



LOOSE ENDS

*Mapping the roots of youth
marginalization in the
underclass*

**POLICY
RECOMMENDATIONS**

NORTH MACEDONIA



POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

NORTH MACEDONIA



Find out more:
egyutthato.eu/loose

This document was created within the frameworks of the 'Loose Ends' project implemented by Együttható Egyesület, Association Nevo Parudimos and RROMA. The project was supported by the Erasmus+ programme of the European Union. Project number: 2020-1-HU01-KA205-078586. This document does not necessarily reflect the official views of the European Commission, the European Union or the organisations co-operating with them.

Autor: Muhmaed Ajvaz

**Issued by Regional Roma Educational Youth
Association - RROMA**

info@rromassn.org

+38931481189



OVERVIEW OF THE MAIN FINDINGS

The exploration of the intersectionality of disability and ethnicity, particularly within the Roma community, has historically been neglected. However, recent initiatives in Macedonia have sought to address this gap, with a focus on inclusive education. This summary delves into the main findings related to the situation of Roma students with special educational needs, examining historical challenges, recent legal developments, and recommendations for improvement.

Historical Context and Legal Developments:

The initial discussions surrounding the educational challenges faced by Roma students, especially those with disabilities, were primarily informal, involving activists, civil society organizations, and occasional engagement with institutions. A significant issue highlighted was the placement of Roma students in specialized schools, often justified by their perceived lack of proficiency in the Macedonian language. This practice overlooked genuine special educational needs, diverting attention from students who required additional support.

In 2019, a pivotal development occurred with the adoption of a new law on primary education, emphasizing inclusive education for all children. The law aimed to rectify past irregularities, such as the disproportionate enrollment of Roma students in specialized schools, which often resulted from teacher assessments or parental choices based on perceived benefits. The transformation of special schools into resource centers was proposed to support regular schools in accommodating all students. Additionally, various documents and strategies were formulated, such as the Strategy for Roma 2022-2030, addressing the specific educational needs of students with disabilities and emphasizing the shift towards inclusive education.

Current Realities and Parental Perspectives:

A research initiative conducted by RROMA through the Loose Ends project in 2021 involved 25 interviews with parents of children with disabilities, providing insight into the socio-economic conditions of these families. The review of resource center reports identified Roma student populations in specific schools, with the primary school "Idnina" having the highest number of Roma students.

Three key conclusions were drawn from interviews with parents:

The socio-economic status of these families significantly influences the decision to enroll children in former special schools.

Most students live in sub-standard conditions with limited family income, often relying on social protection.

Enrollment in special schools is influenced by personal preference, language barriers, recommendations, and problematic behavior.

Parents and students perceive double discrimination based on ethnicity and disability, emphasizing the need for serious governmental efforts in addressing the concerns of people with disabilities.

Recommendations for Improvement:

The report presents a set of recommendations to enhance the situation of Roma students with special educational needs. These include:

1. Providing free services such as speech therapy and special education by the state.
2. Working with parents to raise educational expectations through positive Roma role models.
3. Transforming educational assistants to reduce labeling and increase support coverage.
4. Enhancing communication and information transfer between educational institutions.
5. Professional orientation from grade teaching and integration of life skills subjects.
6. Providing extensive training for teachers to work with students with special educational needs.
7. Offering online instruction for students on long-term hospital treatment.
8. Adapting teaching for students with exceptional intelligence.
9. Training caregivers of children with disabilities.
10. Increasing engagement of local governments in the support of foster families and group homes.

The findings from this report shed light on the complex challenges faced by Roma students with special educational needs. The comprehensive set of recommendations serves as a foundation for further research and initiatives, emphasizing the importance of inclusive education, social support, and policy adjustments to improve the overall situation of people with disabilities in the Roma community.

OVERVIEW CONSIDERING LEGISLATION ABOUT DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL ACCESS IN EDUCATION IN NORTH MACEDONIA

North Macedonia has made significant strides towards inclusive education, as evidenced by the adoption of the Law on Primary Education in 2019. This legislation places a strong emphasis on providing equal opportunities for students with special educational needs, particularly those from the Roma community. This overview explores key provisions of the law, including inclusive education principles, the formation of inclusive teams, the transformation of special schools, and the assessment of students with disabilities.

