

# **Analytical Report PHARE RAXEN\_CC Minority Education**

## **RAXEN\_CC National Focal Point Bulgaria**

Open Society Institute – Sofia  
Bulgarian Helsinki Committee

Schooling of ethnic minorities  
in Bulgaria

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# **1. Executive Summary**

The schooling of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria is considered in the present report from three perspectives: in terms of the equal access of ethnic minority children to quality education, free of discrimination; in terms of the possibility to study mother tongue, as well as ethnic minority history and culture, and in terms of the schooling provided in the system of schools for children with special needs, in which some ethnic minorities are over-represented.

The problem with the access to quality education is particularly serious for the Roma minority and to a lesser degree for the Turkish minority. The large majority of Roma children study in segregated schools in the Roma neighbourhoods where the quality of education is drastically lower than that offered in the schools of their Bulgarian peers. These schools have poor material resources, low qualified teachers, and inadequate supervision. Other Roma children are placed in special schools for children with developmental problems or in schools for juvenile delinquents. The placement procedures allow for considerable discretion and arbitrary targeting of children from the Roma minority. Both types of schools offer education of a lower quality than that provided to other children. The schooling of Turkish minority children is also of a relatively poorer quality because of the higher poverty and isolation in the regions, populated by Turks.

The legislative provisions that regulate the study of mother tongue in Bulgaria's public education system limit the possibility for smaller minority groups and for minorities living in areas with predominantly Bulgarian population to exercise this right. Even ethnic minorities, such as Roma, for example, that have been officially recognised and are large enough to allow for creating mother tongue classes, currently do not study their language because of discrimination and lack of commitment on behalf of authorities. For these reasons the study of mother tongue by ethnic minority children is well organised and is carried out according to the provisions of the legislation currently in force only for some minority groups, such as Turks, Armenians, and Jews. For others, such as Romanians and Greeks, it is partially organized.

The study of ethnic minority history and culture, with a few exceptions, is limited only to those ethnic minority children who study their mother tongue. Some tentative attempts to overcome this have been made in the new textbooks for first grade, which were introduced in the school year 2003/2004 and contain for the first time a Romany, a Turkish, and an Armenian fairytale.

The legislative background, policy, and practice regarding ethnic minority education in Bulgaria are undergoing reforms, which affect all aspects of ethnic minority schooling. Reform efforts are targeted to desegregating Roma education by eliminating segregated schools in Roma neighbourhoods; promoting the study of mother tongue, and changing the procedures for placing children in special schools in order to avoid discretion and arbitrary targeting of ethnic minority children. These reforms, however, do not address some problematic areas such as the connection between the formal recognition of a minority group

and the study of mother tongue, or the problem with “new minorities.” Moreover, for the time being reforms have only been made in the legislative framework and in some policy documents of the Ministry of Education and Science, without actually affecting the education systems, in which ethnic minority children study.

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### 3. Introduction

The attitude of the Bulgarian State towards members of ethnic minority groups in Bulgaria underwent a complex and vicissitudinous evolution.<sup>1</sup> The country began its democratic development in 1989, emerging from a period of suppression and denial of ethnic minority identity during communism. The culmination of this period was the campaign for forceful assimilation of Bulgarian Turks. The consequences of this policy also left a mark on the years of democratic changes. The restoring of ethnic minority rights was slow and difficult, and the ideological and political vestiges of the past can still be felt even today: in the continuing official non-recognition of the ethnic identity of Bulgarian Macedonians; in the discrimination against and segregation of Bulgarian Roma; in the obstacles confronting minorities in the process of practising non-conventional religious beliefs.<sup>2</sup>

According to the latest census of March 2001, ethnic minorities in Bulgaria account for 14 percent of the nearly eight million population of the country. The largest groups among them are Turks and Roma with 9.4 and 4.7 percent of the population respectively, the actual number of Roma being considerably higher than the officially recorded figure.<sup>3</sup>

The schooling of ethnic minorities in Bulgaria has some common characteristics, but also some specific features typical for each minority group. In the present report, the schooling of ethnic minorities will be considered from three perspectives: (1) in terms of the equal access to quality education and the problem of discrimination in the education system; (2) in terms of the possibility to study mother tongue, as well as ethnic minority history and culture, within the public education system; (3) in terms of the schooling provided in the system of schools for children with special educational needs, in which ethnic minorities, and especially Roma, are over-represented. All these aspects are problematic for Roma. The Turkish minority faces problems only with the first and second set of issues, while the remaining ethnic minorities have difficulties solely with the study of mother tongue and ethnic minority history and culture.

From these three perspectives ethnic minority schooling in Bulgaria will be analysed first in terms of legislative framework, and then in terms of practice. Some best practices designed to overcome the deficits of the system and encourage authorities to undertake some actions independently will also be presented.

The present report draws on:

- The official statistics and the sociological surveys on the topic from the last years;

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<sup>1</sup> For more details on the legislation and policy towards minorities in the history of Bulgaria see: Kanev, K. (1998) *Law and Politics on Ethnic and Religious Minorities in Bulgaria*, in: Krasteva, A. (ed) *Communities and Identities in Bulgaria*, Ravenna: Longo Editore, pp.55-93.

<sup>2</sup> For more details on the present status of minorities in Bulgaria see: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (November 2003), *Alternative report to the report submitted by Bulgaria pursuant to article 25, paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities*, available at: [http://www.bghelsinki.org/special/en/2003\\_Shadowrep\\_FCNM.doc](http://www.bghelsinki.org/special/en/2003_Shadowrep_FCNM.doc) (Accessed 8 January 2004).

<sup>3</sup> See Annex 1 – Ethnic composition of Bulgaria's population according to the March 1, 2001 census.

- Analysis of the Bulgarian legislation on the minority education;
- Official publications of the international organizations, including the European Commission;
- Publications of independent researchers and local and international non-governmental organizations.

### 3.1. AN OVERVIEW OF THE BULGARIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Education in Bulgaria is obligatory for children between the ages of 6 and 16. It is divided into four levels: preschool – one year before entering school; primary – 1<sup>st</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade, basic – 5<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade, and secondary – 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade. Curricula, distribution of classes, students assessment, qualification of teachers, textbooks are based on state educational standards which are prepared for every subject and every grade. The compulsory preschool year can be implemented in kindergarten or in school.

The Bulgarian school network is as follows - a total of 3,680 schools, including 466 elementary schools, grades 1-4, 1940 basic schools, grades 1-8, and 580 comprehensive schools, grades 1-12, plus approx. 500 vocational schools and 200 schools for children with special needs. Most of the schools are financed out of municipal budgets.

The Bulgarian education system is centralized. Most of the school curriculum is determined through acts adopted at the national level. The **Ministry of Education and Science (MES)** determines the national priorities in education and oversees the fulfillment of the criteria set up by the laws and the other acts. The municipal authorities in 262 municipalities administer open and close schools, control the budgets of the educational institutions and manage school property.

