



Participatory Action Research

Research Topics:

School Dropout

Early Marriages

Discrimination from Teachers

Inclusion of Children with Special

Needs in the School System



This report came as a result of the research carried out under the project “Leaders - Young Roma in Action” which is implemented by Save the Children in Kosova/o in partnership with NGO Iniciativa 6.

Save the Children is the world’s leading, independent organization for children. We work in over 120 countries. We save children’s lives. We fight for their rights. We help them fulfil their potential.

Iniciativa 6 is a local Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) NGO. The objectives of Iniciativa 6 are: integration of RAE communities, especially integration of children and youth into the education system, improving human rights, building a democratic society, creating a good relationship and cooperation with other similar organizations.

The views on the author of this publication do not necessarily reflect the policies or opinions of Save the Children and Iniciativa 6.

PARTICIPATORY ACTION RESEARCH

The research were conducted by:

A group of young people who are part of the “**Leaders - Young Roma in Action**”

The report was prepared by:

Erëblina Elezaj

Language Editor

AB & Associates – *Translation Services Agency*

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We heartily thank the young leaders and young volunteers of the Municipality of Prizren and Gjakova for their willingness to cooperate and contribute to this action research: Adelina Kabashi; Alban Morina; Albertina Monika; Amir Osmani; Avnore Morina; Besart Mersula; Bleta Qehaja; Bujar Luboja; Dardan Fetahaj; Egzon Sehari; Erxhan Sehari; Fatlum Kryeziu; Furkan Ago; Gezim Qehaja; Granit Hoxha; Ilajda Qorri; Jemina Osmani; Lavdim Morina; Majlinda Shala; Masar Derri; Mirjeta Qehaja; Nita Efendia; Nuhi Morina; Resul Milaimi; Rreze Oseku; Sanije Mergjollar; Valon Gashi; Vilson Dura; Ylveha Braha and Zejnepe Qabrati.

We are especially grateful for comments, guidance, informative meetings, data analyzing, drafting of the questionnaires, inputs and the report to the consultant of the action research Ms. Erëblina Elezaj.

We are also grateful to the organization of Handikos and One to One Kosova/PEMA and school principals of primary schools in Gjakova: "Zekerija Rexha"; "Mustafa Bakija"; "Mazllum Këpuska"; "Fehmi Agani"; "Selman Riza"; "Zef Lush Marku" for their close cooperation and contribution throughout the data collection process.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I

Report Summary	8
Purpose of the project	10
Methodology.....	10
SUMMARY OF RESEARCH GROUPS	12
School dropouts	12
Early marriages.....	12
Discrimination from teachers.....	13
Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system	14

CHAPTER II

School dropouts	16
The problem	16
Methodology.....	17
Key findings	17
Achievements	18
Research limitations and challenges	19
Recommendations	19
EARLY MARRIAGES.....	20
The problem	20
Methodology.....	20
Key findings	21
Achievements	25
Research limitations and challenges	26
Recommendations	26
DISCRIMINATION BY TEACHERS.....	28
The problem	28
Methodology.....	29
Main findings	29
Achievements	32
Research limitations and challenges	32
Recommendations	33
INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM.....	35
The problem	35
Methodology.....	36
Key findings	37
Achievements.....	40
Research limitations and challenges	40
Recommendations	41

CHAPTER III

CONCLUSIONS	44
Achievements, lessons learner and impact of the research on young leaders and the community	44
Leaders	44
Organization	45
Community	45
Difficulties and challenges	46
Recommendations.....	47
REFERENCES	50
ANNEX	51

TABLES

Table 1: Number of young persons who got married before the age of 18 years, by gender.....	22
Table 2: Number of young persons who declared that their partner was younger than 18 years when they got married, by gender	22

FIGURES

Figure 1: Main decision-maker for the marriage, by type of marriage.....	23
Figure 2: Main reasons for early marriages, according to the interviewees.....	24
Figure 3: Reasons for early marriages, according to parents.....	25
Figure 4: Reasons for not attending extra courses (Albanian language, English language, mathematics, etc.) organized at school	31
Figure 5: Reasons for not attending school activities (competitions, quizzes, school choir, cultural activities, sports activities, etc.).....	31
Figure 6: Children's type of disability.....	38
Figure 7: Reasons for not attending education.....	39

ABBREVIATIONS

CSW	Centre for Social Work
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues in Kosovo
KFOS	Kosovar Foundation for Open Society
LYRA	Leaders - Young Roma in Action
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
MLSW	Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

CHAPTER



BACKGROUND OF LYRA PROJECT

The transition of young Roma¹ from childhood to adulthood is obstructed by a lack of opportunities within and outside their communities, as well as difficulties in accessing their human rights as they face structural discrimination and marginalization. Prejudices and stereotypes are widely spread and often remain unquestioned in politics and society.

In addition, relatively low attention in national and international policies to the specific Roma youth problems, makes it extremely challenging for young Roma to effectively engage in and become civic leaders of change.

The main way of halting the vicious cycle and gaining positive representation within the society is to enhance the social inclusion and active citizenship of Roma young people. Increasing the ability of Roma youth to participate in social and community life in an organized manner is a critical issue.

Leaders - Young Roma in Action (LYRA), is a regional project funded by US Department of State, implemented in three countries: Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Kosova/o. The project engages 60 Roma and non-Roma young leaders and targets 10 communities in three Western Balkan countries, respectively: Albania (Korça, Fieri and Pogradeci), Bosnia and Herzegovina (Sarajevo, Banja Luka, Tuzla, Bijelinja and Mostar) and in Kosova/o (Prizren and Gjakova).

REPORT SUMMARY

The main purpose of the LYRA (Leaders – Young Roma in Action) Project is empowerment and capacity building of young Roma and non-Roma leaders (aged 18-26 years) and activists in the Western Balkans to take specific actions in the local, national and regional level to improve social inclusion, non-discrimination and protection of the rights of the Roma.

Through the project, 60 young Roma and non-Roma leaders will be empowered to identify the common problems related to social exclusion and discrimination that the Roma face as well as to draft feasible activities to address these problems through exchange of ideas and experiences and establishment of cross-border networks of cooperation, engagement of the of the civil society and advocacy with state institutions and international mechanisms that deal with Roma issues.

The component of identifying and researching the problems relating discrimination and social exclusion among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo involved 28 young people who, based on the trainings held and discussions of previous knowledge, decided to research four (4) key problems in their communities. In the municipality of Prizren, the leaders believe that *School dropouts and Early marriages*, whereas in Gjakova *Discrimination by the teachers and Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* were considered to be major problems. Each of these issues were researched and analysed through surveys with children, parents and schools, which lasted for a period for 2 weeks, by working groups comprised of 5 young leaders and 2 volunteers.

The National Research Report of the LYRA (Leaders – Young Roma in Action) Project is a synthesis of four local reports which were drafted by each of the working groups. Each of these reports includes a brief description of the problem and the research on the field, research findings and recommendations about the actions that

¹ Throughout this project, the term “Roma” is used to describe, without discrimination, all Romani groups - Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian travellers and others present in the target countries

need to be undertaken to address the problem at the community, local and national level. Since one of the main goals of the project is empowerment of youth in identifying problems in their communities and take immediate actions, this report pays special attention to the working process of the young leaders including their achievements, the impact of the research and other project activities in the community and the organization, as well as the hurdles and the challenges that the organization and they themselves faced during the participatory research.

This report is structured as follows. **Chapter I** provides a brief description of project goals and objectives and the research methodology. The latter provides details of each research step, from research topic brainstorming to data analysis and drafting of recommendations and activities. The chapter then provides a summary of research results of each working group, structured by research topic, including a brief description of the methodology used and the number of respondents.

Content-wise, **Chapter II** is the main component of the report which described the working process of the young leaders, the methodology, findings and recommendations of the research. Each sub-section/sub-chapter is organized as follows: 1. Title of the research topic; 2. Problem definition which also contains a review of existing literature and related legislation and policies; 3. Research methodology which includes details on the respondents and the questionnaire; 4. Main findings of the research; 5. Achievements in capacity building of the young leaders (researchers) as well as in research as an activity itself; 6. Limitations and challenges in the working process and data collection and 7. Specific recommendations for immediate actions based on research findings.

Chapter III includes a summary of achievements, lessons learned and the impact of the research, hurdles and challenges faced during the research process as well as the recommendations of the report based on the research findings. The achievements, difficulties and impact of research are discussed within the framework of three stakeholders: young leaders, organization and community. The recommendations on the other hand are structured according to the following categories: 1. Issues to be raised at the local and central level; 2. The role of young leaders and organization; 3. Immediate advocacy and lobbying actions and 4. Other activities by research topic.

Then, the **Reference** section includes a list of all the research papers and documents reviewed for this report, whereas the **Annex** provides the names of the young leaders by their research topic as well as the survey questionnaires used in the field research.

PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT

The purpose of the project is empowerment and development of capacities and competences of young Roma and non-Roma leaders (aged 18-26 years) and activists in the Western Balkans to undertake actions at the local, national and regional level to improve social inclusion, non-discrimination and protection of the Roma.

The regional project aims to empower 60 young Roma and non-Roma leaders to identify common problems relating to social exclusion and discrimination faced by the Roma community to design feasible advocacy activities to address these problems through exchange of and establishment of cross-border cooperation networks, engagement of the civil society and advocacy with state institutions and international mechanisms that deal with Roma issues.

The young Roma and non-Roma leaders will work in collaboration with their communities to plan and implement the interventions targeting the local problems which cause discrimination and exclusion of the Roma. LYRA (Leaders – Young Roma in Action) Project will enable these youngsters to develop their skills and provide them with the opportunity to network for identifying and treating Roma-related issues through a regional approach.

METHODOLOGY

The first phase of the project included a 6-day training for the young leaders on the following topics: “Discrimination from teachers”, “Human rights”, “Stereotypes and prejudice”, “Participation”, “Youth empowerment” and “Participatory research”.

During this period of time, a flipchart was hung on the hallway of the premises where the training was held, whereby the young leaders could write down research ideas, problems they considered as the most challenging and that need to be researched. In the last day of the training, all the ideas were collected, presented and discussed, and the young leaders decided that the biggest problems that the Roma face in the communities where they live are as follows: “School dropouts” and “Early marriages” in Prizren and “Discrimination by teachers” and “Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system” in Gjakova.

