

Hatches of the present situation of Roma in Bulgaria

Centuries on end Roma have been living on Bulgarian land. The data from the last official survey made in 2001 show that the Roma people are less than 5% from the population of Bulgaria (in 2001 the official number of the Bulgarian population is 7 928 901). According to the Roma leaders the real number of Roma people is much bigger and it doesn't correspond to the official data.

After the democratic changes have set in, the Roma had and have the opportunity to speak freely their mother language, to study it at school, to create and write in their own language, to learn about their own history. There have been registered a great number of cultural-educational organizations, movements and foundations, which take part in the solving of problems, connected with social-economical issues.

Besides these positive changes, concerning the Roma community after the democratic changes, some unfavourable tendencies in the life of the Roma community in Bulgaria have been observed. In the first place, those are the problems, resulting from the unemployment, because many of the factories, which did not require professional training or special education, have been restructured and many Roma in an active age were left jobless, without means to earn their living, without the necessary means for their children's school maintenance. That fact explains the high percentage of students, non-regularly attending or dropping out of school. (Here we have to point out that there is also a small percentage of students, dropping out due to the ethnocultural specification of the Roma community.)

The data from the national representative survey, held in the period 11-16 December 2004 show that the percentage of the totally illiterate among the young Roma reaches 25%, and together with those, who share that it is difficult for them to read, the percentage reaches 60%(!). These results show only the percentage of the illiterate: the people who have not graduated primary or high-school education, or who do not have a qualification, are not included here. At the same time the employers are more insisting, when they hire or look for employees, on people with education and qualification, people who can cope with the modern technical equipment.

In order to handle these hard issues, the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy organizes courses for literacy and professional qualification for unemployed people, responding to certain requirements, with subsidies from the European Union. There are also certain non-governmental organizations that work in this field.

As an example of good practice the programme „**Increasing the level of literacy and vocational qualifications of people from disadvantaged groups and Ensuring employment**“ could be pointed out. The programme was supported by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. It was implemented in the city of Sofia, „Vrabnitza“ region.

The programme was prepared and realized as a partnership among the following bodies:

- The management body of Sofia Municipality - „Vrabnitza“ region, presented by the mayer of the region Mr Janko Jankov
- The responsible of the Educational department for the region – Ms Cholakova
- The head of the Labour Department of „Ljulin“ region – Ms Vatkova
- The director of the regional branch of the Institute for International Cooperation at the Association of the German Popular Universities – Ms Maria Todorova
- Expert from the Regional Inspectorate of Education – Ms Kosharska.
- The chairwoman of the “Ethnocultural Dialogue” Foundation- Ms Adela Stoyanova

The responsibilities and the tasks were shared among the partners as follows :

Sofia Municipality - „Vrabnica“ region:

1. Providing the necessary equipment for the literacy courses: the school, heating, electricity/lighting and the sanitary services for the rooms.

Labour Department:

1. Carrying out informational campaign for popularizing the Programme and the opportunities it offers for social and vocational realization of unemployed persons from “Vrabnitza” region. The campaign is held in cooperation with the Labour department of “Ljulin” region, the Municipality administration, the Employers’ Association and NGOs.
2. Selecting and motivating the unemployed persons to participate in the programme.
3. Making literate the participants in the Programme, thus improving their skills for acquiring professional qualifications and realization on the Labour market.
4. Acquiring professional qualifications - for the unemployed persons.
5. Supporting the professional realization of the participants in the programme

Regional Inspectorate of Education - Sofia:

1. Taking part in the selection of teachers, who will implement the literacy courses
2. Providing the Curriculum for the literacy courses
3. Providing ingoing, midterm and outgoing test for the level of skills and knowledge of the participants in the programme.
4. Providing methodological support and control on the process of learning and the literacy courses for adults.

Institute for International Cooperation at the Association of the German Popular Universities:

1. Organizing and implementing short-term training of Adult Education for the teachers involved in the literacy courses.
2. Purchasing the textbooks and the educational materials needed for the participants in the programme.
3. Classifying and publishing collection of didactical materials used in the literacy courses.
4. Monitoring of the project implementation, focused on Module 1 and Module 3 of the project: “Literacy” and “Vocational qualifications”.

“Ethnocultural Dialogue” Foundation

1. Assisting in the selection of participants for the literacy courses and enhancing the regular attendance of the courses by the participants.
2. Providing the participants-learners with materials: newspapers and magazines.