Qualification of teachers is provided by three **Teacher Training Institutes**. Teachers' qualification is divided into five levels. In-service training is not obligatory and the attainment of a higher qualification level depends on the will of the respective headmaster and the ability of the teacher to spare financial resources for a qualification course.

## 4. Legislation and policies

According to the Bulgarian *Constitution* the provisions of international law of the treaties have a direct force and supersede any domestic legislation stipulating otherwise: “Any international treaties which have been ratified by the constitutionally established procedure, promulgated and having come into force with respect to the Republic of Bulgaria, shall be considered part of the domestic legislation of the country. They shall supersede any domestic legislation stipulating otherwise.”<sup>4</sup> However, in the three branches of law that have a bearing on minority schooling, the provisions of domestic legislation are primarily enforced, because law-enforcement institutions in Bulgaria are not familiar with the norms of international law of the treaties and do not apply them.

### 4.1. PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

Bulgarian legislation provides an extensive and progressive legal framework for the protection against discrimination, although many anti-discrimination provisions are still not being enforced. The leading anti-discrimination norm is Article 6 of the Bulgarian Constitution, which states: “(1) All persons are born free and equal in dignity and rights. (2) All citizens shall be equal before the law. There shall be no privileges or restriction of rights on the grounds of race, nationality, ethnic self-identity, sex, origin, religion, education, opinion, political affiliation, personal or social status or property status.”<sup>5</sup> In an earlier ruling the Constitutional Court interpreted this provision as prohibiting any “privileges” on any of the grounds listed in Paragraph 2.<sup>6</sup> In the Constitutional Court’s interpretation the term “privilege” acquired a very broad meaning. Thus, the ruling in effect precluded the possibility to take positive action in favour of ethnic minorities in any public sphere in Bulgaria, even if it were meant to remedy past discrimination.

With the adoption of the *Discrimination Protection Act* in September 2003 this approach was left in the past. This act fully transposes anti-discrimination directives 43/2000 and 78/2000 of the European Commission and creates a comprehensive legal framework, which provides for an adequate administrative and judicial mechanism for fighting discrimination. The special administrative body for combating discrimination, which the Act created, has broad powers to investigate specific cases and impose sanctions. The act stipulates that “the measures in education and schooling designed to guarantee the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities” do not constitute discrimination “inasmuch as and as long as such measures are necessary”.<sup>7</sup> Chapter II of the act provides for special measures to ensure protection of the right to education and schooling. Under its provisions, central and local government authorities are obliged to take necessary action to prevent racial segregation in educational institutions, while heads of educational institutions are required to take effective

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<sup>4</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 5, Par. 4, State Gazette No 56 (13.07.1991), amended State Gazette No 85 (26.09.2003). Here and below the Bulgarian laws and court rulings are cited from sources in Bulgarian.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, Art. 6.

<sup>6</sup> Constitutional Court Ruling No 14 of November 10, 1992, State Gazette No 93 (17.11.1992).

<sup>7</sup> Discrimination Protection Act, Art. 7, Par. 1, Section 16, State Gazette No 86 (30.09.2003).



measures to overcome discrimination in their schools.<sup>8</sup> The act entered into force on January 1, 2004.

In addition to the general legal framework, the key acts in the sphere of education also contain anti-discrimination provisions. *The Public Education Act* states: “No discrimination or privileges based on grounds of race, nationality, sex, ethnic or social origin, religion and social status shall be permitted.”<sup>9</sup> Such a provision also exists in the *Higher Education Act* although it allows for exceptions in view of the specifics of some fields of study: “No privileges or limitations shall be allowed in higher education on account of age, race, nationality, ethnic identity, sex, social background, political views and denomination with such exceptions as the statute of the higher education institution shall exclusively make in accordance with the specific features of the training and the future profession.”<sup>10</sup> These exceptions, however, must be consistent with the general anti-discrimination provisions. The anti-discrimination provisions of the two main acts, regulating education in Bulgaria, are enforced through administrative channels by the Ministry of Education and Science, as well as by the courts.

One of the key problems in the schooling of Roma in Bulgaria is the territorial segregation of the education system. In the past this territorial segregation, which required Roma children who lived in separate neighbourhoods to study in the local “Roma” schools, was established by law. The provisions, which allowed for a “territorial division” of schools, were gradually eliminated after 1989. The last of these provisions, which existed in the *Public Education Act Implementing Regulation*, was abolished with the April 2003 amendments to this regulation.

Since the adoption of the *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, in April 1999, the official policy of the Bulgarian Government has been targeted to desegregating Roma education as a means for overcoming the discrimination against Roma.<sup>11</sup> Besides the desegregation of Roma schools, the Framework Programme outlines five other specific problem areas, in which measures are suggested for countering discrimination in Roma education. These include: reducing the number of Roma children in special schools; introducing measures to combat racism in the classroom; providing possibilities for the study of Romany language in school; facilitating the access of Roma to higher education, and organising literacy courses for adult Roma.

For several years however the Framework Programme has remained on paper only, and is not being adequately implemented even now. In September 2002 the Ministry of Education and Science issued an Instruction, with which it declared its intent to gradually integrate Roma

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<sup>8</sup> *ibid.*, Art. 29-35.

<sup>9</sup> Public Education Act, Art. 4, Par. 2, State Gazette No 86 (18.10.1991), latest amendment State Gazette No 29 (31.03.2003).

<sup>10</sup> Higher Education Act, Art. 4, State Gazette No 112 (27.12.1995), latest amendment State Gazette No 53 (28.05.2002).

<sup>11</sup> *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, Part 2.V. The Framework Programme has not been officially published by the Bulgarian Government. It is available in Bulgarian on the web site of the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee: [www.bghelsinki.org/zakoni/otherdocs/FrameworkProgram.doc](http://www.bghelsinki.org/zakoni/otherdocs/FrameworkProgram.doc) (Accessed 29 December 2003).

children in schools outside segregated neighbourhoods.<sup>12</sup> The Instruction requires municipal authorities to develop their own programmes for the desegregation of Roma schools. Subsequently, the Ministry of Education and Science and other government institutions reiterated their commitment to this policy in several documents, although no actual steps to desegregate Roma schools were taken on behalf of the State.

