



LOOSE ENDS

*Mapping the roots of youth
marginalization in the
underclass*



RESEARCH REPORT

NORTH MACEDONIA

**On the research conducted
in the 'Loose Ends' projec**

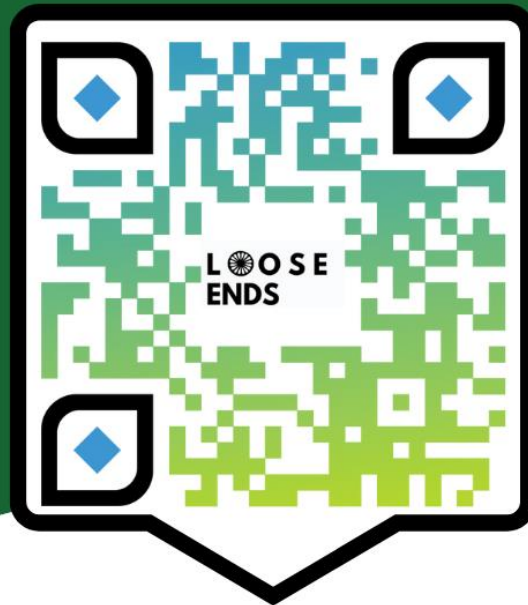


Erasmus+

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1. Introduction

The area of people with disabilities was almost never in the focus of the public in the Republic of North Macedonia, this issue was only indirectly opened during the independence of the country. In the past few years, this issue has been discussed from the perspective of inclusive education, which was still overshadowed by the public comments related to the so-called revolutionary changes in the educational system.

From the point of view of the Roma community, in the past, the most common reasons for the inclusion of Roma students in special schools was the insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language, as well as the personal decision of the families.

The legal framework, the institutional set-up, and the factual situation in the field will be presented within this report, and the main focus will be placed on presenting the answers from the interviews with persons who used to be a part of the special schools, which were transformed into resource centers due to the amendments of the Law on Primary Education. Interviews were also conducted with the parents of these students, as well as with the foster families.

The main purpose of this report is to present the real situation of the inclusion of Roma students in the special schools, foster families, including the description of their socio-economic status and living conditions, their journey through the educational system, as well as the degree of optimism and life perspectives.

In addition to presenting the real situation, this report also aims to give recommendations to the institutions for the improvement of the educational system and the inclusion of Roma students in the regular teaching, supported by an eminent professor from the area.

2. Summary

The area that covers people with disabilities, especially in the Roma community, is an area that has been little explored in the past. It was discussed through informal discussions between some of the activists and civil society organizations, and occasionally with the institutions. The area that covers people with disabilities, especially in the Roma community, is an area that has been little explored in the past. It was discussed through informal discussions between some of the activists and civil society organizations, and occasionally with the institutions. Especially if analyzed through the prism of the education system, the idea that Roma students were placed in specialized schools was justified or unjustifiably, mainly due to insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language in which regular classes are taught. Insufficient attention was paid to students who really have special educational needs due to a certain disability.

In 2019, with the adoption of the new law on primary education, the topic of inclusive education is opened, according to which the inclusion of all children in regular classes is envisaged. This at first glance solves all the irregularities that have occurred in the past, ie the transfer of Roma students to specialized schools for personal assessment of teachers or the choice of their parents due to certain privileges that children receive there as a free meal, transportation, but also lower educational expectations from parents. The new law provided for the transformation of special schools into resource centers will support regular schools that will include all children. In addition to the law on primary education, a number of documents have been created and adopted in the direction of inclusive education such as: Concept for primary education, Guide for work of the school inclusive team, Concept for inclusive education and other relevant documents such as the Strategy for Roma 2022-2030 in which in the field of education there is a special section for students with special educational needs which also mentions the transformation of special schools into resource centers. Experts allude that these changes should be gradually implemented, because regular schools are currently not fully prepared for the implementation of the new concept which implies inclusion of all students in regular classes, ie should first provide full accessibility which in addition to physical accessibility implies and adapting the teaching material for all students with all types of disabilities, as well as providing educational assistance.

In the period from September to October 2021, RROMA through the Loose Ends project conducted 25 interviews with parents of children with disabilities, and additionally an interview was conducted with a professor from the Institute of Special Education and Rehabilitation and a request for access to public information was submitted to the Ministry of Education and Science to review the number of Roma in former special schools. The main purpose of this engagement of the organization was to present the real situation of Roma students with special educational needs, to discover the reasons for enrollment in special schools, to describe the socio-economic status of families and to analyze their level of optimism and perception of life prospects. Additional goals were to show the number of Roma in former special schools and to give specific recommendations for improving the situation. From the review of the annual reports of the resource centers it is noticed that in the primary school "Dr. Zlaten Sremec" - Skopje, the primary school with resource center "Maca Ovcharova" - Veles and the primary school "Idnina" there are 39 Roma students (15 girls and 24 boys), with the largest number of students in the Primary school "Idnina" (19 students).

Three general conclusions were drawn from the interviews conducted with the parents of students with special educational needs:

The first conclusion is that most of these students live in sub-standard conditions, small houses with a large number of members (from 4 to 11 people). Their parents are not employed, ie there is mostly one or no employed member(s) in the family and some of the members are informally engaged in collecting secondary raw materials, which is their only income in the family. The second alternative to this is to use a certain type of social protection, such as GMP, third child allowance or old-age pension. This indicates that the social component is extremely important in these cases, and this is confirmed by the expert who points out that really the socio-economic status is one of the reasons why parents decided to send their children to former special schools.

Most of the students successfully completed their education in the former special schools. Reasons why they were part of these schools are the following: personal preference, lack of knowledge of the Macedonian language, a recommendation from a center for social work or a teacher from the regular schools or their problematic behavior.