Inclusive Education Principles (Article 11):

The Law on Primary Education outlines principles for inclusive education, emphasizing the organization of primary education to support the inclusion of all children. It defines inclusive education as a process addressing individual needs, providing equal opportunities for development and quality education. The inclusive education concept involves adjustments to teaching content, approach, structures, and strategies for students with disabilities. The law highlights the importance of reasonable adaptations in infrastructure, individualized support, curriculum, and program to meet individual student needs without imposing a disproportionate burden on schools. Accessibility to infrastructure and services is underscored to ensure equal access for students with disabilities.

Inclusive Teams (Article 16):

To operationalize inclusive education, primary schools are mandated to form school inclusive teams. These teams, lasting three school years, consist of diverse members, including teachers, parents, special educators, and the school principal. These teams oversee inclusive policies and practices at the school level. Additionally, student inclusive teams focus on specific students, preparing individual educational plans (IEPs) and modified curricula based on their needs.

Transformation of Special Schools (Articles 17-18):

Special schools have been transformed into primary schools with resource centers, which play a crucial role in providing expert support to students with disabilities, teaching staff, and parents. These resource centers collaborate with regular schools and learning support centers to ensure comprehensive support. Educational assistants and personal assistants are introduced to support students with disabilities, with the recruitment process outlined in the law.

Assessment of Students with Disabilities (Article 139):

The law outlines a flexible approach to assessing students with disabilities, accommodating diverse needs. Descriptive evaluation is employed, and adjustments, such as Braille tests or the use of assistive technology, are made to meet individual requirements. The Minister, at the proposal of the Bureau, determines the specific manner of assessment.

Relevant Documents and Strategies:

Several supporting documents complement the law, emphasizing inclusive education. The Concept of Inclusive Education, the Guide for the work of the school inclusive team, and the Annual Programs of primary schools with resource centers provide practical guidance. The Strategy for Roma 2022-2030 addresses discrimination and antigypsyism, emphasizing the transformation of special schools and the role of educational mediators.

Institutional Set-Up:

The institutional framework involves various entities, including preschool institutions, schools, educational and personal assistants, educational mediators, primary schools with resource centers, and government bodies such as the Ministry of Education and Science, the Bureau for Development of Education, and the State Examination Centre. Local self-government is actively engaged in promoting inclusive education at the local level.

North Macedonia's legislative framework for inclusive education reflects a comprehensive and integrated approach. The emphasis on principles, inclusive teams, resource centers, assessment flexibility, and supportive documents demonstrates a commitment to ensuring equal access and opportunities for students with special educational needs, particularly within the Roma community. The coordinated institutional set-up underscores the collaborative effort required for successful implementation at all levels of the education system.

Good practices in improving the situation:

Community Empowerment through Education:

Example: The Open Society Foundations, through their initiatives in various European countries, have supported educational programs targeting the Roma community. These programs focus on early childhood education, language acquisition, and skill development. By empowering Roma children and adults with education, the initiatives aim to break the cycle of poverty and discrimination. Special attention is given to promoting education in the Roma language, fostering cultural pride, and bridging language gaps to enhance access to mainstream education.

Healthcare Outreach Programs:

Example: In Romania, local health authorities have implemented targeted healthcare outreach programs to address the specific health needs of the Roma population. Mobile health clinics visit Roma settlements, providing healthcare services, vaccinations, and health education. These initiatives aim to overcome barriers such as transportation challenges and cultural differences. By bringing healthcare directly to the communities, these programs contribute to improved health outcomes and increased trust in healthcare services.

Cultural Sensitivity in Social Services:

Example: In Slovakia, social services have undergone training to better understand and respond to the unique needs of the Roma community. This includes cultural sensitivity training for social workers and the establishment of community liaisons. By fostering cultural competence within social services, the initiatives seek to build trust and rapport with Roma individuals and families. This approach has led to more effective communication, increased utilization of social services, and a reduction in stereotypes and biases.