## 4.2. STUDY OF MOTHER TONGUE

The study of mother tongue by persons who belong to ethnic and linguistic minorities is guaranteed by the Bulgarian *Constitution*, which states: “Citizens whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian shall have the right to study and use their own language alongside the compulsory study of the Bulgarian language.”<sup>13</sup> *The Constitution*, however, does not stipulate which languages can be defined as mother tongues, where can they be studied and under what conditions. *The Public Education Act* states that mother tongue can be studied “in municipal schools under the protection and supervision of the State.”<sup>14</sup> *The Public Education Act Implementing Regulation* defines mother tongue as “the language, which the child speaks in his or her family.”<sup>15</sup>

Soon after the start of democratic changes, the study of mother tongue was introduced on an experimental basis in several schools in the country, mainly with students in primary and lower secondary school. This experimental stage continued for approximately three or four years. Meanwhile, training for Turkish language teachers was organised in several universities across the country. In the beginning of the school year 1994/1995 the Council of Ministers issued an *Ordinance No 183*, which stipulated that mother tongue shall be studied in municipal schools across the country as a “freely selectable subject” within the general basic education curriculum (from first to eighth grade).<sup>16</sup> This means that mother tongue was studied without any grades, the subject did not contribute to the summative assessment for completion of basic education level, and training was provided in addition to the compulsory curriculum. The teaching and learning of mother tongue has followed this pattern for five years. In 1999 with the adoption of the *Level of Education, General Education Minimum, and Curriculum Act* the study of mother tongue was included among the “compulsory selectable subjects.”<sup>17</sup> These subjects are offered in addition to the compulsory curriculum and are chosen by the students and their parents. They complement compulsory training in the education areas established by law,<sup>18</sup> and are subject to formal evaluation, which contributes to the annual summative assessment.<sup>19</sup> The establishment of mother tongue education as a

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<sup>12</sup> Republic of Bulgaria, Ministry of Education and Science (2002), *Organisation and Management of Teaching and Learning Activities in General, Professional and Special Schools*, Annex 10 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>13</sup> Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria, Art. 36, Par. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Public Education Act, Art. 8, Par. 2.

<sup>15</sup> Public Education Act Implementing Regulation, Art. 8, Par. 4, State Gazette No 68 (30.07.1999), latest amendment State Gazette No 99 (11.11.2003).

<sup>16</sup> Council of Ministers, Ordinance No 183 on the Study of Mother Tongue in Municipal Schools in Bulgaria (05.09.1994), State Gazette No 73 (09.09.1994)

<sup>17</sup> Level of Education, General Education Minimum and Curriculum Act, Art. 15, Par. 3, State Gazette No 67 (27.07.1999), latest amendment State Gazette No 29 (31.03.2003).

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, Art. 15, Par. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Public Education Act Implementing Regulation, Art. 111, Par. 1.

compulsory selectable subject created possibilities for studying mother tongue not only in primary and lower secondary school, but also in upper secondary school.

The organisation of mother tongue education as a compulsory selectable subject is spelled out in detail in two regulations of the Ministry of Education and Science. *Regulation No 7* of 2000 stipulates the minimum number of students necessary to form a group for the study of a compulsory selectable subject. For mother tongue this minimum is 11 students for general education schools and 8 students for special schools.<sup>20</sup> These requirements create serious obstacles for the study of mother tongue in schools with a low number of ethnic minority students, since they can hardly achieve the minimum. *Regulation No 6* of 2001 defines the number of class hours to be allocated to compulsory selectable subjects in basic education. The class hour distribution is as follows:

- 3 hours per week – for first grade students;
- 2 hours per week – for students in second through fourth grade;
- 3 hours per week – for students in fifth through eighth grade.<sup>21</sup>

### 4.3. SPECIAL SCHOOLS

Unlike mainstream schools, which are municipal institutions, special schools in Bulgaria are government educational institutions that are financed and managed directly by the Ministry of Education and Science. Children and students belonging to the Roma minority are over-represented in two types of special schools: the schools for children with developmental deficiencies and the schools for juvenile delinquents.

Until recently children with mental disabilities that were deemed “trainable” were placed in schools for children with developmental deficiencies (popularly known in Bulgaria as “support schools”). According to an old Instruction of the Ministry of Public Education (now Ministry of Education and Science) and the Ministry of Public Health (now Ministry of Healthcare), “trainable” were only the children with mild mental retardation and with some borderline forms of moderate mental retardation.<sup>22</sup> Children with more severe developmental deficiencies were placed in social institutions outside the educational system and were considered “untrainable.”

The 1999 *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society* calls for the “elimination of the practice to send normal Roma children to special schools for

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<sup>20</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Regulation No 7 on the Number of Students and Children in School and Kindergarten Classes (29.12.2000), Art. 26, State Gazette No 4 (12.01.2001), latest amendment State Gazette No 74 (22.08.2003).

<sup>21</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Regulation No 6 on the Distribution of Class Hours for Achieving the General Education Minimum for Each Class, Stage and Level of Education (28.05.2001), State Gazette No 54 (28.05.2001), latest amendment State Gazette No 95 (06.11.2001).

<sup>22</sup> Instruction No 6 on the Placement of Children and Students with Physical or Mental Deficiencies in Special Education and Training Institutions of the Ministry of Public Education and the Ministry of Public Health (18.03.1977), Art. 3 and 4. The Instruction has not been published officially. Quoted in: Kukova, S. et. al. (2002), *Support Schools in Bulgaria*, Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, pp.560-564 (in Bulgarian).

mentally retarded.”<sup>23</sup> However, the Government began reforming the regulatory framework in this area as late as 2002. In August 2002, the Ministry of Education and Science issued *Regulation No 6*, which provided access to support schools for children with other forms of mental retardation. In addition, the Regulation specifically states that children or students may be placed in special education programs only when “all possibilities for schooling and training in mainstream kindergartens and schools have been exhausted”.<sup>24</sup> In November 2003, the Ministry of Education and Science went a step further by adopting amendments to the *Public Education Act Implementing Regulation*, which were designed to adjust the system of mainstream schools to the needs of the children with developmental deficiencies, so that they could be trained together with their peers. The Regulation requires kindergartens, schools, and support units, as well as the institutions that finance them, to “create a supportive environment for integrated schooling and training of children and students with special educational needs and/or chronic diseases.”<sup>25</sup> The Regulation does not eliminate special schools for children with developmental deficiencies, but specifically requires that placement in such institutions is considered by special commissions only when all possibilities for integrated education have been exhausted, and after an explicit written application on behalf of the parents.

A peculiar kind of special schools, in which minorities are over-represented, are the boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and the social and pedagogical boarding schools. These are education institutions for children with deviant behaviour<sup>26</sup>, financed and supervised directly by the Ministry of Education and Science. Placement in these institutions is regulated by the provisions of the *Act for Combating Juvenile Delinquency* and is determined by the local juvenile delinquency commissions or by the regional courts.<sup>27</sup> The placement procedures for these educational institutions, which are in effect correctional facilities, do not comply with the international standards for fair trial and treatment of children in conflict with the law, because they do not provide for any involvement of the courts, as is the case with social and pedagogical boarding schools, or require merely a formal involvement, as is the case with the boarding schools for juvenile delinquents. In addition, the procedures do not allow for legal representation or appeal.<sup>28</sup> In September 2003, the Government developed and submitted to the Parliament a draft law for amending and supplementing the *Act for Combating Juvenile Delinquency*, which would correct these deficiencies if passed as proposed. According to the provisions of this bill, placement in boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools will be done upon a decision of regional courts and in compliance with fair trial procedures, which involve summoning parties to court, cross examination of witnesses, appeal to higher courts, and legal representation.

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<sup>23</sup> *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, Part 2.V.2.