Parents and students are accused of double discrimination, due to ethnicity and disability. The expectations are huge, ie that the state should work more seriously on the issue related to people with disabilities. Children see their parents as the main life models, and some of them - the teachers. Their main source of information is civil society organizations and religious objects.

After the interviews, the review of relevant documents such as the Law on Primary Education and the adopted concepts, the following recommendations can be drawn:

Providing free services from a speech therapist, defectologist (special educator) by the state for people with disabilities. As well as providing free early intervention.

Working with the parents of Roma students with special educational needs to increase the expectations of the educational success of their children, by showing successful Roma life models, campaigns and other tools.

Transforming educational assistants into educational assistance due to reducing the labeling of children with special educational needs, ie increasing the coverage of one child to more children (those children who need support).

Greater communication and transfer of information from preschool institutions to primary schools, and from primary schools to secondary schools for students with special educational needs in order to ensure greater readiness of educational institutions that will provide better education for all children.

Professional orientation from grade teaching. Integrating subjects that will enhance the life skills of all children and increase interaction in teaching through group and teamwork.

Providing a large number of free trainings for teachers to work with students with special educational needs.

Providing online instruction for students on long-term hospital treatment and their direct involvement in instruction through online tools instead of just sending learning materials.

Adjusting teaching for students who are beyond average intelligence (above or below).

Training of caregivers of children with disabilities. Greater work on the independence of people with disabilities where possible.

Greater engagement, ie competencies of the local government in the work of foster families and group homes.

Through these and additional recommendations that will arise after the presentation of the report, the situation of people with disabilities, especially Roma students with special educational needs, can be improved. This report can be the basis for much further research that will use a quantitative research method, ie through surveys and public opinion in this area, but also through other tools of the qualitative method such as conducting focus groups and meetings with stakeholders.

3. Overview of the legislation

In 2019, the new Law on Primary Education¹ was adopted, in which the main emphasis was placed on inclusive education. An overview of the most relevant Articles of the Law that refer to students with special educational needs is given below.

Inclusive education

Article 11

The primary education's institutions, staffing and content are organized in a manner that supports inclusion of all children in regular primary education. (2) Inclusive education is a process that takes into account the various individual needs for the development of students, providing equal opportunities for the realization of basic human rights for development and quality education. (3) The inclusive education referred to in paragraph (2) of this Article includes changes and adjustments of the teaching content, approach, structures and strategies for students with disabilities, with a common vision and conviction that the country has an obligation to provide education for all children. 5 of 70 (4) The inclusion of all children in regular primary education is defined by the Concept of Inclusive Education, which is adopted by the Minister at the proposal of the Bureau, and is published on the website of the Ministry of Education and Science (hereinafter: the Ministry) and the Bureau. (5) The infrastructure, individualized support, curriculum and program in primary education are reasonably adapted to the individual needs of the student. (6) A reasonable adjustment of paragraph (5) of this Article is an amendment and adaptation of the conditions for upbringing and education in a specific case, which does not cause a disproportionate or unnecessary burden on the school, and is aimed at ensuring the enjoyment or realization of all human rights and freedoms of students with disabilities on an equal basis with others. (7) Accessibility to infrastructure and services implies taking measures that ensure that students with disabilities have access, on an equal basis with others, to the physical environment, transportation, information and communication, including information and communication technologies and systems in the primary school.

According to the aforementioned, the Law on Primary Education clearly indicates the adjustment of the educational process to the individual needs of students, with a particular focus on students with special educational needs in order to enable equal access for all students. In order for the aforementioned to function practically, the Law also provides for the formation of inclusive teams.

Inclusive teams²

Article 16

In the primary school, the Principal shall form a school inclusive team, which shall take care of the inclusive politics and practices at the level of the entire school, and an inclusive team for a

¹ Law on Primary Education. <https://www.pravdiko.mk/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Zakon-za-osnovnoto-obrazovanie-05-08-2019.pdf>

² Ibid.

student who works according to an Individual Educational Plan (hereinafter: IEP) or according to a modified curriculum referred to in Article 30 of this Law. (2) The school inclusive team shall have a mandate of three school years and shall be composed of seven members, namely: the pedagogue, i.e. the psychiatrist, i.e. a social worker in the school, two teachers from the school's employees (one class teacher and one subject teacher), two parents, i.e. guardians, a special educator and rehabilitator, and the Principal of the school. The school inclusive team shall design and implement the activities at the level of the entire school and shall ensure that they are harmonized and applied in the educational work. (3) The student inclusive team shall last until the completion of the student's primary education, and shall be composed of: the student's teachers, the parent, i.e. the guardian, the pedagogue, i.e. the psychologist, i.e. the social worker at the school, the special educator and a rehabilitator. The student inclusive team shall focus on the specific students and the preparation and realization of their individual educational plans. (4) If necessary, the student, other teachers and expert associates, or any other person trusted by the student can be invited to participate in the work of the student inclusive team.^{9 8 of 70} (5) If the school does not employ an expert associate of a certain profile, as members of the inclusive team referred to in paragraphs (2) and (3) of this Article, persons from the Centres for supporting the learning of students with disabilities and/or schools with a resource centre shall be assigned. (6) The student inclusive team shall prepare an IEP and a modified curriculum for the student with a disability according to his/her individual potentials and needs, within 30 days from the day the student begins studying at the school, and implements the learning support measures in accordance with the recommendations from the expert bodies for the assessment of additional educational, health and social support for children and young people (hereinafter: expert assessment bodies) within the National Coordinating Body for the implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, under the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia (hereinafter: the Government). When developing the IEP and modified curriculum, the student inclusive team shall collaborate with other teachers and expert associates involved in the educational process of the student.

