receiving budgetary allocations through budgetary credits for financing the schools. The directors of the schools of the public education system can allocate funds for the reduction of the food prices within the frame of the funds from the delegated budgets.

All activities related to the nutrition of the pupils are realized in school canteens and cafeterias, opened in accordance with the "Collection of recipes for school canteens and cafeterias" approved by the Health Minister. Food value is calculated on production costs on the basis of the main expenditures for its production and realization.

The price of the food coupon for pupils is reduced through the subsidies for reducing the food price, provided from the state budget.

The nutrition of children in kindergartens is defined as a local activity by a Decision of the Council of Ministers and is realized at the expense of own revenues of the municipalities, included the fees paid by parents. The Municipal Councils define the costs for an average daily food day per child.

The Ministry of Education, Youth and Science is currently developing politics to increase the quality of education for all children and pupils. A module named "Support for the daily education of pupils from an early stage" has started in 2010 in accordance with the National Programme "The School – a territory of the pupils". The program gives the opportunity to include pupils, as well as those with Roma origin, in various activities in the frame of the whole daily organization of the school process. The children whose maternal language is not the Bulgarian, have the opportunity to learn it in a more efficient way through a whole day stay in Bulgarian language environment. This is a guarantee for a higher educational level, an improvement of the communication skills and an effective communication between pupils of different ethnicities.

Project proposals of 94 schools have been financed in 2010, and of 88 schools – in 2011. The module foresees the purchase of furniture, books, educational and developing games, with the purpose of achieving the highest similarity between the ambient in school and the one at home, which is a prevention against the dropping out of school, as well as care for the hygiene

of child labor in school. The foreseen regime activities are lunch, recreation, self-preparation for the obligatory school subjects, and interest activities. The interest activities include the establishment or the further development of already existing clubs, studios or “workshops” (example: art studios, drama studios, music studios, sports studios or club of young champions, club of the writer or club of the friends of the book, club of the young researcher, club of the curious and the talented, club of the young journalist, club of the lovers of nature, club “Homeland”, club “Skillful hands”, dance club, etc)

Strategic priorities for the period of 2009-2013 have been defined in the Program for the Development of Education, Science and Youth Policies. In the priority of “Achieving an European quality of education” is stated that “The education from the kindergarten to the university preserves and develops the skills for learning, researching and tolerance towards the “different”. The school process helps all pupils to acquire solid reading, learning, speaking and mathematical skills.

It encourages them to think creatively, rationally and independently, to make clear and precise arguments, to take responsibility, and to take individual and collective decisions. Furthermore, education helps them build practical skills for decision-making and choice-making in the field of health, career and future. It also develops aesthetic, cultural and civic sensibility in children and young people. All educational structures provide the necessary information so parents and students could make the most appropriate for them educational choice.

The National program, entitled: “Care for every student” offers an opportunity to additional education for children with outstanding abilities and for children who face problems with the learning material. The program motivates teachers to work with the pupils, taking into account their individual abilities and interests.

Granting equal access to education and opening the educational system play a crucial role for the fight against poverty and act as a deterrent factor against social exclusion of large groups of people. Changing the school environment and building an adequate infrastructure and web of services are of great importance for risk groups such as people with disabilities, people of ethnic minorities and most of all Roma people, who for various reasons have been excluded from the educational system and are not competitive on the labor market.

Providing children and pupils, whose mother tongue is not the Bulgarian (children from different ethno-cultural groups, migrant children and children of refugees), with an access to education, promoting the early childhood education and development, and the work with parents, helps to build a tolerant educational environment, which encourages the acceptance of “the different one, which is an integration tool in the fight against discrimination”.