

EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE IN THE FIELD OF PROTECTION AND PROMOTION OF HUMAN RIGHTS

In response to the invitation by the Commissioner for Human Rights

Example from Latvia

Project “Teacher’s Assistants of Roma Background” and other activities facilitating Roma education

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE PROJECT

Summary

In order to promote integration of Roma community into Latvian society, to eliminate discrimination and to provide equal opportunities to Roma community in the areas of education, employment and human rights in accordance with the community’s special needs, the Government of the Republic of Latvia adopted a **State Programme “Roma in Latvia” 2007-2009**.

Within the State Programme “Roma in Latvia” a special project “**Teacher’s Assistants of Roma Background**” was developed in 2007. The underlying idea of the project was to elaborate a programme aimed at the professional preparation of teacher’s assistants of Roma background and to facilitate their inclusion into school and pre-school educational institutions’ inclusive classes attended by Roma children and children of different ethnic background.

Also several activities linked to the project were conducted in order to promote inclusion of Roma children into educational activities at school.

The project and additional activities related to this project are financed by the Latvian Government (the Secretariat of the Special Assignments Minister for Social Integration, the Ministry of Justice) and amounts to € 101,597. The project started on 1 May 2007 and ended on 31 May 2010.

Objectives

The project aimed:

- to create special opportunities for members of the Roma community and, particularly, to raise their level of education;
- to enhance the inclusiveness of general education system;
- to eliminate the segregation of Roma children in the education system;
- to foster inclusion of the Roma children in the education system at early stages and eliminate any barriers for Roma children and their parents to their active participation in school life;
- to integrate teacher’s assistants of Roma background in educational institutions;

- to reduce negative stereotypes related to Roma at school and improve the knowledge of teachers and professional staff, as well as non-Roma children about Roma culture, history, and identity.

The target groups of the project were:

- teacher's assistants of Roma background;
- Roma children;
- Roma families who have children of pre-school and school age;
- Teachers and professional staff;
- Preschool and elementary school children in classes with children of Roma background.

The main task of the teacher's assistants of Roma background is to assist children of Roma background to integrate into mainstream educational institutions. Teacher's assistants of Roma background help to create the link between the school, family and society as well as to promote intercultural dialogue.

Further tasks of work of teacher's assistants with Roma background:

- to practice teaching methods – to plan activities, management and evaluation;
- to assist Roma children during training and the process of the socialization and education;
- to improve skills for planning and holding classes in cooperation with teachers;
- to participate in the process of elaboration of training materials reflecting the cultural elements of Roma community;
- to promote cooperation with the Roma families;
- to organise and to lead activities of the educational establishment, within the framework of cultural events;
- to assess personal list of practical results;
- to cooperate with mentors and consultants.



Photo: "Center for Education Initiatives", 2008

Activities

The project was implemented in several stages. At first stage the educational training program to prepare teacher's assistants with Roma background was elaborated by an expert from the non-governmental organization "Center for Education Initiatives" that has worked with Roma education issues since 2003. During the process of designing the training program best practices

of other European states in Roma integration into education system was taken as guidelines and adapted to the Latvian situation.

The second stage of the project was the preparation of teacher's assistants of Roma background. Two training seminars four days long each were organized in Jelgava city. 19 teacher's assistants of Roma background participated in the training from 16 cities of Latvia.

During the integration and gradual inclusion of teacher's assistants into school environment and activities a large number of consultations (164 in total) and mentoring visits (12 in total) were provided to teacher's assistants by experts of the organization "Center for Education Initiatives", who have worked at schools in multicultural group (where Roma children have participated as well).

The project "Teacher's Assistants of Roma Background" was presented to school directors and educational experts who represent institutions where teacher's assistants of Roma background started their assistants' practice. Three presentation events were organised in regional municipalities.

Several activities linked to the project were conducted in order to promote inclusion of Roma children into educational activities at school.

At the same time, a special training seminar „Roma child at School” was developed and implemented to improve professional skills of school teachers who educate Roma children. 30 school teachers participated in the training. They were prepared to work in a multicultural environment and to use the principle of inclusive education in practice.

Also in year 2008 seven informative seminars „The work of teacher in a class with Roma children” in Latvian cities with biggest Roma population were conducted for teachers who teach in classes with Roma children. There were 113 participants from 40 Latvian towns and cities, which represented around 16 pre-school educational institutions and 55 schools from Latvia.

A competition “The best teacher – *Lāču Mānuš* (in Roma language meaning- the best friend)” was launched. The most active teachers were awarded for their contribution to integration and education of Roma children.

Nine public discussions „Roma child at School – a step to the future” were organised in cities with large Roma population such as Riga, Daugavpils, Jelgava, Valmiera, Ventspils, Talsi, Jekabpils. The main target audience was the Roma community as well as Roma children's' parents, also social workers, psychologists, and other professionals. A total of 182 participants participated in public discussions.



Photo: "Center for Education Initiatives", 2008

Further, the organisation "Center for Education Initiatives" implemented a project "Good practices of teaching to Roma children: teachers handbook" within the framework of the EU employment and social solidarity programme PROGRESS 2007 - 2013 project „Latvia – Equal in Diversity III”.

The aim of this project was to identify, analyse and disseminate good practices of changes in teaching that have had the biggest impact on the success of Roma children in pre-school and basic education, and motivated them to continue their education and to improve knowledge and skills of teachers and teacher's assistants working with Roma children. This objective was fully reached. Dissemination of teachers' practice "Experience of Latvia teachers in work with Roma children" was a practical support to those teachers who teach or will teach Roma children in their classrooms or groups.