The existing specialized schools were transformed into primary schools with resource centres, i.e. are placed into the function of regular schools.

Primary school with a resource centre³

Article 17

(1) The school with a resource centre shall use its material and human resources and provide appropriate expert support to students with disabilities, the teaching staff, expert associates, parents, i.e. guardians, and the inclusive team of other primary schools. (2) The teaching staff from the primary school with a resource centres referred to in paragraph (1) of this Article, shall also participate in the realization of a part of the modified program for students with complex

³ Ibid.

needs for whom it is in their best interest to attend part of the teaching in the primary school with a resource centre, in accordance with the recommendation of the expert assessment body, based on the International Classification of Functioning (hereinafter: ICF), adopted by the World Health Organization. Learning support centres for students with disabilities Article 18 (1) The Principal, in the primary school that has special classes, shall establish a learning support centre for students with disabilities (hereinafter: the support center). (2) The support centre shall use the material and human resources of the school and provide appropriate expert support to students with disabilities, the teaching staff, expert associates, parents, i.e. guardians, and the inclusive team in other primary schools in the area of the municipality. (3) The teaching staff from the support centre shall also participate in the realization of part of the modified program for students with complex needs, for whom it is in their best interest to attend part of the teaching in the support centre, and in accordance with the recommendations of the expert assessment body, based on the ICF. 9 of 80 Types of support for students with disabilities Article 19 (1) To support the learning for students with disabilities, the primary school shall provide: an educational assistant, a personal assistant, an appropriate expert support from a learning support centre, an inclusive team and assistive technology on the recommendation of the expert assessment body, and in accordance with the individual education plan or modified program. (2) The public call for the selection of an educational/personal assistant, the selection of an educational/personal assistant, as well as the training of an educational/personal assistant, shall be carried out by a school with a resource centre. (3) The public call referred to in paragraph (2) of this Article, after a previously obtained written consent from the Ministry, shall be published in at least two daily newspapers, of which at least one of is issued in the Macedonian language, and in newspapers published in the language spoken by at least 20% of the citizens who speak an official language other than the Macedonian language. (4) The manner of requesting an educational/personal assistant, the manner of selection of an educational/personal assistant, as well as the training program of an educational/personal assistant, shall be determined by the Minister, at the proposal of the Bureau. (5) The selection of an educational/personal assistant shall be carried out by a five-member committee from among the employees of the school with a resource centre, which shall be formed by the Principal of the school. (6) The regulations for the educational assistant and the personal assistant, the description of the competencies and work tasks shall be determined by the Minister, at the proposal of the Bureau. (7) The educational and personal assistants shall be employed for a determined period of time by the schools with a resource centre. The funds for the educational assistants and personal assistants shall be provided by the Ministry's Budget. (8) If there is no primary school with a resource center or a support center on a municipal level, learning support for students with disabilities shall be provided by the nearest primary school with a resource center or a school with a support centre from the nearest municipality.

According to the Law, the students with special educational needs are clearly defined.

Students with special educational needs⁴

Article 35

Students with special educational needs, in terms of this Law, shall be: - students with disabilities shall be those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairments, who, in interaction with various social barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in the society on an equal basis with others, - students with behavioural disorders or emotional problems or with specific learning difficulties, and – students who come from unfavourable socio-economic, cultural, and/or linguistically deprived environments.

The Law also provides for a review of the assessment of students with disabilities, indicating that their assessment is adjusted according to their needs.

Assessment of students with disabilities⁵

Article 139

(1) In the first period, the achievements of the student who is following the teaching according to the IEP shall be evaluated descriptively. (2) In the second and third period, the achievements of the student who is following the teaching according to the IEP can be evaluated descriptively and numerically. (3) The students following the teaching according to a modified program, shall be evaluated descriptively during all periods of the primary education according to the individual achievement of the set results. (4) The manner of assessment of students with disabilities shall be adjusted according to their needs: written tests in Braille, enlarged format, in an electronic version, audio format, etc., use of assistive technology, longer time to take the test, help with reading the test questions, supervised breaks and a flexible curriculum, the presence of an educational assistant. (5) The manner of assessing the students with disabilities shall be prescribed by the Minister, at the proposal of the Bureau.

Review of relevant documents that determine inclusive education

Concept of inclusive education

The inclusive education within the concept is intended to be realized through three different levels of support within the regular schools in cooperation with the parents/guardians, namely:

Level I – general support

General support is provided at the school level, in which, in addition to the teacher, it is intended to include experts who keep records of the student's progress, while the main learning outcome is to

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

ensure the individualization and differentiation of the teaching process by applying appropriate teaching methods and means⁶.

Level II – Intensified support

It is provided when the general support does not give the expected results, and according to the concept, it is given when the school inclusive team and expert bodies make an assessment through observation and identification of the existing capacities/functionalities of the child, as well as the areas where difficulties arise, therefore a plan is made for interventions through which all activities are planned in advance⁷.

Level III – Special support

It follows after the previous two levels do not give the expected results, i.e. after a recommendation was made to provide special support following the assessment of the expert bodies for functional assessment. The special support differs from the intensive support by the additional efforts and multiple interventions.

What is of particular importance for the Roma community is that the concept of education defines the educational mediators, who are engaged through a public call by the Ministry of Education and Science, and whose role is to work with children who come from socially disadvantaged environments, and with those who are outside of the educational system⁸. According to the data from the Draft-Strategy for Roma 2022-2030⁹, the role of the 35 engaged educational mediators is to inform about the possibilities, access to schools, conducting mediation meetings between parents and teachers, with a special review of the needs of the vulnerable groups in the area of education¹⁰.

Concept of primary education

Inclusivity is also mentioned within the Concept of primary education, adopted by Decision no. 08-3980/1 from March 3, 2021¹¹.