As it will be discussed in details in the results section of each working group, one of the biggest problems with analysing and treating any problem in the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities is the lack of data, even at the national level. Therefore, in order to understand whether the perceptions of the selected research problems are real or whether they are based on anecdotal knowledge, this research demanded that the selected samples of the research groups are large enough to represent the target groups in a statistically significant manner. Therefore, in most of the research topics (except for the topic of Working Group IV), the survey was conducted with two groups: the target group itself (children and/or youth) and parents of children of these ages who were asked to provide information about their children.

Bearing in mind the diversity of topics and respondents (parents, children, and institutions), the selection of surveys as a research instrument was also intended to develop the research skills of the leaders and volunteers as well as to provide them with the opportunity to get acquainted with the community which will facilitate the implementation of the planned activities.

With regards to questionnaire design, led by the consultant who was engaged to conduct the research analysis and write the national project, the young leaders met a number of times to discuss and determine the questions which would be included in the questionnaire as well as the groups which would be interviewed in order to ensure that the samples are large enough. The latter is especially important in order to reach conclusions which are statistically significant and which can be used to design activities which the young leaders will implement in the communities in the near future.

Before the field research began, the questionnaires were piloted and tested in the communities of target municipalities, Gjakova and Prizren. Then the leaders and volunteers of each group discussed the problems they encountered with surveying and the questions, and each of the questionnaires was modified accordingly by the consultant to enable collection of accurate data, to facilitate the data entry and the work of the interviewers (young leaders and volunteers).

The field research lasted a total of 15 days for each group. Each working group consisted of five (5) young leaders and two (2) volunteers. In order to ensure that the surveyed samples represent the target population, the survey respondents were selected randomly, whereby the interviewers surveyed the families in every third house of the neighbourhoods where they conducted the research as well as children in the yards of primary and secondary schools. It must be noted that for the research topic *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system*, considering the problem with identification of these children and the hesitation of their parents to be interviewed, the sample was selected through beneficiary database of One-to-One and HandiKOS, which provide services for these children in different municipalities across Kosovo. Also, in order to

collect comprehensive data for this topic, Working Group IV interviewed the management of primary schools in Gjakova to also collect additional information on the barriers of access to education for children with special needs.

Following the finalization of the field research, the data were entered in databases, analysed and the findings of each of research topic were discussed with each respective youth group in the framework of human rights and related sectors and stakeholders. Upon completion of the discussions, the youngsters and organization members proposed recommendations for immediate activities to be organized in the community to address the identified problems.

SUMMARY OF RESEARCH GROUPS

SCHOOL DROPOUTS

Working Group I collected information on a total of 294 school age children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (aged 6-22 years) in the municipality of Prizren, 139 of who were interviewed directly, whereas for the remaining children the data were collected by interviewing 171 parents. The main findings of this research are as follows:

- School dropouts are a problem among children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the municipality of Prizren. Around 16% of surveyed children reported that they are not attending school currently;
- School dropouts are more common among girls compared to boys: around 19% of the surveyed school-age girls declared that they are not attending school compared to 13.8% of the boys of the same age;
- School dropouts are usually long-term or permanent: of 28 respondents who answered the question when they dropped out of school, more than half (18) reported that they stopped attending school 2 or less years ago, whereas the remaining since a longer time ago;
- Even though the majority of the respondents selected multiple reasons for dropping out of school, poor financial conditions is reported to be a major reason (selected by 52% of the respondents). Forty percent (40%) of the children who are not attending school currently selected the difficult financial conditions as one of the reasons, whereas 12% because they had to work. Discrimination in the schooling system (whether direct or not) is reported to influence school dropouts as well: 13% of the surveyed children and parents listed discrimination as one of the reasons why they stopped attending school, 5% mentioned that they did not feel well amongst other children, whereas 5% because of the teachers.
- Twelve percent (12%) of the children mentioned problems with the language as one of the main reasons why they stopped attending the school, while only one (1) youngster dropped out of school because of marriage;
- Development of skills after school dropout is also a major problem hindering the access of these young people to the labour market: only 9 of 40 children (22.5%) who are not attending school reported that they have attended a training or course afterwards. Only two of them attended a course that was not related to crafts, namely English language.

EARLY MARRIAGES

Working Group II collected information on total 217 youngsters of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the municipality of Prizren, 109 of whom were interviewed directly, whereas for the rest the information was collected by interviewing parents of youngsters of these communities. The main findings of this research are as follows:

- Early marriages are still perceived as widespread among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. More than half of the surveyed youngsters and parents (63%) believe that early marriages are very prevalent in their neighbourhood or municipality;
- Nearly 34% of the interviewed youngsters got married before turning 18 years old;
- Gender differences in early marriages are still drastic: around 65% of the respondents who got married before the age of 18 years are females, whereas 35% are males;
- Only half of the surveyed youngsters who got married below the age of 18 years reported that they decided themselves or together with their partners to get married (54%). For 22% of this decision was made by both of their parents, for 8% by the whole family, for 5% by the father, for 5% by the grandfather, and so forth;
- When asked about the reasons for early marriages in their communities, the respondents listed the following: economic situation (22% of the respondents), mentality or lack of awareness (20%), customs and traditions (15% of the respondents), love (15%), own wishes (8% of the respondents), increasing the number of family members (3%), etc.;
- Nevertheless, when the youth who got married before the age of 18 years were asked why they got married so early, the reasons were different: 67.7% claimed that they got married because they fell in love, 24.3% because of customs and traditions, 2.7% because of poor economic conditions and 5.4% because of family problems;
- Very few of the young Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians, especially the ones who got married before they turned 18, declared that they legalize their marriages, i.e. register them in the municipality, which is in fact the first step towards addressing this problem. Around 92% of the surveyed youngsters claimed that they did not register their marriage in the municipality, whereas 40.7% reported that they possess a marriage certificate.

DISCRIMINATION FROM TEACHERS

Working Group III collected information on 346 children and youngsters of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities (age 15-20 years) in the municipality of Gjakova, 149 of whom were interviewed in person, whereas for the rest of the sample the information was collected by interviewing parents of school-age children. The main findings of this research are as follows:

- Discrimination of children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in primary and secondary schools of Gjakova is not perceived to be widespread. Only 7 of the 149 surveyed children (4.7%) claimed that their teachers treat them differently compared to other students; 5 of them (3.4%) reported that the teachers do not respond to their questions during classes, 6 of them (4.03%) reported that they do not have oral tests in front of the class like the other children, whereas only one of the interviewed children claimed that the teachers do not check his/her homework regularly;
- Discrimination from teachers and the schooling system is more evident in other aspects and activities organized by the school after the classes. Around 34% of the children of the sample reported that they do not attend additional courses in Albanian language, English language, mathematics, etc., which are organized after the regular classes, whereas 47.1% reported that they do not participate in other school activities such as quizzes, school competitions, sports activities, school choir, concerts, etc.;

- Even though a relatively high percentage of children and parents listed lack of organization of such activities and not being selected by their teachers as the main reasons for not attending these activities, lack of interest, lack of willingness or lack of information of children are most definitely issues which should be explored further because they may be very powerful indicators in analysing discrimination in the schooling system;
- Finally, the finding that more than half (58.2%) of the surveyed children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities share a desk with children of the same community as themselves in the classroom and that 90% of these children socialize with children of the same community after the classes is a rather powerful indicator in showing that the schooling system should work more persistently towards integration of these children.

INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM

Working Group IV collected information on inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system by interviewing their parents and 6 primary schools in the municipality. The survey collected information for a total of 205 children with special needs. The survey respondents were selected by using the beneficiary databases of two NGOs - HandiKOS and One-to-One – which provide services for these children. The main findings of this research are as follows:

- More than half of the children with special needs (67%) attend education in primary or secondary schools;
- Even though most of the parents report that their children do not attend education for multiple reasons, lack of personal assistants is the most commonly listed reason, by 48% of survey respondents. Around 25% of the parents reported that one of the reasons why their children do not attend school is because they were not admitted by the management of the school when they applied for registration; 10% mentioned poor financial conditions as one of the main reasons, whereas 8% of the parents selected the lack of infrastructure (lack of physical access) inside and outside schools as well as lack of adequate textbooks (for blind children) as some of the main reasons why their children do not attend school;
- Regarding the interviewed schools, in six (6) of them, education for children with special needs is offered only in regular classrooms, in one of them it is offered in regular classrooms and separate/special classrooms, whereas in the last one, education for children with special needs is offered only in separate/special classrooms;
- Regarding the physical access in schools, data show that out of 5 schools where the children with special needs attend education, in 3 of them there is horizontal access (i.e. access to the classrooms and other rooms in the first floor for children with physical disability), whereas only in one (1) of them there is vertical access, that is, access in other floors of the school building;
- Only one (1) of five (5) schools where children with special needs attend education reported that there are special assistants in the school for these children.

CHAPTER 2

RESULTS OF WORKING GROUP I

SCHOOL DROPOUTS**THE PROBLEM**

The right to education is considered as one of the main and fundamental human rights. Education is one of the main factors that affects and ensures sustainable development of any country. Therefore, like in other countries, ensuring that mandatory education is completed as well as that the school dropouts are minimized is one of the top priorities of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) of Kosovo as well. Nevertheless, there is a great number of problems and challenges, starting from data collection to fiscal constraints of the government. Even though there is a common belief that the vulnerable groups such as girls, the poor and minority communities face many obstacles in accessing education, very little official data have been collected to address this issue in a constructive manner.

The report of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) on “*School dropouts and non-attendance*”² shows that there is a lack of data on school dropouts in Kosovo and the ones that are available are highly unreliable (OSCE, 2012). Some of the main problems with data collection include: lack of data collection on school dropouts, problems with data-matching of those collected at schools compared to the departments of education at the local level, lack of data collection on school dropout reasons and lack of possibility of disaggregating the existing data by gender and ethnicity or community.

According to the Manual for Local Officials “*Improving the delivery of education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities: Good Practices and Recommendations*” prepared by the European Centre for Minority Issues in Kosovo (ECMI) – which is based on the implementation of a project with the same name - the main reasons for school dropouts and non-attendance among children from these communities include socio-economic exclusion, marginalization and the high poverty rates. According to this report, school dropouts are especially prevalent during primary school (5th or the 6th grade) and the children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities usually do not attend secondary school. The report also concludes that the school dropout rate is much higher among girls as a result of early marriages and traditional gender roles (ECMI, 2012).