Latvian Government representatives and responsible policy-makers (Ministry of Culture, Ministry of Education and Science) holds regular meetings with experts of the organisation "Education Initiative Centre" and Roma teacher's assistants in order to create public awareness about issues related to developing Teacher's Assistants of Roma Background training programme, teaching aids and the need for quality education for Roma children.

2. HUMAN RIGHTS ISSUES AT STAKE

Mainstreaming of Roma education issues helps to improve access to education for Roma and support and promote their rights to quality education. This project also addressed the discrimination of Roma and aimed at their full inclusion into society.

The project promotes tolerance and eliminates prejudice towards Roma and Roma population.

3. IMPACT ASSESSMENT AND EVALUATION

Project results: 20 teacher's assistants of Roma background were prepared for work at school.

In school years 2007/2008, 2008/2009 and 2009/2010 eight teachers' assistants of Roma background were working at schools in the regions. In 2009/2010 two were paid from the municipality budget.

The project was systematically evaluated and reports on the evaluation were presented to the ministry. The Council for the Evaluation of implementation of the State Programme "Roma in Latvia" assessed and discussed the main results of the project and activities in the field of Roma education.



Photo: "Center for Education Initiatives", 2008

Results of the project were highly valued by school principals, teachers, parents and children involved in the project. Evaluation of the project clearly showed that teacher's assistants of Roma background foster educational achievements of Roma children and help to change the attitude of Roma parents as regards the necessity to include their children into educational processes at school. The number of Roma children attending inclusive classes of pre-school, primary and secondary school educational institutions has increased.

Positive results of the project are also drawn from the support and partial participation of Roma parents in the activities related to Roma children education.

One of the most positive examples of the project is teacher's assistants active involvement in the lifelong learning process. In the pre-school education institution "Pasaciņa" in Jelgava city teacher's assistant of Roma background Ligita Sunīte graduated with the qualification of teacher and continues to educate Roma and other pupils in becoming teachers.

She reflects her experience as teacher's assistant:

"My opportunity to work as teacher's assistant and why I agreed to accept this? I'm a chair person of the Audit commission of The Roma Cultural Society in Jelgava city. I had an opportunity to attend seminars on inclusion issues in education. My granddaughter started to attend the kindergarten "Pasaciņa" and I realized that I can actually support her and other Roma children to integrate into society. Above all - I like children and love to work with them.

It was not an easy decision for me to accept this job, because of my doubts and responsibility involved. But I have been receiving support from the staff of the kindergarten "Pasaciņa", participants of the project and my community. So I started to work.

Today parents of Roma children want their children to obtain a good education, a good permanent job in the future and to be integrated in the society. Before that Roma were not aware of the importance of education, but now their view has changed."

¹ http://www.iic.lv/lv/projekti/cbseg_rezultati.html#ligita

In 2010 the Ministry of Education and Science prepared amendments to the Cabinet Regulation No. 461 of 18 May 2010 „Regulations Regarding the Classification of Occupations, the Basic Tasks Appropriate to the Occupation and the Basic Qualification Requirements, and the Procedures for the Use and Updating of the Classification of Occupations” which will allow municipalities to provide their pre-schools and elementary schools with a teachers’ assistant, including teachers’ assistant with Roma background, in order to promote school attending, especially, among Roma children.

Monitoring of the situation

In 2008, the foundation “Baltic Institute of Social Sciences” conducted a research “The influence of State Programme “Roma in Latvia”” on the Roma community, during which views of the Roma community representatives in Latvia were compiled. Overall the project was estimated rather highly, but the continuity and sustainability of the project is needed for it to be effective and more successful.

In 2011 the project – survey „The Roma rights to education: the situation in Latvia and recommendations of efficient promotion of the rights within the frames of national policy” was carried out by organisation “Centre for Education Initiatives”. The aim of the project was to identify the factors which define the specific situation of Roma education and integration processes in Latvia. The evaluation of the project “Teacher’s Assistants of Roma Background” and other activities in field of education is one of main tasks of the survey.

Among the recommendations addressed to the policy makers to improve the situation of Roma in education field the survey identified:

- to continue the project “Teacher’s Assistants of Roma Background”;
- to provide activities to improve cooperation between schools and Roma parents;
- to re-establish the monitoring mechanism and data collection methods in order to gain the actual views on situation of education of Roma children;
- to promote the inclusion of Roma children into education at very early stage.



Photo: “Center for Education Initiatives”, 2008

4. CONCLUSIONS FOR INSPIRING SIMILAR PROJECTS ELSEWHERE

The contribution of teacher's assistants of Roma background has a positive impact on improving the level of education of Roma community and in creating new opportunities for Roma in the fields of employment and lifelong education. They represent in practice the Roma language, history and culture in schools and promote tolerance between children and professionals.

This project is the best way to combat segregation of Roma children and discrimination in the field of education.

The project will further continue in different stages:

- to promote the inclusion of Roma children into education at very early stage the organization "Center for Education Initiatives" in the framework of the project "School and Community for inclusion for Roma children" (the project of Latvia and Switzerland cooperation program) will continue the practice of integrating teacher's assistants of Roma Background into the education system – it is planned to provide work at an education institution for five assistants of Roma background from 2011 until 2012.
- the Government has applied for receiving funds from the EU employment and social solidarity programme PROGRESS 2007 - 2013 to continue training of teacher's assistants of Roma background in 2012.

5. CONTACT

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