Goal of the programme :

Increasing the abilities for employment of unemployed, uneducated and unqualified persons through their involvement in literacy courses, vocational qualifications and employment courses.

Objectives:

Improving the capacity of the human resources;

Decreasing the level of unemployment in the region;

Providing employment for the participants in the programme

Target group:

30 unemployed persons of Roma origin /27 women and 3 men/, who identify themselves as illiterate and with no professional qualifications, living in Sofia (complex “Moderno predgradie”).

Duration of the programme :

June 2005 – December 2005

Curricula:

The curriculum of the literacy courses was provided by The Regional Inspectorate of Education - Sofia.

The curriculum of the vocational qualifications courses was provided by the firms-winners of the competition for vocational training, possessing official license from the National Agency for Vocational Training.

Programme activities:

- Module 1 – Literacy ;
- Module 2- Vocational Qualifications ;
- Module 3 - Employment.

/ During Module 1 and Module 2 the participants were receiving scholarships, granted from the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy/

- Training of teachers

Before the start of the first module, a short-term training in Adult Education was organized for the teachers involved in the modules. The trainers were leading experts in the above field. After the successful graduation of the training, the participating teachers received a certificate. The following criteria were taken into consideration for the selection of teachers, who would attend the training and be involved in the project modules

- Educational degree;
- Qualification level;
- Experience in literacy courses with adult learners;
- Duration of teaching experience in schools from regions with mixed ethnic population

Module 1- Literacy

The duration of this module was 5 months. The curriculum included 600 classes. The participants were divided into two groups- 15 people per group.

The literacy module started with incoming test that aimed at clearing out the type and level of knowledge the participants have in order to provide adequate and effective further learning process.

As a result from the tests, two main levels were distinguished among the participants. They participants were divided into completely illiterate and secondary (partly) illiterate:

Reading and Writing:

The fully illiterate persons don't know the alphabet and the letters, so they cannot read. They don't possess any graphical skills. It's hard for them to understand and write with manuscript letters. They read and write easier with printed letters. The fully illiterate persons face difficulties in orientating among the lines and even the pages of a book or notebook.

The secondary (partly) illiterate persons could read by reading the syllables and have some graphical skills. Most of them use manuscript letters, some of them write with printed letters. They are able to rewrite words, sentences and short texts, but they make mistakes.

Mathematics:

The fully illiterate participants don't know the numbers very well and they don't know the arithmetical signs.

The secondary (partly) illiterate participants know the numbers and can write them.

The diverse mistakes and lack of knowledge in different areas required different approaches and systematic work with each of the participants. Thus the individual approach in the module was one of the obligatory preconditions in order the learners to keep their motivation and not to face too much difficulties or inadequate tasks in comparison with their abilities and expectations.

Midterm and outgoing tests for measuring the levels of the acquired knowledge were held as part of the literacy module. The participants, who have finished successfully the literacy course, received certificate, approved by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of labour and Social Policy. The certificate gives the opportunity to take part in the course for vocational qualifications.

Module 2-Vocational qualifications

After a provisional survey on the learners' desires for professional development the participants were divided into two groups: course for tailors and course for bakers.

The courses lasted 38 days / 300 classes/. The courses included both theory and practice. The teachers had high qualifications and used diverse methods to ease the understanding of the information and the gaining of skills. The learners received different educational materials and equipment, necessary for their training.

All of the participants were motivated during the courses and passed the final exam successfully. They received certificates for vocational qualifications.

Module 3 - Employment

The realization of this Module is forthcoming. On an equal basis the Labour department will make the selection and will assist the participants from the first two modules by providing them with employment opportunities.

Conclusion

The project serves as a proof for the fact that better results are achieved when the efforts of more partners are involved in the project implementation. Taking under consideration the importance of the clear roles, the effective task division and the awareness of the responsibilities of each partner, such a partnership is an important factor for a successful project end.

Project Sustainability

The sustainability of the project can be seen in several dimensions:

- the participants, who have achieved good results in the literacy courses have the opportunity to continue their education and earn a degree.
- all the participants, who have graduated successfully the vocational qualification courses could continue their development in the professional field they have chosen to work.

Relevance of the project with regard to the family literacy

There is indirect link between the project and the family literacy programme. By becoming literate and gaining some vocational qualifications the participants in the project developed their system of values with regard to the need of education. They also become capable of providing assistance to their children in their homework preparation. The gained skills and knowledge also allowed the participants to assist the elder members of their families in many ways.