As it may be understood from the summary of the two abovementioned reports, despite the widespread belief that school dropouts are very common among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children, there is very little evidence on the prevalence of the issue, its causes, reasons and demographic and socio-economic characteristics of these children. Bearing in mind the importance of education in socio-economic inclusion, **Working Group I** attempted to use this research to understand the multidimensionality of school non-attendance and dropouts among primary and secondary school-age children.

2 The report “*School dropout and non-attendance*” is based on OSCE’s research conducted in 2011 which included interviews with school directors of 83 primary and secondary schools in 24 municipalities around Kosovo as well as interviews with directors of education departments at the local level, students, MEST officials and other local and international organizations which operate in the field of education.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the lack of data on this problem as well as the limited time and geographical space to conduct the research, the survey interviewed two groups of respondents: school-age children and parents of school-age children. This approach has not only enabled the group to collect data on a larger sample of respondents (i.e. making the results statistically robust and more reliable) but it has also enabled them to compare the perceptions of the two above-mentioned groups on school dropouts and non-attendance of education.

In order to collect information in as many aspects as possible related to school dropouts, the survey has collected information on the following:

- Demographic characteristics of children: gender and age;
- School attendance: grade of school they are attending, language at school, regularity of school attendance and the number and reasons for absences during the last 3 months and
- School dropouts: duration of dropout, grade when the child has dropout of school, reasons for school dropout, activities after school dropout and plans for school attendance in the future.

It must be noted that the children who reported that they were attending school during the time that the survey was conducted were asked whether they had ever dropped out of school so that the group could collect information on temporary school dropouts.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey “School dropouts” collected information on a total of 294 children and youngsters aged 6-22 years. The surveyed interviewed 139 children in person and 171 parents of school-age children. Inclusion of the parents in the survey has enabled collection of a larger sample of data on the children, making the findings statistically significant and more credible. In order to capture a more diverse and larger sample, the survey was conducted in four neighbourhoods of the municipality of Prizren: “Jeta e Re”, “Ortakoll”, “Xheladin Hana” and “Bazhdarhane”.

Some of the main findings of the report are as follows:

- 16% of the children are not attending school;
- The number of girls that have dropped out of school is higher than that of boys. Around 19% of the surveyed girls interviewed for this survey reported that they are not attending school compared to 13.8% of the school-age boys;
- Most of the children who have dropped out of school have not attended education during the last school year (2012-2013), meaning that children typically drop out of school for a longer period of time. Only 11 of 48 children who have dropped out of school declared that they attended school during the last school year;
- Survey data do not show any specific trend in school dropout with regard to the grade when the children stopped attending school. 6 out of 41 respondents claimed that they stopped attending school after the 9th

grade (after completing the lower secondary school), 6 after the 7th grade, 5 after the 8th grade, 4 after the 3rd grade, 4 after the 4th grade, etc.,

- Out of 28 respondents who answered the question as to when they dropped out of school, a very large number (18) reported that they stopped attending school less than or 2 years ago, whereas the others since a longer period of time;
- Even though the majority of the respondents selected multiple reasons for dropping out of school, poor financial conditions is reported to be a major reason (selected by 52% of the respondents). Forty percent (40%) of the children who are not attending school currently selected the difficult financial conditions as one of the reasons, whereas 12% because they had to work. Discrimination in the schooling system (whether direct or not) is reported to influence school dropouts as well: 13% of the surveyed children and parents listed discrimination as one of the reasons why they stopped attending school, 5% mentioned that they did not feel well amongst other children, whereas 5% because of the teachers. Twelve percent (12%) of the children mentioned also difficulties with language as one of the main reasons for not attending school. While 4 of the children stopped attending school because they had to take care of their siblings (among other reasons), only one (1) of them reported to have dropped out of school because of marriage;
- Only 9 of the 40 children (22.5%) that dropped out of school reported to have attended a course or training after they stopped attending school; only 2 of them attended courses that were not related to crafts, namely English language;
- Only 10 of 41 children/youngsters (24.4%) declared that they plan to continue schooling in the future;
- Similar to responses on school dropouts, most of the children/youngsters do not plan to continue education for multiple reasons. Poor economic conditions remain the main reason for non-attendance of school. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the children/youth do not plan to continue education because of the poor financial conditions, whereas 16% reported that one of the main reasons why they will not continue schooling is because they have to work. For 19% of the children, taking care for their siblings is one of the main reasons for not continuing education, whereas for 14% one of the main reasons is marriage;
- Only 2 (1.9%) out of 103 interviewed children who are attending education currently declared that they do not attend it regularly;
- Only 8 out of 257 children (3.1%) who are attending schooling presently declared to have dropped out of school temporarily in the past for an average period of half a year;
- Similar to long-term school dropouts, a considerable share of children/youngsters dropped out of school temporarily because of poor economic conditions, 4 out of 10.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Regarding the working process of the youngsters, one of the main achievements is the design of a methodology that would enable collection of data for a representative sample of children and youth. Also, the questionnaire design has made the interviewers think about the different ways they can collect comprehensive information about a topic as well as the different aspects of a problem. Therefore, the respondents (children and young people who are currently attending school) were asked if they ever dropped out of school. One of the main

achievements of this group was modifying and adjusting the interviewing style to the nature and characteristics of the respondent, in this case, usage of different interviewing styles for parents and children. This challenge has not only enabled them to upgrade their individual research capacities and skills but also their teamwork skills, by incentivizing them to collaborate in order to share best practices and methods in interviewing different groups of respondents. In addition, contact with the community and discussion of this problem with children and parents has enabled the youngsters to gain a deep understanding of the multi-dimensional nature of problems that the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities face in the fields of access to education.

Regarding the aspect of data collection, the “School dropouts” research will contribute to a large extent to the existing literature, especially in addressing this problem at the local level, in Prizren. Firstly, the research shows how prevalent school dropouts are among the children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Secondly, the research gives an insight to gender discrepancies in access to education, the reasons why these children drop out of school, why they do not continue education and how they deal with school dropouts. All this information is not only useful to identify the school dropout cases, but also to inform all the related stakeholders how the school dropout problems should be tackled as well as how children can be kept in the schooling system.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The first limitation of this research is the lack of data on school dropouts which does not enable conducting a trend analysis (to assess whether the situation has improved or exacerbated) nor verifying the accuracy of data. Secondly, data collection only in Prizren limits the tackling of the problem only in this municipality. Lastly, considering youngsters’ lack of field research experience as well as the short period of time for conducting this research, a lot of issues which are related to school dropouts could not be included in the questionnaire, thus limiting recommendations which would tackle the problem comprehensively.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research results show that the factors that have an impact on school dropouts are multiple and diverse, so tackling this problem should focus on multiple dimensions that include a wide range of stakeholders from different fields.

First of all, the finding that there is no certain/common trends of when the children/youth drop out of school proves that any effort of activity should be focused on children/youth of all age groups as well as on all levels of education.

Subsequently, bearing in mind that the children/youth stop attending school for multiple reasons – poor financial conditions, discrimination in school, care for younger siblings, difficulties with the language at school, etc., - any project/activity must be focused on multiple sectors (social protection system, labour and employment system, education system); different levels of governance (ministries at the central level, directors of department for education in the municipalities, employees of Centres for Social Work (CSW), municipal officials for communities, school directors, teachers, parents, children, local non-governmental organizations, international organizations and media).

Lastly, when commencing school attendance is highly improbable, mechanisms and programmes on training the youth on certain crafts and professions should be put in place in order to facilitate their inclusion in the labour market and generate income.

RESULTS OF RESEARCH GROUP II

EARLY MARRIAGES

THE PROBLEM

Child marriages or early marriages are defined as the union of two persons, at least one of whom is less than 18 years old. The fact that at least one of these persons is a child (also according to the Law on Family in Kosovo 2004/32) means that early marriages violate children and human rights because the children do not have the legal capacity to decide on their marriage.

According to the UNFPA document “*Child marriages*” (2012), early marriages are still widespread in Kosovo, especially among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. This phenomenon is especially prevalent in rural areas whereby girls are considered to be ready to be married as early as when they’re 13-15 years old (UNFPA, 2012). The research study of the Kosovar Foundation for Open Society (KFOS) (2009) which assessed the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities through a survey with 857 respondents, also lists early marriages as a problem which these communities deal with. The majority of the respondents of the survey aged 18+ years (85.6%) reported to be married or to have been married (KFOS, 2012, p.84). The report of the Kosovar Centre for Gender Studies and the Network of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Women Organizations of Kosovo on the situation of these communities’ girls and women (no date) shows that their average marriage age is 15-16 years, while that of boys and men is 18 years or older (KCGS & Rrogaraek, n.d., p. 13).

Despite the lack of topic-specific research, the above-mentioned reports mention love, family pressure, the socio-economic situation and previous traditions and customs in Kosovo as the main reasons for marriage, while domestic violence, divorce, unwanted pregnancies, complications during pregnancy, school dropouts and problems with employment are listed as common consequences of early marriages (UNFPA, 2012). Even though both girls and boys usually stop attending school to get a job or care for their families as well as do housework upon their marriage, early marriages have a more negative impact on young girls. This is especially the case because early marriages are more prevalent among young girls (younger than 18 years), limiting this way their decision-making power and exposing them to risks of domestic violence and sexual abuse. The fact that early marriages are neglected by authorities due to the belief that they are deeply ingrained in the earlier traditions of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian and other communities in Kosovo makes this issue even more difficult to be tackled adequately and effectively by official institutions and non-governmental organizations.

Having in mind that the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities rarely register their marriages, especially the early ones, this research intends to collect information on the presence and prevalence of early marriages as a phenomenon, the main reasons why they happen, how they are perceived by the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and how they are linked with access to education and school dropouts.

METHODOLOGY

Considering the lack of evidence on this problem as well as the limited time and geographical space whereby the youngsters could conduct the interviews, two groups were surveyed on this topic: parents who have adolescent children and youth. Such a composition of the sample has not only allowed the youngsters to collect more

information (in order to make sure that the results are statistically significant and reliable) nor to compare the perceptions of these two groups on early marriages.