<sup>24</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Regulation No 6 on the Schooling of Children with Special Education Needs and/or Chronic Diseases (19.08.2002), State Gazette No 83 (30.08.2002).

<sup>25</sup> Public Education Act Implementing Regulation, Art. 7.

<sup>26</sup> Public Education Act Implementing Regulation, Art. 66, Par. 1, Section 6.

<sup>27</sup> Act for Combating Juvenile Delinquency, Art. 13, Par. 2 and Art. 23, Par. 4, State Gazette No 13 (Extraordinary) (14.02.1958), latest amendment State Gazette 69 (03.08.1999).

<sup>28</sup> For more details see: Kanev, K. et. al. (2001) *Children in Institutions, Volume 1: Social and Pedagogical Boarding Schools and Boarding Schools for Juvenile Delinquents*, Sofia: Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, pp 5-40.

## 5. Minority schooling in practice

### 5.1. DISCRIMINATION AND SEGREGATION

The segregation of education on ethnic grounds has a long history in Bulgaria, which goes back to the social and political structure of the Ottoman Empire. After the country regained its independence, segregated schooling became the dominant model of minority education.<sup>29</sup> The development of Bulgarian education presents a paradox. Before World War Two all large ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, except for Roma, were educated in private segregated minority schools. After the end of the war, the new communist government introduced measures to integrate students from these minorities into the unified national education system – a policy, which provided the basis for ideological indoctrination and assimilation. At the same time segregated Roma schools were created and this marked the beginning of segregated Roma education. Purely Roma schools emerged together with segregated Roma neighbourhoods in the big cities. The end of the 1950s and the beginning of the 1960s also saw the development of a system of boarding schools with predominantly Roma enrolment. Segregated schools in Roma neighbourhoods were meant to be schools for students “with poor living standards and culture” that had to provide basic literacy and labour skills. The curriculum of the 31 largest segregated Roma schools had a special focus on vocational training and the development of labour skills ever since first grade. In addition to studying their lessons, students were expected to manufacture certain products according to a centrally imposed production plan.<sup>30</sup> This status of Roma schools was abolished as late as the mid-1990s.

According to a survey conducted by the Open Society Foundation – Sofia, currently there are approximately 60 primary, 350 basic and 9 secondary schools in Bulgaria, in which Roma enrolment varies between 50 and 100 percent.<sup>31</sup> According to data submitted by the Ministry of Education and Science, “pure” Roma schools with close to 100 percent Roma enrolment total 106.<sup>32</sup> The Open Society Foundation survey paints a grim picture of segregated “Roma schools”:

- 5 percent of the students in these schools have a “remote chance” of completing secondary education;
- in many cases fourth grade students are unable to read and write;
- some schools lack basic training facilities such as blackboards and chalk;

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<sup>29</sup> For more details see: Sachkova, E. (2000) “Minority Education Policies in Bulgaria”, 1878-2000, in: *Strategies for Policy in Science and Education*, No 3.

<sup>30</sup> Marushiakova, E., Popov, V. (1993) *Gypsies in Bulgaria*, Sofia: Club 90, pp. 90-91 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>31</sup> Denkov, D., Stanoeva, E., Vidinski, V. (2001) *Roma Schools in Bulgaria 2001*, Sofia: Open Society Foundation, p. 10.

<sup>32</sup> Nunev, I. (2002) “Analysis of the Current Status of Schools with Roma Enrolment”, in: *Strategies for Policy in Science and Education*, Special issue, pp. 110-144 (in Bulgarian). See also: Annex 2 - Distribution of Bulgarian schools with 100 percent Roma enrolment by regions.

- only 0.3 percent of Roma schools are interested in the national exams for entering “elite” schools after graduating seventh or eighth grade;
- in more than 50 percent of Roma schools windows are screened with plywood, rather than glass;
- teachers, who consider their work in Roma schools as a punishment, in turn, often punish their Roma students.<sup>33</sup>

The majority of Roma students in Bulgaria speak Romany language in their families. On the other hand, the teachers in the segregated Roma schools are predominantly Bulgarian and do not speak Romany. Since these schools are the least prestigious place for a teacher to work at, the people who teach there are usually the least qualified.

The education standards in segregated Roma schools are very low, and sometimes student achievement is even registered at the cost of violations of the existing regulations in education.<sup>34</sup> Supervision, however, which normally should be exercised by the Regional Inspectorates on Education of the Ministry of Education and Science and by the relevant municipal institutions, is on the whole inadequate.

This system, which creates little incentives, as well as many other factors that affect the social status of Roma, delivered a heavy blow to Roma schooling. It produced poorly educated parents who have no motivation to ensure better education for their children. The severe economic crisis after 1989 further damaged Roma education. Data from the latest census show that between 1992 and 2001 the share of illiterate Roma beyond the age of 7 has increased from 11.2 percent to 14.9 percent, while the percentage of Roma with a university degree has dropped from 0.3 percent in 1992 to 0.16 percent in 2001.<sup>35</sup>

According to a recent study conducted by the World Bank, the differences across ethnic groups in the attainment of any education level in Bulgaria are clearly pronounced, and are particularly high in the case with Roma. While 65 percent of Bulgarians have completed secondary or post-secondary education, for Roma this percentage is just 10.<sup>36</sup> Attendance rates for the members of the Turkish minority are also considerably lower compared to the figures for Bulgarians. While drop-outs among Bulgarian children occur mostly between basic and secondary school, Turks, and especially Roma, tend to dropout just after a couple of years of schooling.<sup>37</sup>

After the beginning of democratic changes in Bulgaria good education became increasingly dependent on the possibility of the parents to pay additional money for the schooling of their children. These payments, most of which are informal, include food, cultural activities, school refurbishment, etc. High-quality but expensive private education institutions were also

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<sup>33</sup> *Roma Schools in Bulgaria 2001*, Sofia: Open Society Foundation, pp.10-11.

<sup>34</sup> See, for example, the situation in one of the Roma schools in Stara Zagora in: Kanev, K. (2003) *The First Steps: An Evaluation of Nongovernmental Desegregation Projects in Six Bulgarian Cities*, Budapest: OSI, p. 36.

<sup>35</sup> Open Society Institute (2002), *Monitoring the EU Accession Process: Minority Protection*, p. 90.

<sup>36</sup> World Bank (2002), *Bulgaria: A Changing Poverty Profile*, Country Study Report No. 24516 (29.10.2002), p.114.

<sup>37</sup> *ibid.*, p. 118.

established. The connection between economic status and prospects for education further deepened the differences between minority and majority schooling.<sup>38</sup>

In 1999 the Bulgarian Government adopted a *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, which provides for a series of anti-discrimination measures, targeted, among others, to desegregating Roma education and improving the social status of Roma in Bulgarian society. Since 2002 the Ministry of Education and Science and other government institutions have adopted several official documents in support of Roma school desegregation.<sup>39</sup> In June 2003 an Advisory Council on the Schooling of Ethnic Minority Children and Students was established at the Ministry of Education and Science, one of the key goals of the new body being “to desegregate pre-schools and schools in Roma neighbourhoods and to integrate the children and students enrolled in them into mainstream education”<sup>40</sup>. Until now, however, desegregation has not become the target of any actual government policy. In the beginning of the school year 2000/2001, a Roma non-governmental organisation, the Drom Association, started implementing a project for desegregation of the Roma School in Vidin.<sup>41</sup> In the years that followed similar initiatives were launched in several other Bulgarian towns. Currently, owing to the efforts of various non-governmental organisations, nearly 2,500 Roma children have been enrolled and study in integrated schools.