Inclusiveness is emphasized within this document, while care is taken to ensure the enrolment and regular attendance of students from vulnerable groups who are at risk of early school leaving¹². Removal of all teaching content that encourages discrimination against certain groups, as well as adjustment of the space and accessibility to school premises and teaching aids for students with special educational needs¹³.

⁶ Education concept (2019). Ministry of Education and Science.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Draft-Strategy for Roma 2022-2030.

¹⁰ Concept of education.

¹¹ <https://mon.gov.mk/stored/document/Koncepcija%20MK.pdf>

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

Guide for the work of the school inclusive team (SIT)

The Guide for the work of the school inclusive team (SIT) is an extremely important document for the implementation of inclusive work, which determines the protocols and instruments for the work of the (SIT), and presents a series of examples of instruments and document models from the 6 areas, namely¹⁴:

Area 1: Scope and student involvement

Area 2: Planning of educational work

Area 3: Teaching and learning support

Area 4: Student support

Area 5: Partnerships with parents, the local and business community

Area 6: Gathering information, analysis and evaluation of inclusiveness

Each of the areas is defined in detail, and practical examples are given within the document for easier implementation of inclusive education in primary schools by the SIT.

Annual programs of the five primary schools with resource centers

-Zlaten Sremec's program

-Idnina's program

-Sveti Kliment Ohrdiski Novo Selo's program

-OU "Maca Ovcharova" Veles' program

Strategy for Roma 2022 - 2030

In February, 2022, the Strategy for Roma 2022-2030 was published, which is preceded by the Decade of Roma and the Strategy for Roma 2014-2020.

A novelty in the new Strategy are the newly added areas, i.e. in addition to the previous ones: health, employment, housing, education and culture – discrimination and antigypsyism, poverty and civil registration have been added¹⁵.

Key challenges in the area of poverty: systemic and long-term measures for street children, establishing a support system for homeless people at a local level, high rates of children not attending preschool and primary education, developing a support system for the elderly/frail persons at a local level.

¹⁴ Guide for the work of the school inclusive team (SIT). Primary education program.

¹⁵ <https://www.mtsp.gov.mk/content/pdf/2022/Strategija%20za%20inkluzija%20na%20Romite%202022-2030%2003-02-2022%20finalna%20verzija.pdf>

Challenges in the field of discrimination and antigypsyism: recognizing the concept of antigypsyism in public policies and domestic legislation, improvement of the institutional and political framework for antigypsyism, support for victims of discrimination and access to justice, dismantling and prevention of systemic discrimination against Roma.

The following challenges are defined within the area of civil registration: Assessment of the number of Roma at risk of statelessness, improvement of the institutional and political framework for undocumented persons, etc.

Special schools are mentioned in the section of the area of education, where the transformation of special schools into resource centers that help in the full inclusion of children with special educational needs in regular school is emphasized.

4. Institutional set-up¹⁶

Preschool institutions – environments in which the first identification of some of the children with special educational needs is carried out and help is offered to encourage the child's development and provide additional support. They facilitate the vertical transition towards the education of children with special needs.

Schools (primary and high) – recognize and make efforts to respond to the needs of all children, and create a stimulating school environment for the participation and learning of each student through adaptation.

Educational assistants – participate in the teaching under the supervision of the teacher, to improve the learning process. They work by facilitating group work and occasionally work individually with certain students in order to strengthen their skills.

Personal assistants – are engaged to support students with disabilities in performing daily activities. The purpose of the support is for the personal assistant to provide the student with a disability with appropriate individual practical help in: moving, maintaining personal hygiene, feeding, dressing and communicating with others.

Educational mediators – are engaged for children who come from socially deprived environments and for those who are outside the education system. Their role is to inform about the possibilities and access to schools, sensitizing the population and school employees about the specifics of vulnerable groups in education. Taking actions to prevent premature school leaving. Mediators are engaged through a public call through the Ministry of Education and Science.

Primary schools with a resource center – with the development of inclusion, special schools are transformed into schools with a resource centre and become national, i.e. regional centres that offer their professional, material and spatial resources to students with disabilities, their families and the educational staff.

¹⁶ The institutional set-up is taken from the Concept of inclusive education

Ministry of Education and Science (MES) – creates inclusive policies, provides adequate resources to schools (human, material and financial) for the implementation of inclusive education, monitors inclusive practices and resources in order to provide additional support to students in need. MES should develop a strategy for the transition of children with disabilities from special to regular schools, and support the process of transformation of special schools into schools with resource centres.

Bureau for Development of Education (BDE) – advocates for the advancement and improvement of teaching and learning of students with special educational needs, through the realization of developmental research in the area of inclusive education.

State Examination Centre (SEC) – defines and enables adjustments in the process of external measurement of student achievements and state tests, in order to meet the needs of students with special educational needs.

State Education Inspectorate (SEI) – monitors and evaluates inclusive practices in each school based on clearly defined indicators.

Ministry of Labour and Social Policy (MLSP) – monitors and promotes the work of preschool institutions, day care centers and other social institutions that offer support to schools through their services. Through regional centres for social work, the MLSP participates in the detection of children with special educational needs who are outside of education. It provides for the licencing of service providers that offer social services for persons with disabilities.