In order to collect as much information as possible on different aspects of early marriages, the survey has collected data on:

- Demographical characteristics of youth and their partners: gender, age, level of education attainment, parents' education attainment;
- Family circumstances in which the youth were raised: parents' behaviour at home, decision-making and the financial situation;
- Marriages of the youth: their age and age of their partners when they got married, registration of the marriage, school dropout, decision-makers of the marriage, reasons for the marriage and others' opinions of the marriage; and
- Perceptions on early marriages: others' opinions on early marriages, the prevalence of early marriages and reasons for early marriages.

It must be emphasized that the parents of the youth were asked about marriages of each of their children in order to gain insight on gender differences and dimensions of this problem.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey *Early marriages* collected information on a total 217 young persons, 109 of whom were interviewed directly, while the rest of the information was derived by interviewing their parents. The interviewed young persons were 15-37 years old, whereas their parents 32-73 years old. By including parents in the sample, the survey has been able to collect information on more young persons, which increases the robustness of the results and their credibility, hence they can be used to draft and plan activities tackling the problem of early marriages in communities where the research was conducted.

In order to collect an ample amount of data, the survey was conducted in the following seven (7) neighbourhoods of Prizren: "Hasan Prishtina", "Jeta e Re", "Landovicë", "Ramadan Çeku", "Selajdin Berisha", "Terzi Mahall", and "Xheladin Hana".

Some of the key findings on early marriages are as follows:

- Survey results show that the interviewees have a rather low level of education. A little more than 32% of the interviewed young persons have not completed even the compulsory education (11% of them are illiterate, whereas 20.2% are literate even though they have not completed any level of formal education), 44% have completed primary school, 20.2% have completed secondary school and only 3.7% (4 out of 109 respondents) have completed university education;
- The average age of youth interviewees is 18.8 years, the lowest age being 14 years, and the highest age 28 years. Nearly 34% of the youth interviewees got married when they were less than 18 years old. As proven by other research, gender differences are drastic: around 65% of the respondents that got married before the age of 18 years are women, whereas 35% are men;

TABLE 1: NUMBER OF YOUNG PERSONS WHO GOT MARRIED BEFORE THE AGE OF 18 YEARS, BY GENDER

	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	All	Percentage
FEMALE	4	5	10	5	24	64.9%
MALE	1	4	3	5	13	35.1%
All	5	9	3	5	37	100%

- This gender difference is verified by the data from the question on the age of partners when the youth got married. A little more than 31% of the youth declared that their partners were younger than 18 years when they got married. Around 65% of these respondents are men whereas 35.1% are women. As it may be observed on the table below, the number of men who were married to women younger than 18 years is higher compared to the number of females who declared that their partners were younger than 18 when they got married;

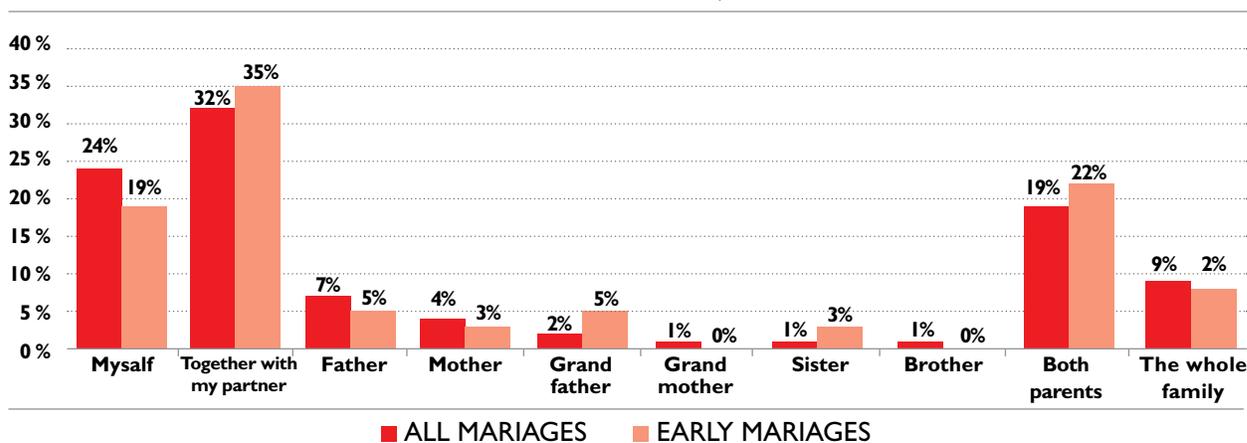
TABLE 2: NUMBER OF YOUNG PERSONS WHO DECLARED THAT THEIR PARTNER WAS YOUNGER THAN 18 YEARS WHEN THEY GOT MARRIED, BY GENDER

	13 years	14 years	15 years	16 years	17 years	All	Percentage
FEMALE	0	2	1	2	4	9	26.5%
MALE	1	1	4	6	13	25	76.5%
All	1	3	5	8	25	34	100%

- The majority of the interviewed young persons (91.7%) stated that they did not register their marriage in the municipality when they got married; only 40.7% of them reported that they possess a marriage certificate, i.e. that they registered their marriage afterwards;
- While 32% of the youth reported that they dropped out of school when they got married, 25.9% declared that they continued attending school after they got married. The survey with parents also shows that 54% of the young persons dropped out of school when after they got married;
- Some of the main reasons why the young persons did not continue school attendance after getting married includes: childcare, care for the family or family obligations (16 respondents), work (14 respondents), age (3 respondents), lack of time (9 respondents), because they did not want to or did not think it was necessary (9 respondents) and 1 respondent reported that she does not attend school because her husband does not allow her;
- Most of the young persons claimed that the main reason for their marriage was love (74.3%), traditions or customs (17.4%), financial conditions (1.8%) and family problems (6.4%). The answers are similar for the young persons who got married before they turned 18 years: 67.7% declared that they got married because of love, 24.3% because of traditions and customs, 2.7% because of difficult financial conditions and 5.4% because of family problems;
- Despite the answers listed above, when asked whether they had pressure from the family to get married, 18.4% of the young persons admitted it and this percentage is higher among those who got married before they turned 18 years (27%);

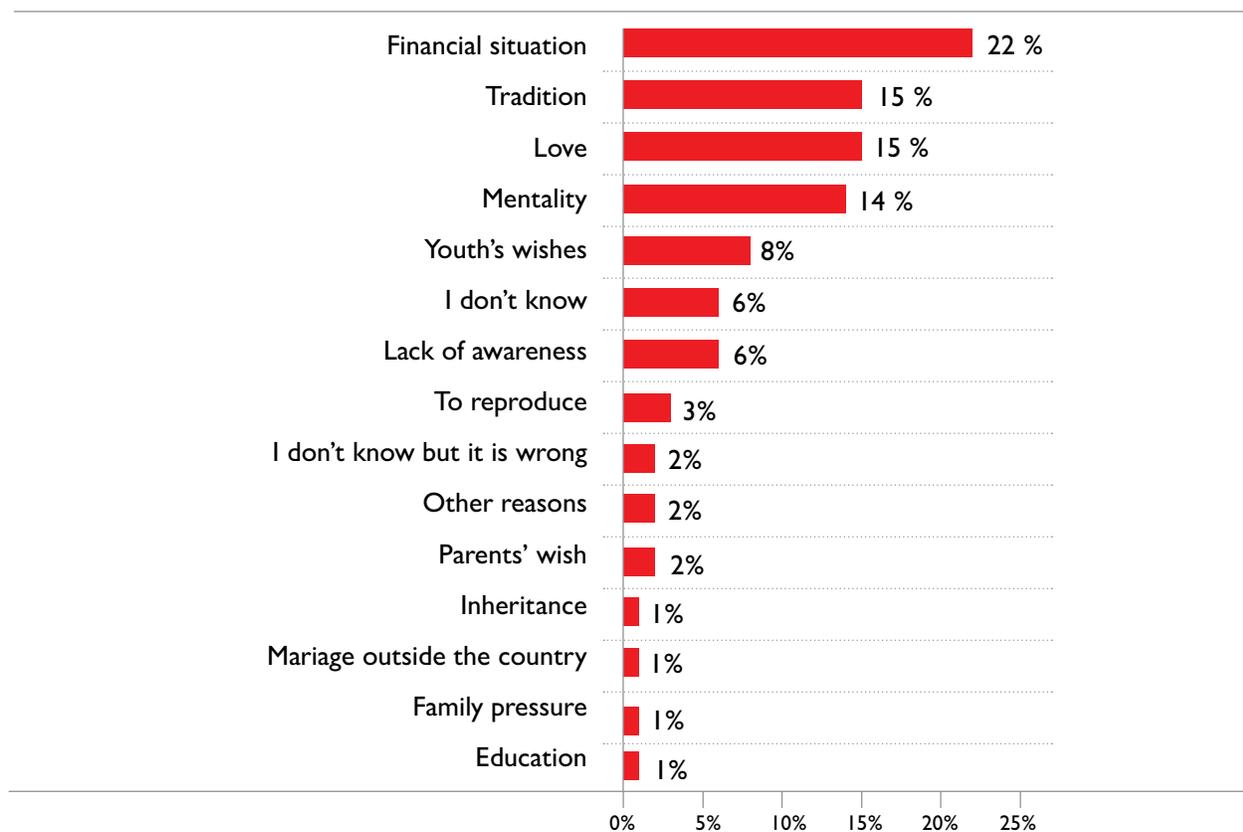
- Also, the percentage of young persons who declared that their parents were strict when they were children – which could have influenced their decision to get married – is higher among young persons who got married before reaching adulthood (37.4%) compared to the whole sample of the interviewees (28.4%);
- Even though poor financial conditions were listed as the main reason why they got married by very few interviewees, around 24% of them declared that their financial situation has improved a little or to a large extent after they got married. On the other hand only 13.8% of the parents believe that their financial situation has improved after their children got married;
- As shown on Figure 1, only half of the young persons who got married before they turned 18 years decided themselves or with their partners that they want to get married (54%). For 22% others, both of their parents decided that they should get married, for 8% this decision was made by the whole family, for 5% only by the father, for 5% the grandfather, and so forth;