In the summer of 2002, with the support of the World Bank, several non-governmental organisations began organising in different Bulgarian towns pre-school training programmes for Roma children who would be enrolled in first grade. In the beginning of the school year 2003/2004 the Government began supporting financially the one-year preparatory pre-school training. This measure is expected to help minority children learn Bulgarian language better. The Ministry of Education and Science has no information on the number of minority children who have been newly enrolled in preparatory classes at kindergartens or schools.

The access to quality education is also a problem for the children from the Turkish minority, most of whom live in villages where the quality of education is generally lower than that in the urban areas. Additional factors affecting their education prospects are the poverty and the geographic isolation of the regions, populated by Turks. According to the World Bank study, the percentage of Turkish minority children attaining different education levels was considerably lower than that of Bulgarian, both in urban, and in rural areas.<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> *ibid.*, p.120-121.

<sup>39</sup> See ‘Legislation and Policies’ above.

<sup>40</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Order No D-09-528, Art. 2.3 (25.06.2003).

<sup>41</sup> See ‘Good Practices’ below.

<sup>42</sup> World Bank (2002), *Bulgaria: A Changing Poverty Profile*, p. 117.

## 5.2. STUDY OF MOTHER TONGUE AND ETHNIC MINORITY CULTURE AND HISTORY

The legal provisions that regulate the study of mother tongue in Bulgaria limit the possibility for smaller minority groups and for minorities living in areas with predominantly Bulgarian population to exercise this right. The refusal of Bulgarian authorities to recognise the ethnic identity of Bulgarians of Macedonian descent makes it impossible to even raise the issue about studying Macedonian language as a mother tongue. In addition to Macedonians, Roma also do not study their mother tongue, although in the beginning of the 1990s Roma language classes had been organised for a short period of time for approximately 4,000 children in different towns across the country.<sup>43</sup> Although Bulgarian legislation does not differentiate between the rights of “traditional” and “new” minorities, the study of mother tongue by members of “new minorities”, such as the Bulgarian citizens of Arab descent, for example, who currently outnumber Bulgarian Jews, is not even an issue for Bulgarian authorities.

The study of mother tongue is organised by the Ministry of Education and Science, which has appointed experts in Turkish, Romany, and Armenian languages, as well as in Hebrew. Since Turkish language was introduced in the beginning of 1990s, the number of students who study it as a mother tongue has been constantly dropping. This trend has been preserved in the last few school years. In the school year 2001/2002 instruction in Turkish had been organised in 520 schools for 34,860 students, while in the school year 2002/2003 this course was offered in 420 schools for 31,349 students.<sup>44</sup> There are many reasons for this constant decline in enrolment, but one of them is undoubtedly the fact that Turkish language classes are placed in competition with other subjects, which children and parents consider more important and more practical for the future. Although the study of mother tongue became part of the compulsory selectable curriculum as early as 1999, it was introduced as a compulsory selectable subject for first-graders from the Turkish minority as late as the school year 2002/2003, whereby children and parents had to choose between Turkish, English and choreography.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, Turkish language is studied as a mother tongue in several secondary schools. Apart from being offered as a mother tongue within the compulsory selectable curriculum, Turkish is also taught as a foreign language in three private schools and in the three secondary Muslim religious schools in Bulgaria. Two pedagogical universities – in Shoumen and in Kurdjali – train Turkish language teachers. Turkish philology is taught at the University of Sofia, while Turkish language is also taught at the Higher Islamic Institute in Sofia.

From the other ethnic minorities in Bulgaria, only Romanians and Romanian Wallachians who live in Sofia have the possibility to study Romanian as a compulsory selectable subject

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<sup>43</sup> Nunev, I. (1998) *Roma Children and Their Family Environment*, Sofia: International Centre for Minority Studies and Intercultural Relations, p. 40 (in Bulgarian).

<sup>44</sup> Bulgarian Helsinki Committee (November 2003), *Alternative report to the report submitted by Bulgaria pursuant to article 25, paragraph 1 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities* (at Art. 14), available at: [http://www.bghelsinki.org/special/en/2003\\_Shadowrep\\_FCNM.doc](http://www.bghelsinki.org/special/en/2003_Shadowrep_FCNM.doc) (Accessed 29 December 2003).

<sup>45</sup> *ibid.*



in the only high school in the country, offering intensive instruction of Romanian language, which is based in the capital. However, the study of mother tongue for Romanian Wallachians from other areas of Bulgaria has not been organised and this is the problem, which the community has been raising for several years now.

For the children belonging to some other ethnic minorities, the study of mother tongue is still taught as a freely selectable subject. Armenian is taught to approximately 370 students in two schools in Plovdiv and in Sofia. One Sofia-based school offers courses in Hebrew (although this has never been the mother tongue of Bulgarian Jews). Greek is taught as a freely selectable subject to several dozens of Karakachans in a school in Sliven.

One of the tasks of the Advisory Council on the Schooling of Ethnic Minority Children and Students that was established in June 2003 is “to elaborate and propose strategies for enriching the content of education with information on ethnic minority communities in Bulgaria.”<sup>46</sup> In their mother tongue classes minority students also study the history and culture of their community. History and culture instruction, however, is by no means adequate, and, with a few exceptions, is limited only to those ethnic minority children who study their mother tongue. At the end of the 1990s a non-governmental organisation, the Interethnic Initiative for Human Rights Foundation, published supplements on Romany history and culture to the textbooks in Bulgarian language and literature, history, and music for first through eleventh grade. These teaching materials were approved by the Ministry of Education and Science and introduced in nearly 25 schools, but the initiative was gradually phased out, because it did not receive support or further funding by the government. In the framework of some desegregation projects carried out by various non-governmental organisations, extracurricular activities are being organised in several Bulgarian towns designed to promote tolerance and mutual understanding between Bulgarian and Roma children.<sup>47</sup> In the beginning of 2002 another non-governmental organisation, the Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialog and Tolerance, launched a project for studying Romany folklore in school, which aims at introducing Romany folklore as a subject in the secondary education curriculum.