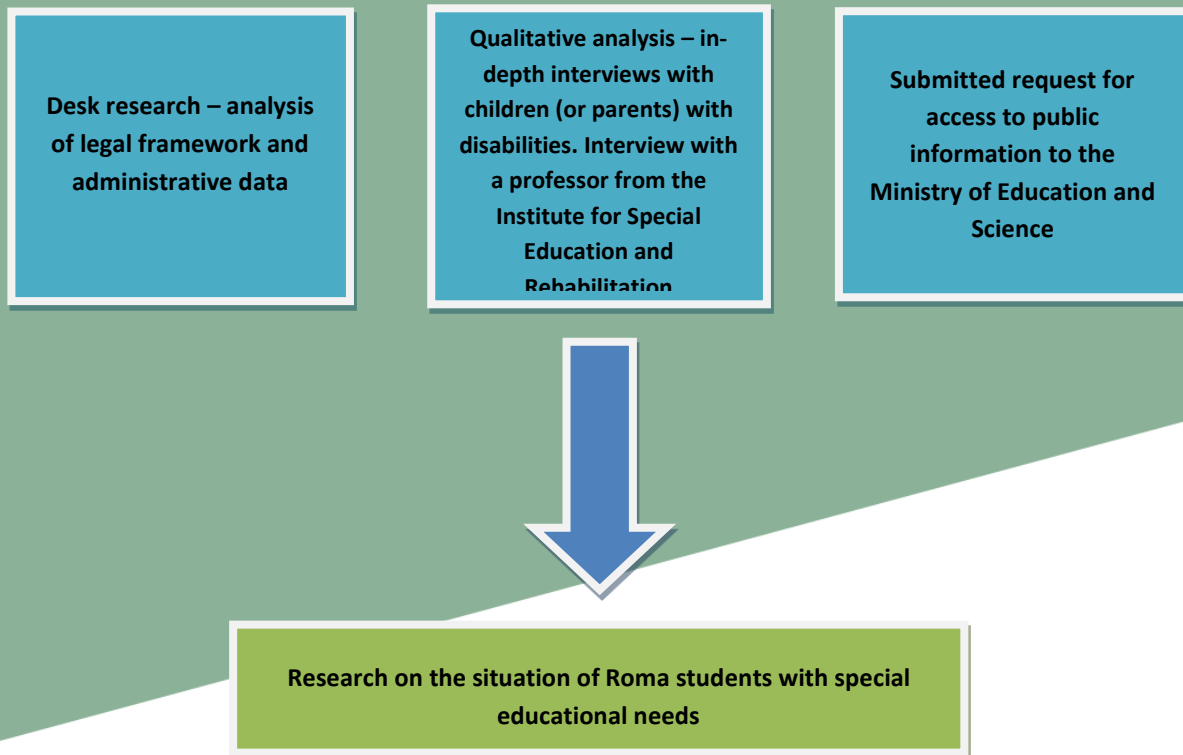
Day care centres – with their expertise and competencies, they offer support to schools, and also have the opportunity to create new services at a local level. They are under the competencies of the MLSP.

Professional bodies for functional assessment – their role is to perform functional assessment in accordance with the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health – ICF, of children or young people who need additional support to make an official decision about the type of support, the learning context, and provide recommendations for the parent on how to support the child.

Local self-government – monitors and supports the process of inclusive education at the local level and supports interdepartmental cooperation, provides services at the local level to improve the inclusion of children with special educational needs. It is responsible for improving the physical accessibility of schools, as well as all public facilities. It is responsible for partitioning.

5. Methodology

In the period from September to October 2021, interviews were conducted for the needs of the research of the conditions of students with special educational needs. The research used an integrative approach, which includes a combination of three methods, namely:



The desk research includes an analysis of the legal framework that regulates primary education, i.e. an analysis of the Law on Primary Education. Analysis of all relevant documents, including: **Concept of inclusive education, concept of primary education, work guide of the school inclusive team (SIT), annual programs of the five primary schools with resource centres, Strategy for Roma 2022 – 2030**. In addition, the institutional set-up was also analysed, as well as that of all stakeholders in relation to students with special educational needs.

The qualitative analysis includes 25 semi-structured in-depth interviews. The interviews were conducted in 4 different municipalities: Chair, Kumanovo, Tetovo and Stip.

The structure of the questions addressed the following main points:

- **Family background** – socio-economic status, number of members, family ties, housing and living conditions, profession and working conditions).

- **School** – level of education, primary school experience, relationships with teachers and other school staff, experience with special schools, personal experiences as Roma.

- **Process** – how the school journey was traced, (dis)satisfaction with the present/future, how to improve the situation.

- **Other** – role models (teacher, family member), connections with other institutions (non-governmental organizations, religious places, municipality, etc.), legal regulation, self-sacrifice and degree of social optimism.

Additionally, besides the interviews with the parents of the students with disabilities, an interview was also conducted with a professor from the Institute for Special Education and Rehabilitation, and the key conclusions and recommendations from that interview are shown in the **Conclusions and Recommendations** section.

6. Presentation Of Obtained Findings

In relation to the request for access to public information regarding the number of Roma students in specialized schools, the answer is as follows:

“The Ministry of Education and Science does not keep data by ethnicity for schools”¹⁷.

However, despite the answer, the number of students by ethnicity can be seen from the annual programs of the resource centers (former specialized schools).

In the continuation of the report, there is a display of publicly available information for Roma students in resource centers or former specialized schools.

Special primary school Dr. Zlaten Sremec - Skopje¹⁸

Table 1. Special Public School Dr. Zlaten Sremec - central

Sex	Roma	
	F	M
I - V	0	0
VI - IX	0	1
I - IX	0	1

¹⁷ Annex 1 and 2. Request for access to public information and response from the Ministry of Education and Science.

¹⁸ The presented data are taken from the annual program of “Dr. Zlaten Sremec”.

Table 2. Students in regional classes

Primary School Kuzman Shapkarev		
Roma		
Sex	F	M
I - V	2	2
VI - IX	0	1
I – IX	2	3

Primary School Strasho Pindzur		
Roma		
Sex	F	M
I - V	0	1
VI - IX	0	3
I – IX	0	4

Primary School Gjorche Petrov		
Roma		
Sex	F	M
I - V	0	0
VI - IX	0	2
I – IX	0	2

There are no Roma students in the regional schools Public School Aleksandar Makedonski, Public School Diturija and Public School Naim Fraseri.