FIGURE 1: MAIN DECISION-MAKER FOR THE MARRIAGE, BY TYPE OF MARRIAGE



- The majority of the youth interviewees (88.1%) declared that their families approved of their marriage. However, when asked what the others thought of their marriage, a higher percentage of respondents who got married before they reached the age of 18 years (27%) compared to the others (12.8%), declared that the others opposed their marriage. A little over 28% of the surveyed parents also declared that the marriages of their children were opposed by the others (relatives, neighbours, etc.);
- More than half of the interviewees (62.4%) believe that early marriages are still very prevalent in their neighbourhood or community. The share of parents who share the same opinion is almost the same, 63%;
- As it regards to reasons for early marriages, the majority of the respondents claim that they happen for multiple reasons. Some of the most common ones include: financial situation (22% of the respondents), mentality and lack of awareness (20%), traditions and customs (15% of the respondents), love (15% of the respondents), wishes (8% of the respondents), reproduction (3%), etc.;

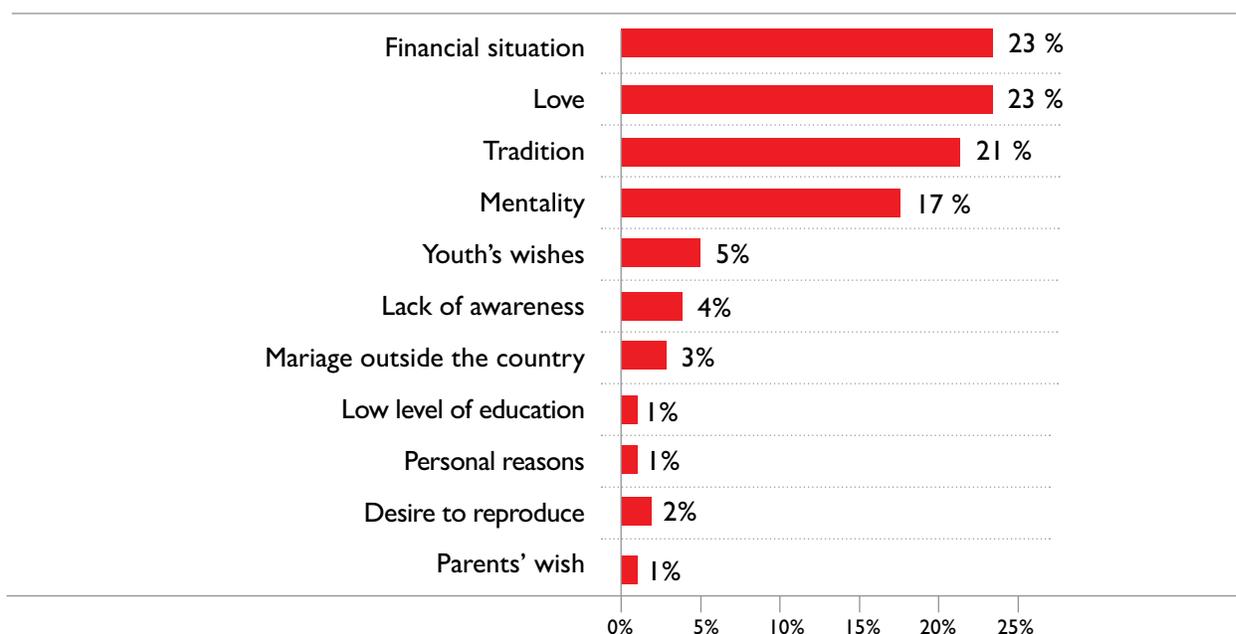
FIGURE 2: MAIN REASONS FOR EARLY MARRIAGES, ACCORDING TO THE INTERVIEWEES



Similar to the youth interviewees, parents also list a number of reasons for early marriages. However, their answers differ from those of the youth in several aspects. While a similar percentage to that of youth think that financial conditions are one of the main reasons for early marriages (23%), a higher percentage of them compared to youth believe that love (23% of respondents) and traditions and customs (21% of respondents) are the main reasons for early marriages. The percentage of parents that think that early marriages occur because of the mentality (17%) is also higher compared to the surveyed youth, while the other reasons are mentioned in lower numbers;

An interesting finding worth noting is that marriages outside Kosovo are considered as reasons for early marriages rather than just marriages.

FIGURE 3: REASONS FOR EARLY MARRIAGES, ACCORDING TO PARENTS



ACHIEVEMENTS

As it regards to the working process of the youth, one of the main achievements is designing an adequate methodology which would allow collecting missing data on the problem of early marriages. Also, considering the sensitivity as well as the traditional aspect of the problem, the questionnaire design process has motivated the youngsters to think creatively and discuss how they can collect and verify information that they need from the respondents in a manner that is not very direct and straightforward. Considering the illegality of early marriages as well as perceptions of human rights violations (especially among girls) after marriage, the questionnaire design process has made the youngsters discuss about other problems related to early marriages, raising this way their awareness about the complex and multi-dimensional nature of problems of the communities where they live. Lastly, bearing in mind that: 1. This group interviewed two different generations of respondents whose perceptions on early marriages differ fairly significantly and 2. The fact that the interviews were conducted in the presence of other family members, who may have influenced answers to many questions, the youngsters of this group had the opportunity to develop and advance their research skills to conduct surveys which tackle very complex and sensitive issues.

Regarding the achievements in data collection, even though it was conducted only at the local level, this survey has collected quite credible data on the presence and prevalence of early marriages as a phenomenon among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the municipality of Prizren. Since the survey asked the youth and the parents about their marriage age/marriage age of their children and their partners (in case of youth respondents), this survey helps us draw the proportions of early marriages compared to marriages of adults as well as the proportion of early marriages at each age below the age of 18 years.

Then, this survey shows that early marriages have a much more negative impact on girls/women with explicit indicators. As the section of the main findings shows, the percentage of girls who were married when they were children is higher than that of men, as is the number of male respondents who stated that their wives were younger than 18 years (as young as 14 years) when they got married. The survey also shows

that early marriages whereby the wife is younger than 18 years whereas the husband is older are more prevalent than otherwise, which increases chances of problems they may face with family planning and decision-making power after marriage.

A very important achievement of the survey with regards to data collection – which is related to the illegality of early marriages as well as the access of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities to public services (such as education and healthcare) – is the indicator of the percentage of persons who registered their marriage when they got married as well as those that possess a marriage certificate.

Then, compared to the previous research, the research of the **Working Group II** provides specific and detailed information on the perceptions and factors that are thought to impact early marriages. Especially the latter has facilitated the discussion and compilation of recommendations on tackling the problem of early marriages in the communities where the youth live. Also, having in mind that the survey included interviews with youth and their parents, the survey has also made it possible to compare the perceptions on early marriage between these two groups, hence generations. The indirect questions on the socio-economic situation of the families before and after marriage, strictness of the parents at home, approval and opposition of the marriages by parents, decision-makers of marriages, etc., have enabled verification of reasons listed as factors influencing early marriages.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

The first limitation of this research is the fact that the data were collected only in a few neighbourhoods of Prizren, which limits their usefulness in other communities and municipalities where the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities reside in Kosovo. Secondly, bearing in mind that official data on early marriages are almost inexistent, it is impossible to validate the data on this phenomenon's prevalence according to this survey. Lastly, considering the sensitivity of the issue, youngsters' lack of research experience as well as the short period of time arranged for the field research, the survey could not cover many important issues and aspects related to early marriages – for example: domestic violence, sexual abuse, decision-making power of girls/women after marriage – which limits comprehensive addressing of early marriages as a problem.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Research results show that the factors that influence early marriages are diverse and multiple, therefore the treatment of this problem should be focused on multiple dimensions. The evidence that early marriages are more prevalent among girls – which results in numerous consequences – also demands a separate treatment for this vulnerable group.

Then, considering the illegality and the traditional factor of early marriages, any activity organized for tackling this problem must pay special attention to the abovementioned.

Having in mind that early marriages occur because of multiple reasons (poor financial conditions, lack of awareness, low education level, previous traditions and customs, etc.) and entail a series of consequences which can influence also the future generations, the activities/projects targeted to early marriages must be inclusive both institutionally and in stakeholders aspects. Some of the sectors which should be actively engaged in tackling the problem of early marriages include: the social protection system, especially social services, work and employment, the education system and the healthcare system. Then, the institutions and officials of the central and local

level are equally important, therefore, the engagement of the healthcare and social welfare at the municipal level, Centres for Social Work (CSW), schools, municipal officials for communities, teachers and teachers, medical staff in Centre for Social Work (CSWs) and so forth, is essential. Inclusion of non-governmental organizations (both local and international), parents, youth and media is also more than necessary.

As perceived by the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian youth and parents themselves, one of the main reasons for the occurrence of early marriages is the mentality or lack of awareness in the communities. Therefore, one of the first activities that should be organized to tackle this problem in the community is raising the awareness of youth and parents on early marriages. Such an activity must include the following elements: 1. Early marriages within the framework of the human and children's rights; 2. Consequences of early marriages, with a special focus on young girls; 3. Decision-making in marriages and 4. Registration of marriages in the municipality. The latter is especially important for two reasons: 1. The authorities will be informed about the early marriages, so they will be obliged to address the problem and 2. To facilitate the access of children and youth of the communities to services such as healthcare, education, social assistance, social services, employment programmes (for adults), etc.

Even though not direct, another activity which undoubtedly serves in raising the awareness, especially of the youth, is their education. Therefore, the activities organized to tackle school dropouts could ultimately have an impact on preventing early marriages as well.

Therefore the **Working Groups I** and **II** should collaborate in drafting the activities so that they can achieve results in both areas. Bearing in mind the high school dropouts from secondary school among those who get married before they turn 18, the interventions must also include programmes for youth who get married at an early age (and cannot attend school) as well as those who do not plan/cannot return to school for other reasons.

RESULTS OF THE WORKING GROUP III

DISCRIMINATION BY TEACHERS**THE PROBLEM**

The right to education is one of the most basic and fundamental human rights. Education is considered to be an entry point for social inclusion of all the marginalized and socio-economically excluded groups; therefore, human capital development is a priority of many governments around the world. In addition to facilitating the social inclusion of children in the society, education also enables and facilitates the access of youth to the labour market as well as to generate income, influencing this way the improvement of living conditions and breaking the chain of transgenerational poverty.