## **5.3. MINORITY REPRESENTATION IN SPECIAL SCHOOLS**

### **5.3.1. Schools for children with special needs**

The students enrolled in schools for children with developmental deficiencies across Bulgaria total approximately 10,000. For decades, the Bulgarian system for placing children in such institutions did not take into account the impact, which poverty and cultural specifics have on educational attainment. The tests, which diagnostic commissions use to decide on the placement of children in the so-called “support schools”, are not culture-sensitive and are

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<sup>46</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Order No D-09-528, Art. 2.4 (25.06.2003)

<sup>47</sup> See: *The First Steps: An Evaluation of the Nongovernmental Desegregation Projects in Six Bulgarian Cities*, pp. 42-43, 69, 76.

administered in a quite perfunctory fashion.<sup>48</sup> Some of the schools invest special effort in attracting students, targeting Roma neighbourhoods specifically and showing around advertising brochures on the material facilities they offer.<sup>49</sup> Neither teachers, nor the diagnostic commissions' members explain to parents and children what are the negative consequences of graduating such a type of school. Most of these schools offer accommodation and food and in effect function as institutions for children deprived of parental care.

As a result, nearly 70 percent of the students in support schools in Bulgaria are Roma.<sup>50</sup> These children study with a curriculum that does not cover the general education minimum for basic education, and they do not attain the level of education that corresponds to the grades they have completed. Many of these students, however, have no developmental deficiencies whatsoever and can be educated in mainstream schools. A recent research conducted in three support schools showed that 46 percent of the students demonstrate results, which are comparable with the mainstream school standards, and can study effectively in mainstream schools.<sup>51</sup>

In addition to low education standards, students in support schools are also exposed to the detrimental effects of institutionalisation and ethnic segregation. The material conditions in some of these schools are lamentable. The classrooms in 80 percent of the support schools have only desks, cupboards for the teaching aids, and blackboards.<sup>52</sup> The food that is offered does not comply with the legally established standards for healthy nutrition in Bulgaria, while in some support schools children are often exposed to physical abuse by the staff, as a form of punishment.<sup>53</sup>

In the last two years the placement of children in special schools, as well as the very function of these institutions in the Bulgarian education system, became the target of a series of reform efforts designed to prevent the possibility for healthy children to be placed in such schools due to poverty and neglect.<sup>54</sup> These reforms, however, are still limited only to the legislative framework, while the system itself has remained virtually unchanged.

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<sup>48</sup> Cf. Tanaka, J.(2000), "Parallel Worlds: Romani and Non-Romani Schools in Bulgaria", in: *Roma Rights*, No 3, p. 39.

<sup>49</sup> One such school, by no means the only one, is the Ivan Vazov Boarding Support School in Pazardjik. See: *Support Schools in Bulgaria*, p. 299.

<sup>50</sup> *ibid.*, p. 8.

<sup>51</sup> Open Society Institute, Budapest (December 2001), *School Success for Roma Children: Step by Step Special School Initiative*, Interim Report, p. 32.

<sup>52</sup> *Support Schools in Bulgaria*, p. 16.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*, p. 20.

<sup>54</sup> See 2.3 above.

### 5.3.2. Schools for children with deviant behaviour

Both types of schools for children with deviant behaviour, the boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and the social and pedagogical boarding schools, are in effect places of involuntary confinement. The arbitrary procedures for placing children in such schools<sup>55</sup>, the fact that these institutions offer accommodation and food, as well as the special efforts, which their staff makes to attract children from Roma neighbourhoods, have resulted in a considerable over-representation of Roma children. According to a 2001 study conducted by the Bulgarian Helsinki Committee, the average share of minority children (predominantly Roma) in boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools varies between 60 and 70 percent, reaching 95 percent in some schools, out of a total of 2,400 children placed in such institutions.<sup>56</sup> Often local Roma children who live in the village where a given school is situated are “booked” as juvenile delinquents and are placed in it, because this is the only school in the locality.<sup>57</sup>

In addition to being stigmatised as a result of the placement in a place for involuntary confinement, the institutionalisation, and the ethnically segregated educational and social environment, the children in boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools are also exposed to many other detrimental factors. The material conditions in these schools are worse than in any other institution for children in Bulgaria. Unlike other institutions, boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools cannot attract enough donor funding to compensate for the miserable food budget that is provided by the State. The teaching and learning process is often perfunctory and instruction is provided by teachers with low motivation and poor qualification for whom working in such a school is the worst possible employment opportunity. Boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools are not subject to the type of supervision exercised on places of involuntary confinement. In some of these institutions inhuman or degrading treatment and punishments are endemic. Soon after a 2002 visit of a delegation of the Council of European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) in one boarding school for juvenile delinquents, the school was closed down.<sup>58</sup>

Similarly to support schools, the system of special schools for children with deviant behaviour in Bulgaria is also undergoing reforms, which began with the drafting of a bill for amending and supplementing the Act for Combating Juvenile Delinquency. Changes affect placement procedures and are expected to significantly limit discretion, and hence the over-representation of minority children in such institutions. The reform, however, does not raise the issue whether it is reasonable to preserve boarding schools for juvenile delinquents and social and pedagogical boarding schools as places for involuntary confinement for children, nor does it address the problem with the material conditions, the teaching and learning process, and the supervision of these institutions.

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<sup>55</sup> See 2.3 above.

<sup>56</sup> *Social and Pedagogical Boarding Schools and Boarding Schools for Juvenile Delinquents*, p. 391-392.

<sup>57</sup> *ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>58</sup> See press release about the visit available at: [www.cpt.coe.int/documents/bgr/2002-05-02-eng.htm](http://www.cpt.coe.int/documents/bgr/2002-05-02-eng.htm) (Accessed 5 January 2004 r.). The Bulgarian Government has not yet authorised the publication of the report from this visit.

## 5.4. PROGRAMMES AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION

### 5.4.1. The Government Programme

In 1999 the Bulgarian Government adopted a *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*, which provides for a series of anti-discrimination measures, targeted, among others, to desegregating Roma education and improving the social status of Roma in Bulgarian society. Since 2002 the Ministry of Education and Science and other government institutions have adopted several official documents in support of Roma school desegregation.<sup>59</sup> In June 2003 an Advisory Council on the Schooling of Ethnic Minority Children and Students was established at the Ministry of Education and Science, one of the key goals of the new body being “to desegregate pre-schools and schools in Roma neighbourhoods and to integrate the children and students enrolled in them into mainstream education.”<sup>60</sup> At the end of 2003 the Government adopted an Action Plan for Implementing the Framework Programme. Until now, however, desegregation has not become the target of any actual government policy. In the beginning of the school year 2000/2001, a Roma non-governmental organisation, the Drom Association, started implementing a project for desegregation of the Roma school in Vidin.<sup>61</sup> In the years that followed similar initiatives were launched in several other Bulgarian towns. Currently, owing to the efforts of various non-governmental organisations, nearly 2,500 Roma children have been enrolled and study in integrated schools.