Table 3. Public School with a resource centre “Maca Ovcharova” – Veles¹⁹

Roma		
Sex	F	M
I – III	0	2
IV – VI	2	3
VII – IX	0	1
I – IX	2	6

¹⁹ The displayed data is taken from the annual program 2021/22 of Public School “Maca Ovcharova” - Veles

Table 4. Special Public School "Idnina"

	Roma	
Sex	F	M
I – IX	11	8

From the aforementioned data, it can be seen that there are a total of 39 Roma students in the resource centres for which there is published data (15 female and 24 male Roma students). The largest number of Roma students in the analysed resource centres (former special schools) is in Special Primary School "Idnina" (19 students). The question arises as to why the Ministry of Education and Science in their response to the request for access to public information, pointed out that records are not kept on the number of students by ethnicity, yet from the annual programs of the resource centres (former specialized schools) it is evident that such statistics exist.

Presentation of findings from the qualitative analysis

Family background – socio-economic status, number of members, family ties, housing and living conditions, profession and working conditions)

Chair, Topaana

The structure of families in which Roma students live, which are part of former Specialized schools, ranges from 4 to 11 family members. The houses are too small and there are mainly 1 to 2 different rooms where the entire family lives. Also, the roofs of the houses do not meet the standards, so during torrential rains, the houses may get completely flooded. A part of the interviewees do not have access to a sewage network, nor electricity, and the proximity between the houses further increases the risk of a rapid spread of potential accidents, such as fire.

From a financial perspective, these families are unstable, due to the fact that usually only one member is engaged in informal work, i.e. collecting secondary raw materials (iron, plastic and other raw materials), which is how the families survive financially. The other work alternative in these families is for the women to work privately as hygienists in other residential facilities.

What especially stands out in Topaana (Chair) compared to other municipalities, is that Roma often foster children with disabilities from other ethnic communities.

The aforementioned refers mainly to Roma families who live in Topaana in substandard conditions, and are foster families of children with disabilities. Within the report, additional focus will be placed on foster families in Topaana. The interviews were conducted with the parents, however all of the questions are about the children.

Shtip

The number of family members ranges from 4 to 5 members, with everyone having good relationships with one another. The houses are small and have 2-3 different rooms. Out of 5 interviewees, only one of them is employed. The family of the first participant survives from the pension received by his grandfather, and all other members are unemployed. The second interviewee singled out the social (old-age) pension as the only income in the family. The third and fourth interviewees are beneficiaries of the guaranteed minimum assistance (GMA), child allowance and old-age pension, while the last interviewee points out the parental allowance for third child as the only income in the family.

Tetovo

The family structure in Tetovo is similar, there are generally 6 or more members. They live in small houses, and survive solely by taking advantage of social rights, such as GMA, carer's allowance and child allowance. In general, the parents of all 5 interviewees are unemployed.

Kumanovo

All of the interviewees live in substandard conditions, similar to the other municipalities, they live in small houses with 2 to 3 different rooms, and the relationships between the family members are always assessed as good and close.

Out of 5 interviewees, two are employed, one has a father who is employed, one child has no income in the family, i.e. his parents are engaged in collecting secondary waste, and the last interviewee does not use any help from public institutions.

School – level of education, primary school experience, relationships with teachers and other school staff, special school experience, personal experiences as Roma.

In **Chair, Topaana**, some of the interviewees completed their education in a special school, namely: "Idnina" and "Sveti Naum". Some of the interviewees attended only one to two years of primary school. The experience of those who completed the school is divided into positive and negative in relation to the professional staff. Some of the interviewees specifically emphasized that some of the teachers were their favourites and they were generally satisfied with the special school.

Afrodita²⁰: "The child goes to the special school "Idnina" 4-5 hours a day. He did not attend any kind of classes before, this is his first time in "Idnina". He likes his teachers, he likes to learn, but the other children insulted him because of his leg. By his friends because he is disabled, because of his leg. It's similar in that school, there are children with Down syndrome, with hearing problems and speech problems."

An extremely important aspect is the journey of the student, i.e. who decided he/she should enrol in a special school.

²⁰ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

Afrodita²¹: *“We previously had a proposal, we wanted to go to a regular primary school, but the teacher did not accept him because of the way that he walks and because she wouldn’t be able to pay much attention to him, but after my mother died I had to take it upon myself because she was helping me, so I went to get an expert opinion and categorization. Yes, we had some misunderstandings because there are stairs and he won’t be able to climb them, I got into a fight with the teacher and the pedagogue. The teacher made a bigger problem, because she did not want to accept him because he has special needs.*”

In **Shtip**, three interviewees completed special high school in “Iskra” Shtip, and two graduated from the special primary school “Vancho Prkje”, also in Shtip. The students who completed primary and high school rate their experience in those two schools as good, and have special compliments for the school staff.

They rate the regular educational institutions as discriminatory and as institutions that segregate the students, which is one of the main reasons why they transferred to special schools, but according to them, completing special schools puts them in a better position on the labour market because of the benefits for these people. However, in general, the interviewees indicate that they are discriminated against in all areas of their lives and are beneficiaries of social protection.

When asked: “Now, as an adult, do you think it is better for a small child to be sent to a special school?”, to which Redzep²² responded: “It’s good, to have the documents so he could work tomorrow”.

The first participant was referred to a special school by the Centre for Social Work, the second was referred after he had a physical altercation with other students and was sent directly to the special school “Vancho Prkje”, which is where the third participant also ended up after being taken there directly by his parents. The fourth and fifth participants also ended up in “Vancho Prkje” after previously attending regular schools, where one of them was transferred by their own will, while the other on the recommendation of the regular school. Out of all five, only one considers himself to be a person with a disability, while the other four do not.