For the reasons listed above, depending on the context, the governments of every country define and determine compulsory education level and commit to guaranteeing the fundamental conditions for its completion: equal access to education, provision of compulsory education for free and high standards of education. In Kosovo, compulsory education is defined as the completion of the lower secondary school (9th grade). Nevertheless, ensuring completion of compulsory education of the school-age children remains a challenge for all the levels of governance bearing in mind Kosovo's fiscal constraints, the high rate of poverty and other problems. Inclusion of children from community minorities, those with special needs or other socio-economically vulnerable groups in the education system entails a wide range of challenges including discrimination.

As for other topics researched by this project, there is lack of data on *Discrimination of teachers* in primary and secondary schools in Kosovo. For instance, in the research study of the KFOS on Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, discrimination is discussed as a general phenomenon. According to this report, 50% of the surveyed individuals who had contact with central government institutions reported that they felt discriminated. On the other hand, even though the survey did not ask questions about the local government institutions such as those providing education or healthcare services, it is thought that they are less discriminatory because they are closer to the communities (KFOS, 2009, p. 49). Another report of KFOS titled "Reality or fireworks" – which assesses the implementation of the Strategy for Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and its Action Plan – shows that MEST has undertaken a few actions to improve the access of these children to education, including: distribution of school books for free, offering extra courses/education to children who have dropped out of school, etc. (KFOS, 2013, p.42). Nevertheless, the case of discrimination of these children in the schooling system is not discussed neither in this report, despite evidence of its prevalence. Organizations such as the ECMI have started dealing with specific cases of separate/isolated classrooms for the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in different municipalities around Kosovo (ECMI, 2012). Research findings of the **Working Group I** School Dropouts show that discrimination is a very important factor in school dropouts. More than 13% of children surveyed in the municipality of Prizren for this research who dropped out of school stated that one of the main reasons why they are not attending school is because of discrimination, whereas 5% stated that they dropped out of school because of the way that their teachers treated them.

Considering the importance of access to school, lack of data on the issue, perceptions that discrimination is highly widespread as a phenomenon in the schooling system (and one of the main reasons for school dropouts), the main purpose of the research of the **Working Group III** was collection of evidence on prevalence of discrimination in the schooling system and its forms.

METHODOLOGY

In order to collect an ample amount of data on prevalence of discrimination of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children by the teachers of primary and secondary schools in the municipality of Gjakova, it was essential that the sample of the interviewed is as big as possible given the limited time and geographical space for conducting the survey. Therefore, the young leaders interviewed two groups of respondents: children who are attending lower secondary school (grades V-IX) or upper secondary school (grades X-XIII) and parents whose children are attending primary or secondary school. Children attending primary school were not interviewed for this topic because the team supposed that they are too young to answer the questions of the survey. Information on discrimination of these children was collected by interviewing their parents.

The survey questionnaire enabled collection of information on the following:

- Children's demographical characteristics: gender, age;
- Schools that the children attend: grade, type of school;
- Direct discrimination from teachers: behaviour of teachers towards the children, frequency of children's homework evaluation, attention and care the children are given during the classes;
- Indirect discrimination from teachers and schools;
 - Participation in extra classes offered at school, other school activities (cultural, sports, etc.), reasons for not participating in these activities and
 - Children's socialization patterns with the other children in the classroom, during the lunch break, during and outside the class hours.

MAIN FINDINGS

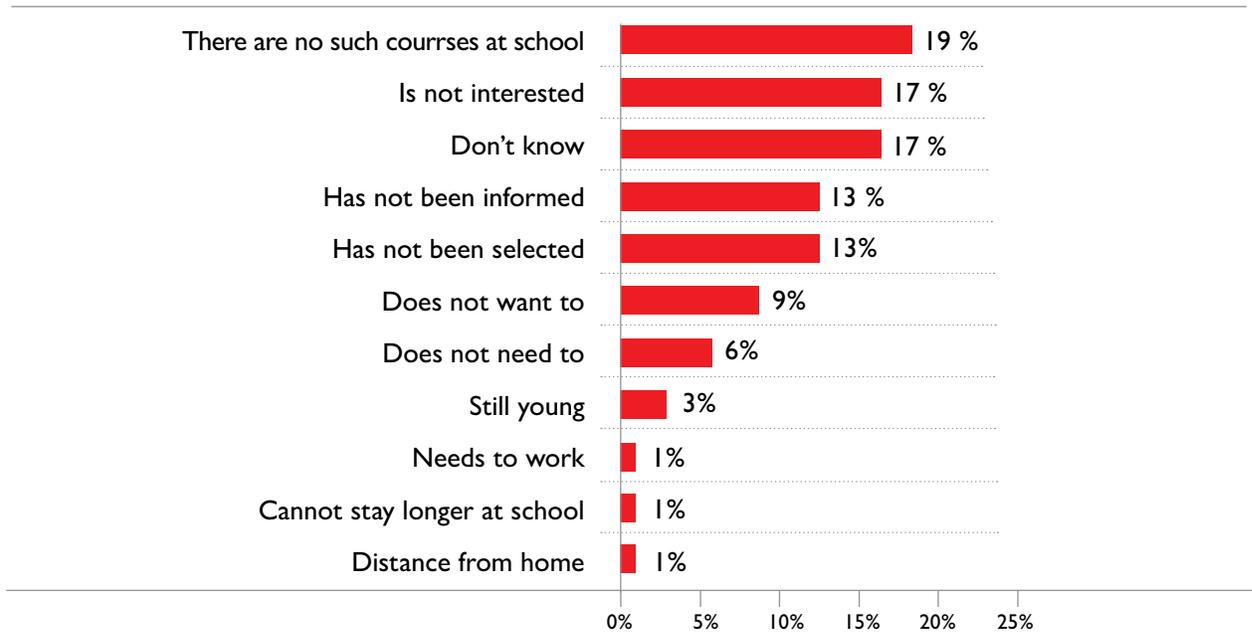
The survey *Discrimination from teachers* collected information for a total of 346 children aged 5-20 years, 149 of whom were interviewed directly, whereas for the remaining 237 the information was collected by interviewing their parents. Inclusion of parents in the survey sample enabled the working group to collect information on a larger number of children and youth, making the findings of the survey statistically robust and usable for planning immediate interventions in the communities.

In order to capture diverse and a lot of information, the survey was conducted in nineteen (19) municipalities of the municipality of Gjakova: "Bërkoc", "Dardania", "Dedë Gjon Luli", "Edit Durham", "Ibrahim Fehmiu", "Haxhi Ymeri", "Haxhi Zeka", "Hyrije Hana", "Lekë Dukagjini", "Mithat Frashëri", "Musa Zajmi", "Piskotë", "Qabrat", "Qamëria", "Qerim", "Mahalla e Qylit", "Sadik Pozhegu", "Sadik Stavileci" and "Sefe".

Some of the main findings of the field research are as follows:

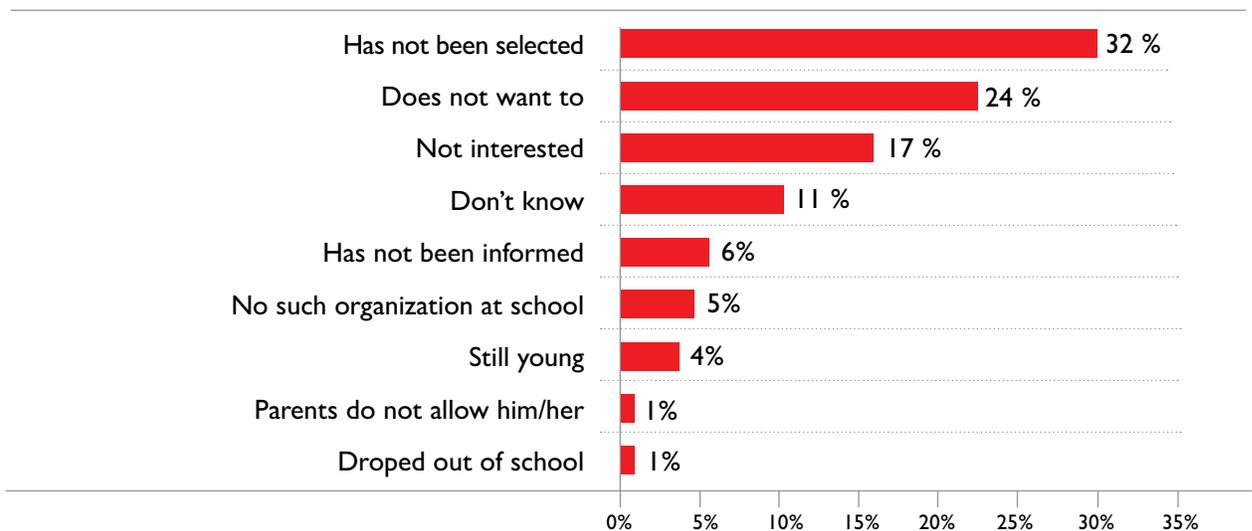
- All the children in the neighbourhoods where the survey was conducted attend regular schools and regular classrooms;
- Only 7 of the 149 children who were interviewed directly (4.7%) claimed that the teachers treat them differently compared to other children, while 12.2% of the parents reported that their children complained to them about their teachers' behaviour at school;
- Of 7 parents who answered the question on the type of complaints that their children made about their teachers, 4 stated that their children complained that the teachers pretended that they did not hear them in class, 1 complained that the teacher did not answer his/her question and ignored him/her, 1 complained that the teacher does not correct his/her homework as regularly, whereas 1 complained that the teachers always blame him/her for all the problems in class;
- Only 5 of 149 children interviewed directly (3.4%) claimed that the teachers do not answer to their questions when they do not understand something during the lectures. Of these children, 1 claimed that in such cases the teachers pretend that they did not hear him/her, 1 claimed that the teacher usually answers the questions of other children, whereas the last one reported that the teachers get aggravated in such cases;
- Only 1 of the 149 interviewed children (0.7%) claimed that the teachers do not check his/her homework regularly;
- Only 6 of the 149 children interviewed directly (4.09%) claimed that the teachers never test them orally in front of the class like they do with other children;
- Around 34% of all the children (367) do not participate in the extra courses in Albanian language, English language, mathematics etc., which are organized at school, which implies that the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children are discriminated by the teachers in the schooling system, though not directly;
- Nevertheless, as it may be observed in Figure 4, only 26% of these children may not be attending these extra courses as a result of discrimination: 13% of them claimed that they have not been informed about those courses and 13% claimed that they do not attend them because they were not selected by the teachers. For the remainder, 19% of the respondents reported that such courses are not organized at all in the schools that they attend, 17% reported that they are not interested to take those classes and 17% did not give any reasons for not attending these extra courses;

FIGURE 4: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING EXTRA COURSES (ALBANIAN LANGUAGE, ENGLISH LANGUAGE, MATHEMATICS, ETC.) ORGANIZED AT SCHOOL



- The percentage of children who do not participate in other school activities like quizzes, competitions, sports activities, school choir, concerts, etc., is even higher, 47.1%;
- As shown on Figure 5, the main reason why children do not participate in these activities is because they have not been selected by their teachers (32% of the respondents), followed by those who did not want to participate in such activities (24%) and those who claimed that they are not interested (17%);

FIGURE 5: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING SCHOOL ACTIVITIES (COMPETITIONS, QUIZZES, SCHOOL CHOIR, CULTURAL ACTIVITIES, SPORTS ACTIVITIES, ETC.)