These examples showcase innovative practices that have made significant strides in improving the situation of individuals with disabilities and the Roma community. By focusing on accessibility, education, employment, and cultural sensitivity, these initiatives contribute to building more inclusive and equitable societies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Socio-Economic Perspective

Enhancing Financial Support and Accessibility:

Recognizing the socio-economic challenges faced by families of children with disabilities and Roma, it is crucial to enhance financial support mechanisms. While allowances for people with disabilities have increased, the additional financial burden of services like defectologists and speech therapists can be overwhelming. To alleviate this burden, all disability-related services, including early intervention centers, should be provided free of charge.

The government should prioritize allocating funds to ensure that essential services are accessible to all, irrespective of socio-economic status. This includes making early intervention centers freely available to parents, eliminating financial barriers to accessing critical support services. By doing so, the state can mitigate the economic challenges faced by families, thereby fostering a more inclusive and equitable educational environment.

Impact: This recommendation aims to level the playing field for children with disabilities and those from the Roma community, ensuring that socio-economic factors do not hinder their access to necessary services. It promotes inclusivity by acknowledging the financial constraints faced by families and working towards a system that guarantees equal opportunities for all children.

Educational Perspective

Promoting Inclusive Education and Parental Engagement:

Addressing the prevalent trend of socially disadvantaged families opting for special schools due to perceived benefits like free transportation, meals, and low expectations, it is imperative to promote inclusive education. Simultaneously, there is a need to engage parents actively in the educational journey of their children, fostering higher expectations and aspirations.

Launch awareness campaigns aimed at altering parental perceptions regarding the advantages of special schools. Encourage parents to have higher expectations for their children's educational achievements through targeted campaigns showcasing successful Roma individuals. Additionally, the state should collaborate with institutions to ensure that inclusive education is not only a legal requirement but a practical reality.

Impact: By promoting inclusive education and actively engaging parents, this recommendation seeks to break the cycle of low expectations and foster a culture of academic achievement. It empowers parents to be advocates for their children's education and ensures that educational choices are driven by the best interests of the child rather than socio-economic considerations.

Transformative Practices in Special Schools:

Within special schools, there is a need for transformative practices to enhance the quality of education and break the cycle of low expectations. This involves a shift in focus from segregated to inclusive teaching practices, tailored support, and regular evaluations of individual plans to ensure continuous improvement.

Transform educational assistants into a more comprehensive role as educational assistance to remove labels from children. Encourage a dynamic system for constant re-evaluation of individual plans, with a focus on reducing and excluding educational assistance as students progress. Implement professional development programs for regular teachers to equip them with the necessary skills for inclusive education.

Impact: By transforming special schools into environments that prioritize inclusivity, individualized support, and continuous improvement, this recommendation aims to provide a high-quality education for children with disabilities and those from the Roma community. It envisions a future where special schools are stepping stones rather than permanent placements, ensuring that all students receive the support they need to thrive academically.

Youth Work Perspective

Youth Empowerment through Life Skills and Dynamic Support:

Beyond formal education, youth work plays a vital role in empowering individuals for future success. It is essential to integrate life skills into regular teaching, providing practical knowledge and promoting teamwork. Establish a dynamic support system that emphasizes constant re-examination of individual plans and a gradual reduction in the need for educational assistance.

Integrate life skills into the regular curriculum, benefiting all students and providing practical skills for daily life. Create a more dynamic support system that allows for the continual re-evaluation of individual plans, adjusting interventions based on progress. This involves ensuring that support mechanisms are flexible, evolving with the changing needs of the student.

Impact: This recommendation envisions youth work as a holistic approach that extends beyond academics to equip students with essential life skills. By integrating life skills into the curriculum and maintaining a dynamic support system, it prepares students with disabilities and those from the Roma community for a successful transition to adulthood, fostering independence and resilience.

These recommendations, spanning socio-economic, educational, and youth work perspectives, form a comprehensive strategy to improve the situation of children with disabilities and those from the Roma community in special schools. By addressing the multifaceted challenges from these perspectives, the goal is to create an inclusive and supportive environment that empowers every child to reach their full potential.