### 5.4.2. Policies and programs of the European Union

In its Regular Reports on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession to the European Union, the European Commission awards a special attention to minority protection. Of all the problems of minority schooling, the Commission addresses only the discrimination and segregation of Roma education. It welcomed the adoption of the *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society* in its 1999 Regular Report,<sup>62</sup> but no focus was placed on the problems of minority schooling either in this, or in the next Report. It was only in its 2001 Regular Report that the Commission addressed the issue of Roma school desegregation noting: “It is a positive step that the process of desegregation of Roma schools has started, with some NGO projects testing different methodologies.”<sup>63</sup> The Commission criticises the lack of progress in implementing the Framework Programme and underlines that “[desegregation] has to become Government policy.”<sup>64</sup> The problem with segregation is also raised in the 2002 Regular Report, again from a critical perspective: “Efforts need to be made to combat segregation and encourage integration. Whilst some initiatives are underway

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<sup>59</sup> See ‘Legislation and Policies’ above.

<sup>60</sup> Ministry of Education and Science, Order No D-09-528, Art. 2.3 (25.06.2003).

<sup>61</sup> See ‘Good Practices’ below.

<sup>62</sup> 1999 Regular Report from the Commission on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, p. 14, available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/index.htm> (Accessed 5 January 2004).

<sup>63</sup> 2001 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, p. 23, available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/index.htm> (Accessed 5 January 2004).

<sup>64</sup> *ibid.*

through donors to address segregation, this is not yet in practice a Government policy.”<sup>65</sup> In the 2003 Regular Report, however, the focus of the European Commission seems to shift away from these issues. Although the problem with segregated education for Roma exists, the critical perspective to it has been lost and there are no recommendations for desegregation.<sup>66</sup> Unlike previous Reports, the 2003 Regular Report does not even contain the words “segregation” and “desegregation”.<sup>67</sup>

The financial support for minority schooling provided by the European Commission through the National Phare Programmes is poorly aligned or not aligned at all with the stated priorities of the Bulgarian Government, and more specifically with the *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society*. Two projects have been launched up to now. None of them, however, provides for specific measures targeted to desegregating Roma schools or reducing the number of Roma children placed in special schools.

#### PHARE 2001

##### PROJECT: BG 0102.06 SOCIAL INCLUSION

3.7 million Euro have been allocated to Bulgaria to encourage the social and economic integration of Roma. The first component of the grant scheme provides for the establishment of Roma Information and Cultural Centres and has a total budget of 966,000 Euro. The other two components are targeted to entrepreneurship promotion and job creation.

The component ‘Development of Roma Information and Cultural Centres’ also involves providing ‘Literacy and Numerical Training’ to Roma. The target group is illiterate Roma beyond the age of 16. Roma Information Centres are expected to develop programs, co-operating with schools and Regional Inspectorates on Education.

##### PROJECT: BG 0104.01 ROMA POPULATION INTEGRATION

This project is almost entirely targeted to broadening the access of Roma children to education and improving the quality of education they receive. The project involves improving the quality of education for Roma children in integrated schools, qualifying 300 teachers to work in a multiethnic environment, instructing 100 assistant teachers, and training Roma to work in public administration. The project is targeted both directly and indirectly to the following groups: Roma and non-Roma in ethnically mixed classes in kindergartens, pre-schools, and general schools; Roma assistant teachers; teachers; students in pedagogy;

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<sup>65</sup> 2002 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, p. 33, available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/index.htm> (Accessed 5 January 2004).

<sup>66</sup> 2003 Regular Report on Bulgaria's Progress towards Accession, p. 25, available at: <http://europa.eu.int/comm/enlargement/bulgaria/index.htm> (Accessed 5 January 2004).

<sup>67</sup> The 2003 Regular Report is inadequately focused in many respects and contains a number of other inaccuracies on human rights and minority protection.

university professors; Roma and non-Roma parents; members of school boards; local communities; representatives of local administrations who work directly with Roma.

The first component amounting to 765,000 Euro involves:

- Improving school attendance for Roma children in kindergarten, pre-schools, and primary school levels – first through fourth grade – in 100 ethnically mixed classes.
- Training 300 master teachers and 100 Roma assistant teachers to implement the RAMO (Shoulder) integrative and intercultural programme in 100 pre-school and primary school classes, first through fourth grade
- Introducing and broadening the application of the RAMO Programme in primary education
- Integrating 100 young Roma who have graduated from secondary education in public administration by organising public administration training, workshops, and seminars.

The second component involves the provision of equipment and supplies to support the schooling of disadvantaged Roma students. The budget for this component amounts to 1.350 million Euro. Support will be offered to 12,200 children, while the material facilities in 10 integrated schools and 10 integrated kindergartens will be improved; in addition, 20 computer labs will be created.

In the summer of 2002, within the framework of the Child Welfare Reform Project, a series of training and schooling programmes were launched to support the entry of disadvantaged children in pre-school classes. These programmes were organised with a grant from the Japan Social Development Fund, as well as with the co-operation of the World Bank and the European Union. In 2002, 1,535 children benefited from a four-month training programme amounting to 600,000 Bulgarian leva. In the school year 2003/2003, 2,000 children participated in a six-month training programme amounting to 980,000 Bulgarian leva. This initiative is targeted mainly to improving access to education and extending funds to local NGOs to operate pre-school and kindergarten programmes for children from the poorest communities

Pre-school education is of strategic importance for the inclusion of Roma children in the education system. If there are involved from the very beginning, they would have better chances to remain in school.

The ACCESS Programme does not address directly the problems of Roma education and does not envisage specific measures in this area. ACCESS is an institution-building programme and supports activities of non-governmental organisations, which contribute to the social integration of marginalised groups through the projects they implement.

The Youth Programme operates in a similar pattern. It is targeted to all young people between the age of 15 and 25 years, and provides for positive measures designed to ensure the involvement of young people from disadvantaged groups. Good or bad practices with respect to minority schooling could be identified in individual NGO projects that have been

financed by these programmes, but they can hardly be considered as an instrument to pursue some specific policies of the European Union in overcoming the problems of ethnic minority education in Bulgaria.

## **6. Good practices**

### **PROJECT: FREE ACCESS FOR ROMA CHILDREN TO ALL SCHOOLS IN VIDIN**

Since the beginning of the school year 2000/2001 the Roma organisation ‘Drom’ in the town of Vidin has been assisting the enrolment of children from the Roma neighbourhood in schools outside the neighbourhood. The project was supported by the Roma Participation Programme of the Open Society Institute – Budapest. The Drom Association purchased two buses and organised the daily transportation of children to the integrated schools. It also hired mentors, educated Roma, one per each school, who ensured that children attend classes regularly, and monitored their achievement and behaviour. They also facilitated the communication between the school, the project, and the parents. Roma children were enrolled in as many integrated schools outside Roma neighbourhoods as possible. The goal was the number of Roma students in each class to exceed 10-15 percent.

The project provided training aids to the children whose parents were unable to afford them. Breakfast was also provided to some of the students. Parents were supported by being transported for free to the schools for teacher-parent meetings. In addition, the project team also organised periodic meetings with parents in the Roma neighbourhoods, at which they discussed various problems of education, as well as desegregation.

The children who needed further schooling were given the opportunity to take additional classes at a legally established fee. These classes were given by the teachers in the integrated schools upon agreement between the school management and the project leaders. This also included offering additional schooling to children during school holidays and the summer. In addition, the project team organised a diverse extracurricular programme in the integrated schools, which, as a rule, had a clear multicultural content. It included joint celebration of school and national holidays, trips, summer camps, etc.