- With regards to classroom and school environment, the survey data show that the children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities are not well integrated. Around 75% of them claimed that even though most of the other children in their classrooms and school are from other communities, more than half of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children (58.2%) share a desk with children of the same community, while 90% socialize only with children of the same communities as theirs after school hours.

ACHIEVEMENTS

With regards to achievements of the youngsters, because of the sensitivity of the topic, even the process of the methodology design was challenging, so the opportunities to learn and develop their capacities were numerous. To start with, the working group needed to initially define the term ‘discrimination’ as well as other related aspects of it in the schooling system. Then, the group had a lot of discussions to determine the samples as well as the age of the respondents to be interviewed, which has raised their awareness on the complexity of researching sensitive issues, especially in the aspect of ethics considering that half of the interviewees were children less than 18 years old. Also, during the questionnaire design the young leaders had to think about different factors and indicators of discrimination in the schooling system, even the ones that are least direct/straightforward, which had initiated a lot of interesting discussions, enabling them to develop their debating skills. Lastly, the members of the **Working Group III** had the opportunity to develop and advance their field research skills to a large extent because they had to be very careful during the interviewing process, to ask and clarify the questions by not influencing the answers of children.

With regards to the achievements of the research, **Working Group III** covered a larger geographical area compared to the other groups, which drastically improves the statistical robustness of the survey results. Regarding the research findings, this research provides evidence to verify that the perceptions of prevalence of discrimination by teachers in primary and secondary schools in Gjakova are true. Another important achievement is collection of data on discrimination of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in school environment, which impacts the integration of these children in the education system fairly decisively. The abovementioned school components include: the classroom and school environment, participation of children in various school activities, frequency and intensity of their interaction with children of other communities and so forth. Lastly, even though indirectly, the results of the research give an insight to differences in perceptions of discrimination by children and their parents.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

One of the biggest challenges reported by the **Working Group III** is related to field research. In addition to the bad weather conditions and the large geographical space they had to cover for a short period of time, this group had difficulties to convince the parents to give interviews because the latter were not interested and they could not understand how this research could help their children. The group also expressed concern over the credibility of data obtained from the parents because they might have been influenced by the local elections which were held during this period of time, so the parents may have been more negative towards the engagement of institutions in social inclusion of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as well as integration of their children in the schooling system.

As it regards to the research itself, one of the main limitations is the sensitivity of the issue and the age of interviewees, which requested that the latter are asked indirect questions on discrimination. This leaves a wide room for interpretation of results and makes it more difficult to have a clear picture of discrimination in schools. Another important limitation is the fact that the research included only quantitative data, while discrimination as a phenomenon requires in-depth analysis of qualitative data in order to understand other related problems.

RECOMMENDATIONS

According to research findings, discrimination of children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the schooling system in Gjakova is still present even though not always in the scope and forms perceived by the members of these communities and the wider public opinion. The following recommendations require concerted engagement of central institutions (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Ministry of Justice, other ministries and courts), local institutions (Municipal Department for Education, Municipal Department for Communities), schools (directors, other management staff, teachers, and parental councils) and non-governmental organizations operating in these communities.

According to research findings, around 5% of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children and 12.2% of parents whose children are attending primary or secondary schools in Gjakova reported that they are discriminated by teachers in many forms. In some cases, the teachers discriminated the children by not answering to their questions during lectures; in other cases they treated them differently from other children, while in others they discriminated them by not testing them in front of the whole class.

- These findings show that school management (starting from the director) should start by improving the monitoring mechanisms of regulations on equal treatment of each student. Several stakeholders could initiate this process: parent councils, mediators (staff of local NGOs) and leaders of the organizations;
- Then, establishment of a complaint system which is easily accessible at any time for any case and which ensures that the complaints will not have a negative impact on evaluation and attendance of students who file a complaint is essential. This system would have to include different levels of governance and institutions starting from the school's director, municipal department for education, municipal department for communities, judicial institutions at the local or regional level, up to the MEST at the central level;
- In order to make such a system functional, the activities should include raising awareness and informing communities about the existence of such a system and their benefits from it with regards to human rights. Such an informing activity could be easily implemented through engagement of local organizations which are very close to the communities where they operate, hence know their members well.

Another indicator of prevalence of discrimination in the schooling system is the lack of participation of children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in activities organized outside the regular school hours, such as extra courses in Albanian language, English language, mathematics, etc., as well as activities like competitions, school choir, sports activities, etc. Even though the percentage of children who were not selected to participate in such activities is not very high (13% in the cases of extra courses and 32% in the case of extra activities), a large number of children claimed that they were not interested, they did not want to or that they were not informed about such activities, hence they did not participate. These three factors imply that the children of these communities in addition to not participating in activities organized outside working hours, also that the system where they are being educated does not provide the necessary incentives for them to improve their success in school or develop their talents in interaction with other children. Therefore, one of the recommendations for

tackling this problem could be to oblige the schools (perhaps by the top level institutions like MEST) to include as many children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as possible in the activities that the schools organize outside the regular school hours. Such a request could be used as a precondition for additional support (be it financial or other) for schools which perform the best at the local level.

Considering the finding of this research that 90% of the children of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities socialize only with children of their communities after the school hours and that slightly more than half of them (58%) share a desk with children of the same community as theirs, the abovementioned activities could have manifold benefits. To start with, they would facilitate the integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in all schooling system's components. Simultaneously, they would provide these children with opportunities to develop and advance their skills and talents further. Finally, considering that such activities would engage children from all the other communities, by interacting with each-other, the children will have a chance to get to know one-another better. This will not only have a positive impact in improving the learning environment in schools but also in raising awareness on discrimination in the long run, after these children will have grown up.

INCLUSION OF CHILDREN WITH SPECIAL NEEDS IN THE SCHOOLING SYSTEM

THE PROBLEM

As previously discussed in the report, access to education is one of the most basic and fundamental human rights. Therefore, a schooling system which guarantees equality of access to education for all children is a key factor in their social inclusion in the long term. As a result, stigma, discrimination, culture, problems with access to infrastructure, public services, and so forth, faced by the marginalized groups such as children with special needs on a daily basis, require a different education system, inclusive education.

The most recent report of UNICEF “*Rights of children with special needs to education: Access based on rights for inclusive education*” (2012) defines inclusive education as a system which acknowledges the need for transformation of cultures, politics and practices in schools to accommodate the needs of each individual student as well as making the removal of barriers that hinder this opportunity mandatory. In other words, inclusive education requires that all the children, including children with special needs, do not only have access to the schooling system but are also offered adequate learning opportunities to reach their full potential (UNICEF, 2012, p. 10).

As in other countries in the region, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Kosovo also has incorporated elements of inclusive education in its strategic national education plans as well as national reports. One of the more concrete steps that it has undertaken to implement this strategy is training of 300 teachers of primary schools on innovative teaching methods for children with special needs. In addition, model schools have begun to be built, and slowly, all the other schools will follow these models and will be transformed into inclusive schools whereby separate/special classrooms will be slowly merged into regular ones. Moreover, the Faculty of Education has begun to offer the course *Inclusive Lecturing* in Bachelor and Master’s programmes (UNICEF, 2012, p. 80). Also, with the initiative of *Save the Children*, during 2013 the Faculty of Education has begun its collaboration with the University of Bologna, Italy, as a result of which the curricula for inclusive education was assessed and revised and a Master’s Degree programme for Inclusive Education was accredited in the beginning of 2014 and will begin during this same year.

Save the Children has been actively engaged in the field of Inclusive Education and promotion of inclusive models of education for children with special needs since 2005. Through its project for inclusive education, Save the Children has been supporting 9 municipalities with the aim of improving the access to and quality of education for children from the marginalized groups by promoting inclusive and participatory access to education. In cooperation with governmental institutions, Save the Children has advocated for and supported the local institutions - including preschools and primary schools – in integrating children with special needs in the public schooling system as well as the community based rehabilitation centres, HandiKOS and Down Syndrome Kosova – in improving the quality of services they offer to these children. In addition, 17 preschool institutions in 7 municipalities have been supported with a range of activities: human resources, teaching materials, toys and small school grants, with the aim of improving their access to education services as well as the quality of these services which would ultimately enable the children with special needs to realize their full potential. Further, by investing

in physical infrastructure of schools, Save the Children has been supporting the improvement of physical access of children with special needs to education.

Nevertheless, despite the investments and support of the civil society in this field, full implementation of the concept of inclusive education in policies and practical activities is rather slow in Kosovo, mainly due to the lack of political will and specially fiscal constraints. More than half of children with special needs who do attend education are doing so in the seven (7) special schools spread throughout the territory of Kosovo. According to UNICEF's report: "*Justice denied: The state of education of children with special needs in the after war Kosovo*" (2009), from 1,081 identified cases of children with special needs who attended education in the schooling system during the period of the research, 511 attended education in special schools, whereas 570 in separate (special) classrooms in mainstream schools (UNICEF, 2009, p. 32). In addition to the limited conditions for these children to attend education in schools, the municipal investments on improving the physical infrastructure which would facilitate the access of children to other public services and spaces are also very limited, and this is an additional barrier to inclusive education (UNICEF, 2009, p. 33).

The key problem of any policy targeted to children with special needs in Kosovo is the problem of identifying these children. There are still no official data which confirm even an approximate number of children with special needs in Kosovo. The abovementioned report of UNICEF (2009) attempts to calculate this figure by using the average percentage of children with special needs in the world, 15-20%. According to this, the number of school-age children with special needs in Kosovo ranges between 55,000 and 70,000. This figure implies that less than 2% of children with special needs who attend education have been identified (UNICEF, 2009, p. 33).