Ferdi²³: *The social services advised me: You can’t go to another school, you have to go directly to a primary school in Shtip (special class) where you will learn and graduate, so you can go directly to (another special school).*

When asked if he wanted to attend the special school, Ferdi²⁴ answered “Yes”, but when asked “Have you ever thought that you are a person with a disability?”, he answered “No”.

Elvir²⁵: *“I didn’t want to go to that school. I studied in Dimitar Vlahov, but there was a problem because of a fight, so they transferred me to that school.”*

²¹ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²² The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²³ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²⁴ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

What all of the interviewees in **Tetovo** have in common is that they refused to share much information with the interviewer. Two of them completed their education in a special primary school.

In **Kumanovo**, two of the interviewees completed their education in a special high school, the third completed primary school, there is no information about the fourth, and the last interviewee completed primary education. The students who completed their education in a special school also rate their experience as positive.

Regarding how they ended up in a special school, the following statement confirms that not speaking the Macedonian language was one of the reasons for sending Roma children to special schools.

Shevket²⁶: *“When my mother wanted to enrol me in primary school, they interviewed me, but because as a child I didn’t speak Macedonian very well, they decided to transfer me to a special school where there were several other Roma children who studied there because they didn’t speak Macedonian.” I never thought I was a person with a disability”.*

When asked “Have you ever thought that you are a person with a disability?”, Shevket’s answer was **“No, never”**.

While on the question: “Is this school better than the traditional one? What do you think?” the answer was, as follows:

Shevket²⁷: *“Yes, this school is good for children who have developmental disabilities, but not for children who do not speak Macedonian and have no other developmental disabilities. I don’t think they do that anymore.”*

- Process – how the school journey was traced, (dis)satisfaction with the present/future, how to improve the situation

There is a visible dissatisfaction among the interviewees from **Chair, Topaana** regarding their life journeys, and they also clearly point out that they do not foresee a good future for themselves. They believe that the main problem is the discrimination against them as a Roma community by state institutions, and they believe that they are victims of double discrimination because they are Roma and have disabilities.

All of the interviewees were unanimous in their answers that the institutions that work with people with disabilities should be strengthened, the standard and learning conditions should be raised, but also the lives of people with disabilities in the country should be improved in general. It is also necessary to have a greater number of Roma who work in this area at a local, national and international level.

²⁵ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²⁶ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²⁷ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

Perijan²⁸: “I would improve their attitude towards the children so that it’s not different. They are understanding, intelligent, bright and smart children, they are just labelled. Otherwise, the attitude should be the same as with all other children”.

All 5 interviewees from **Shtip** are dissatisfied with their current lives, and also have no expectations that their situation will improve in the future.

The following key points were highlighted from the conducted interviews: a larger budget and support from the Government and municipalities for persons with disabilities, employment and reduction of discrimination towards people with disabilities in educational and public institutions. There was also a specific proposal for Roma mentors for students in primary school for easier learning of the Macedonian language.

The situation in **Tetovo** is similar, the interviewees believe that the country should take serious steps to improve the situation of people with disabilities.

Jema²⁹: “Giving financial help to such persons to provide them with all necessary conditions for visiting speech therapists, defectologists, etc., because that is very expensive for us.”

- Other – role models (teacher, family member), connections with other institutions (non-governmental organizations, religious places, municipality, etc.), legal regulation, self-sacrifice and degree of social optimism.

Several of the interviewees from Topaana, Chair pointed out that their mothers are their role models in life, others singled out their teachers, and some their fathers.

Denisa³⁰: “Me and my husband. That’s when he’s the safest, when we’re at home. Or when I went there (to the school), when he sees me, he immediately starts looking for me”.

All of them stated that they have good support from the local civil society organizations from which they receive current information that is useful to them.

In **Shtip**, all of the participants singled out their teachers as their role models. Additionally, they emphasized that they have good relationships with civil society organizations and mosques. Four of them had low social optimism, and one had high social optimism. The situation is similar in Kumanovo, the only difference being that all interviewees had low social optimism.

7. Conclusions

The following conclusions can be drawn from the interviews conducted with the parents of the students who attended special schools:

²⁸ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

²⁹ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

³⁰ The name is fictitious in order to protect the identity.

- From the aspect of family background, the families of students with disabilities usually consist of 4 to 11 members. In general, they are families with a lower socio-economic status that mainly survive on social protection (guaranteed minimum assistance, child allowance, old-age pension, etc.), and most of the time there is only one or no employed member in the family. Some of the interviewees point out that precisely because of certain privileges, such as free meals, transportation and other allowances, they thought it would be better to enrol their children in special schools.
- Regarding the school, most of the students' parents point out that their children successfully completed the educational process in special schools. For most of them, the reasons for transferring to special schools were, as follows: personal preference, lack of knowledge of the Macedonian language, recommendation from a centre for social work or a teacher from regular schools, and problematic behaviour. Also, some of the interviewees point out that due to the discrimination in regular schools, they enrolled their children in special schools, as well as because of the belief that they would have better opportunities on the labour market if they graduate from special schools.
- Regarding the children's journeys, some parents also accuse the double discrimination, due to their ethnicity and their disabilities. All of the interviewees warn that the country should take more serious steps towards improving the situation of people with disabilities.
- Most of the students see their parents as role models, and some of them also see their teachers. Their main source of information is religious buildings and local civil organizations.