An important element in the organisation of this school desegregation initiative was that it sought political, administrative, and public support at the local level. It involved stakeholders in education, political parties, NGOs, and the media. Special efforts were invested in rallying support from the Roma community through its formal and informal leaders, as well as through Roma NGOs.

The leadership of the project was in the hands of experienced educators who determined the enrolment strategy, identified the need for additional measures, and decided on the type of extracurricular activities to be organised. They also supervised on a daily basis the work of the mentors. These educators, as well as the teachers in the integrated schools, attended

training seminars with a special focus on multicultural education, which were led by university professors and international experts.

Over the next few years similar projects, supported by the same donor, were organised in six other Bulgarian towns – Montana, Pleven, Stara Zagora, Sliven, Haskovo, and Sofia. They adopted the same desegregation model, adapting it to local conditions. Currently, approximately 2,500 Roma children benefit from these projects.

#### PROJECT: ROMANY FOLKLORE IN BULGARIAN SCHOOLS

In 2002 the Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialog and Tolerance in Veliko Turnovo launched a project for introducing Romany folklore in Bulgarian schools. The project was supported by the Education Programme of the Open Society Foundation – Sofia and the Ministry of Education and Science. In the framework of this initiative a new subject, Folklore of Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria (Romany Folklore), was piloted in the primary school curriculum. During the first school year (2002/2003) 30 classes, studying the freely selectable subject Folklore of Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria (Romany Folklore), were formed in 15 schools in the regions of Veliko Turnovo and Turgovishte. Approximately 600 children were covered. A special textbook, 'Magical Examples of Romany Folklore', was published, presenting the folkloric heritage of the different Roma groups in the context of the common national Bulgarian culture and establishing links with the folklore of other ethnic groups. The key goals of the project were: (1) to introduce a new subject, Folklore of Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria (Romany Folklore), in the general school curriculum; (2) to preserve the ethnic identity of Roma children (i.e. ensure integration without assimilation); (3) to teach children from other ethnic communities (non-Roma) in tolerance and respect for the Other. Training seminars were organised for the teachers who would teach the new freely selectable subject.

In the beginning of the new school year, 2003/2004, the project doubled in scope, covering more than 1,000 students in 12 municipalities within 4 regions. The local governments of Gorna Oriahovitsa, Liaskovets, Popovo, Razgrad, Kubrat, Samuil, and Shoumen also supported the initiative by allocating funds from their budgets for new classes in 'Folklore of Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria (Romany Folklore)'. The classes are ethnically mixed. Roma, Bulgarian, and Turkish children, as well as children from other communities are equally represented. Two new compendiums were published under the project: 'Stories by the Fireplace' (for students in 2nd through 4th grade) and 'Tales of Travels'.

It should be noted that the Action Plan for Implementing the Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society, which was approved by the Council of Ministers on September 25, 2003, provides for the allocation of funds to finance the national introduction of the subject 'Folklore of Ethnic Groups in Bulgaria (Romany Folklore)' from the beginning of the next school year. 50,000 Bulgarian leva will be allocated from the Government budget for this purpose; the project will again be implemented by the Amalipe Centre for Interethnic Dialog and Tolerance.



## 7. Conclusions

In some areas, minority schooling has made a progress compared to the situation before 1989. Positive developments include mainly the newly acquired possibility for some ethnic minorities to study their mother tongue, as well as the strengthening of other elements of minority identity through the education system. In other areas, however, minority schooling continued to follow the old discriminatory and segregative policies, especially for what concerns Roma education. Discrimination and segregation is expressed in the fact that Roma children study in segregated schools in the Roma neighbourhoods, and are often referred to the so-called special schools, in which they are drastically over-represented. It was only after the adoption of the *Framework Programme for Equal Integration of Roma in Bulgarian Society* in 1999 that the relevant authorities began to re-consider these policies and identifying ways to reform them. Until now, however, this process has been limited only to Government papers and policy documents and has not affected the way education is organised.

## Annex 1

**Ethnic composition of Bulgaria's population according to the March 1, 2001 census<sup>68</sup>**

<b>Ethnic group</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Relative share in %</b>
Bulgarians	6,655,210	83.900
Turks	746,664	9.400
Roma	370,908	4.700
Russians	15,595	0.200
Armenians	10,832	0.130
Wallachians	10,566	0.130
Macedonians	5,071	0.060
Greeks	3,408	0.040
Ukrainians	2,489	0.030
Jews	1,363	0.017
Romanians	1,088	0.014
Others	18,792	0.230
No self-identification/no answer	86,915	1.100

<sup>68</sup> According to data submitted by the National Institute of Statistics, available at: [www.nsi.bg](http://www.nsi.bg) (28.12.2003).

## Annex 2

**Distribution of Bulgarian schools with close to 100 percent Roma enrolment by regions<sup>69</sup>**

	Total number of children in school and pre-school age	Total number of Roma children in school and pre-school age	Total number of schools and kindergartens with 100 percent Roma enrolment
Blagoevgrad	51,604	2,344 (4.5%)	2
Bourgas	57,581	6,246 (10.8%)	4
Dobrich	29,968	1,131 (3.7%)	5
Gabrovo	17,274	1,386 (8%)	3
Haskovo	23,628	4,871 (21%)	5
Kurdjali	25,221	1,524 (6%)	4
Kyustendil	21,505	1,606 (7%)	3
Lovech	21,517	1,003 (4.6%)	0
Montana	23,185	6,231 (27%)	6
Pazardjik	36,736	6,930 (19%)	10
Pernik	19,006	1,524 (12.5%)	0
Pleven	40,199	5,060 (12.5%)	4
Plovdiv	77,129	10,315 (13.4%)	5
Razgrad	21,776	2,068 (9.5%)	0
Rousse	34,147	3,113 (9%)	2
Shoumen	29,008	4,063 (14%)	5
Silistra	17,076	1,922 (11.3%)	5
Sliven	29,492	5,645 (19%)	5
Smolian	22,443	231 (1%)	0
Sofia – city	146,526	2,405 (1.7%)	6
Sofia – district	31,290	5,192 (16.6%)	6
Stara Zagora	50,209	7,228 (14.4%)	6
Turgovishte	19,099	3,122 (16%)	6
Varna	59,691	7,259 (12%)	4
Veliko Turnovo	37,620	3,238 (8.6%)	3
Vidin	15,154	2,735 (18%)	2
Vratsa	29,248	4,802 (16.4%)	1
Yambol	20,212	2,972 (15%)	4
<b>TOTAL:</b>	<b>1,007,544</b>	<b>106,166 (10.5%)</b>	<b>106</b>

<sup>69</sup> According to data published in: Nunev, I. (2002), "Analysis of the Current Status of Schools with Roma Enrolment", in: *Strategies for Policy in Science and Education*, Special issue, pp. 110-144.

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