8. Recommendations

- In the last 5 years, allowances for people with disabilities have increased by almost 10%, however, this in itself is not enough if people need to set aside from those funds to pay for a defectologist, a speech therapist, therefore all of the services that they need, which are related to their disability, should be provided to them free of charge. Early intervention centres, instead of being paid for privately, should be made available to parents, i.e. provided free of charge, since not all households can afford it.
- Many socially disadvantaged families decided to have their children study in special schools because they would have free transportation, meals and full-day stay there, but also because of the low expectations the schools had for them. It is also necessary to work with parents so they could have higher expectations for their children's educational achievements through campaigns with successful Roma, despite the socio-economic aspect, which the state should undoubtedly ensure is at a higher level through other institutions.
- Transformation of educational assistants into educational assistance in order to remove the label from children, and the person providing educational assistance should take care of more than one child, i.e. those who will need such assistance.
- Monitoring of students with special needs should begin after early detection is established, i.e. from preschool education, while all the data and information should be transferred to primary education, and then to high school, thus preparing the educational institutions for an easier transition from one educational level to another.

- By including students with disabilities in regular teaching, it is necessary to work on their engagement in teaching, i.e. to avoid a situation in which there will be low expectations for them and their withdrawal and passiveness during teaching.
- Professional orientation should start from grade school, instead of later grades.
- It is necessary to integrate the subject of life skills into regular teaching, since it would be of great benefit to all students, and especially to people with disabilities. This type of subjects would be interesting for students, would involve more teamwork, but would also be different from classic face-to-face teaching in which the teaching material is only verbally transmitted by the teachers.
- It is necessary to establish a more dynamic system that will prefer constant re-examination of the individual plan for working with students, but also a tendency to reduce and exclude educational assistance. Since in the case of the Roma community, those children who, due to insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language, were transferred to special schools, after reaching a certain level of knowledge of the language, still faced low expectations for them and remained permanently in the category of students with special educational needs, even though in reality they did not need it anymore.
- The country should provide regular teachers with free training on skills for working with students with special educational needs.
- On-line teaching is especially important for students who are undergoing long-term hospital treatment. In the past, teaching materials were given that the children were forced to learn on their own, however, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the country now has experience with on-line teaching and it is necessary to provide conditions for following regular teaching to those children who, due to justified health reasons, cannot attend school in person.
- The education system at the moment is adjusted towards students with average intelligence, and is very little focused on those who are outside the average (above or below).
- In foster families, children should be provided with learning resources, and foster carers should be trained, since some of those children with disabilities who live in foster families are not included in the education system at all. Group homes or foster families should be a temporary residence of these children, and the country should work on the independence of those individuals, where applicable.
- The local government, with the support of the central government, should accept greater competencies for foster families and group homes.

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10. Appendices

Appendix 1:

До: Министерство за образование и наука на Република Северна Македонија

Ул. „Св. Кирил и Методиј“ број 54, 1000 Скопје

Република Северна Македонија

Барање

за пристап до информации од јавен карактер

Врз основа на член 4 и член 12 од Законот за слободен пристап до информации од јавен карактер (“Службен весник на Република Северна Македонија бр. 13/ 1.2.2006 год.), од имателот ја барам следната информација од јавен карактер:

1. Ве молиме да ни одговорите според етничка припадност (Македонци, Албанци, Турци, Роми, Власи и Срби и други) колку ученици има во петте основни училишта со ресурсен центар ‘Златан Сремец’ и ‘Иднина’ од Скопје, Завод за рехабилитација на деца со оштетен слух, говор, глас и други проблеми во развојот ‘Кочо Рацин’ од Битола, ‘Климент Охридски’ од Ново Село и ОУРЦ ‘Маца Ѓоргиева Овчарова’ од Велес“ во последните четири учебни години – 2018/19, 2019/20, 2020/21 и 2021/22.
2. Ве молиме да ни одговорите колку од ангажираните образовни асистенти во петте горенаведени основни училишта со ресурсен центар според етничка припадност (Македонци, Албанци, Турци, Роми, Власи и Срби).

Форма во која се бара информацијата:

а) увид

б) препис

в) фотокопија

електронски запис

д) друго _____

(се наведува бараната форма, со заокружување)

РЕПУБЛИКА СЕВЕРНА МАКЕДОНИЈА
REPUBLIKA E MAQEDONISE SE VERIUT
МИНИСТЕРСТВО ЗА ОБРАЗОВАНИЕ И НАУКА
MINISTRIA E ARSIMIT DHE SHKENCES
СКОПЈЕ - ШКУП

Примено: Prilozhenie:	19-05-2022		
Орг. един. Nj. org.	Број: Numri:	Прилог: Shtojce:	Вредност: Vlerat:

Appendix 1.1

Начин на доставување на информацијата:

а) по пошта

б) телефон

в) факс

е) **е-маил** muhamed.ajvaz1996@gmail.com

д) друго _____

(се наведува бараниот начин, со заокружување)

Барател на информацијата:

Регионална Ромска Образовна Младинска Асоцијација

Кратово 1360 Тошо Куковски бб, Кратово 1360

Емаил: muhamed.ajvaz1996@gmail.com

(Правна поука: Барателот не е должен да ги наведе и образложи причините за барањето, но треба да наведе дека станува збор за барање за слободен пристап до информација од јавен карактер).

Место: Скопје
Датум 18.5.2022

Appendix 2. Response from the Ministry of Education and Science

Бр. 03. 5916/2
Скопје, _____ година
30 -05- 2022

ДО
Регионална Ромска Образовна Младинска Асоцијација
Тошо Куковски бб
1360 Кратово

ПРЕДМЕТ: Одговор на ваше барање

Почитуван,

Во врска со вашето барање за пристап до информации од јавен карактер, а кое се однесува на податоци поделени по етничка припадност, Ве известуваме дека Министерството за образование и наука не води податоци по етничка припадност за училиштата.

Со почит,

Подготвил: Анастасија Трајковска



МИНИСТЕР,
Мисир Стојан Шаќири