This report also discusses the identification of children as a problem in itself with regards to inclusion of children in the schooling system. According to research, the de facto practice of identifying children has been through parents and/or schools. In the case of the latter, the children are interviewed by school's director or other management staff, who afterwards, in collaboration with parents decide what type of school or classroom the child can attend. However, anecdotal evidence shows that such identification is often discriminatory and in conflict with the inclusive education principle described earlier in this chapter (UNICEF, 2009, p. 33).

Hence, the main purpose of the **Working Group IV** research is collection of demographic data and key problems that the children with special needs in the municipality of Gjakova face with regards to access to education.

METHODOLOGY

In contrast to the surveys of other groups which selected the sample through the random sampling methodology, by knocking on every third door in a row in the neighbourhoods whereby the survey was conducted or the school yards where these children attend education, the sample for the *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* was selected from databases of beneficiaries of HandiKOS³ and One-to-One in Gjakova. In order to have more comprehensive information on problems faced by children with special needs in access to education, **Working Group IV** interviewed their parents and the primary schools in Gjakova.

3 HandiKOS is an association of paraplegics and paralyzed children of Kosovo. This organization's mission is: prevention of disability, promotion and provision of services as well as identification and full participation of Persons with Disability (PWD).

The database of parents' survey includes the following information:

- Children's demographic characteristics: age, gender;
- Children's type of disability;
- School attendance: grade, type of classroom and/or school (mainstream school/special school);
- Reasons for not attending education;
- Participation in activities of organizations offering services for children with special needs at the local level (HandiKOS, One-to-one, etc.).

Meanwhile, the survey with primary schools includes the information below:

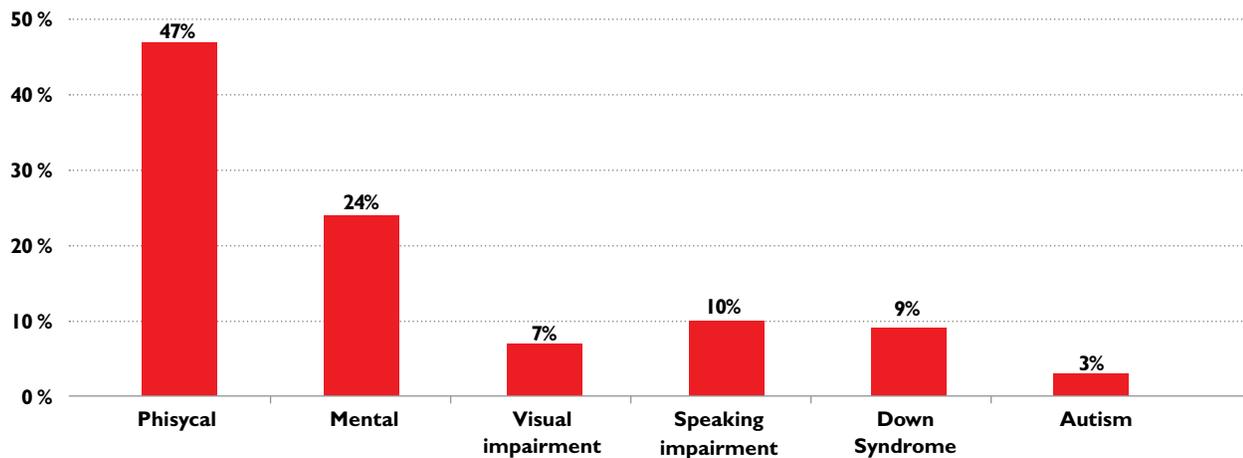
- Whether children with special needs attend education in the specific schools and their number;
- Form of teaching at school: mainstream or special/separate classrooms;
- School conditions for children with special needs: horizontal access, vertical access, access to the toilet, access to director's office, teacher's office, etc., and whether the school offers personal assistants for these children.

KEY FINDINGS

The survey *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* collected information on a total of 205 children with special needs aged 2-20 years, 61.6% were males and 37.4% females, and six (6) primary schools where these children attend education. **Working Group IV** covered the largest geographical space compared to all the other groups - the whole municipality of Gjakova and the surrounding villages – to interview as many parents of children with special needs as possible within the two-week period set for the interviews. The sample of schools included the following: “Fehmi Agani”, “Mazllum Këpuska”, “Zekeria Rexha”, “Zef Lush Marku”, “Selman Riza” and “Mustafa Bakija”.

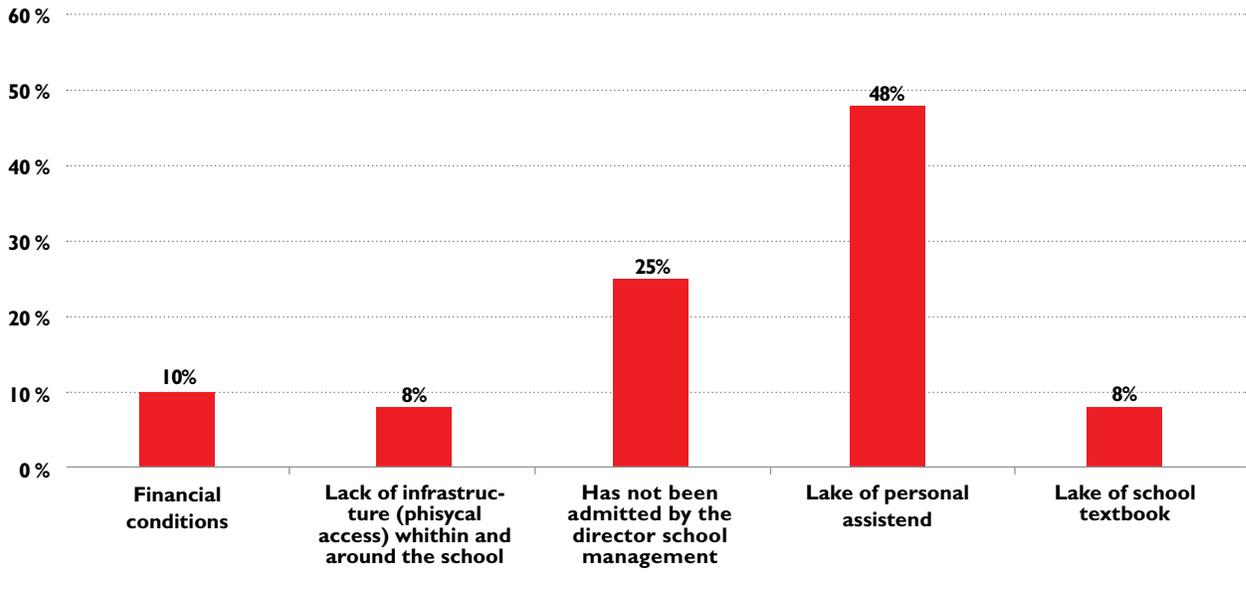
- With regards to the type of disability, as it may be observed in Figure 6, around half (47%) of the surveyed children have a physical disability, 24% have a mental disability, 10% have visual impairment, 9% have the Down Syndrome, 7% have speaking impairment, whereas 3% are autistic;

FIGURE 6: CHILDREN’S TYPE OF DISABILITY



- Even though around half of children have physical disability, only 24 parents provided information on the orthopaedic equipment that their children use: 23 said that their children use wheelchairs, while only 1 said that the child uses crutches;
- More than 67% of children with special needs are attending primary or secondary education. The gender differences are insignificant: 31.3% of girls with special needs do not attend education compared to 32.1% of boys;
- Even though they listed multiple reasons for not attending education, of 33% of children who are not attending education, the lack of personal assistant was mentioned as one of the key reasons by 48% of the respondents. Then, 25% of parents claimed that one of the main reasons why their children is not attending education is because he/she was not admitted to school by the director/management of the school when they applied; 10% mentioned poor financial conditions, whereas 8% of the parents mentioned the lack of physical infrastructure (physical access) within and around the school and lack of appropriate textbooks (for the blind children) as some of the main reasons why their children are not attending education;

FIGURE 7: REASONS FOR NOT ATTENDING EDUCATION



- As it regards to children who are attending education, survey data show that 38% of them are attending education in regular/mainstream classrooms, 43% in separate or special classrooms for children with special needs within mainstream schools and 19% in special schools.
- Around 72% of surveyed parents reported that their children attend activities organized by local NGOs such as HandiKOS, One-to-one, etc. Survey data show that more than half (53.5%) of children who do not attend education also do not attend activities organized by the afore-mentioned local organizations. Around 79% of children who attend education also attend activities organized by HandiKOS, One-to-one, etc.;
- Finally, data of the survey with parents shows that most of the children do not attend school due to lack of adequate conditions. Ninety-three percent (93%) of the surveyed parents claimed that they would send their children to school if they had better financial conditions, if the infrastructure within and around schools was appropriate, etc.

As it regards to interviews with primary schools, the survey *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* shows that:

- Children with special needs attend education in five (5) of six (6) of the primary schools surveyed;
- The number of children who attend education in these schools is fairly small: 3 children in two of them, 4 children in one of them, and 22 respectively 47 children in the other two schools;
- In three (3) of these schools, education for children with special needs is delivered in regular/mainstream classrooms, in one (1) of them in both regular/mainstream and special/separate classrooms, whereas in the last one, education for children with special needs is delivered only in special/separate classrooms;

- Of 5 schools where the children with special needs attend education, there is physical access in 3 of them (that is, these children have physical access to the classrooms and other rooms of the first floors), while only in one of them these children have vertical access, i.e. access to other floors of school premises;
- Lastly, only (1) of the five (5) schools where children with special needs attend education has personal assistants for these children.

ACHIEVEMENTS

The achievements related to capacity building of the young leaders are multiple. To start with, bearing in mind different types of disabilities and different problems that each one of them poses not only to access to education but also to other daily activities of these children, this helped the young leaders to research, discuss and acquire a wide knowledge on this field. Secondly, bearing in mind the lack of data and difficulties in identifying the children with special needs - partially caused from stigmatization of this category of children from the society, which influences their parents to hesitate to provide information about them – the young leaders had to think creatively about sample selection. Thirdly, interviewing parents of children with special needs and collaboration with two types of institutions – local organizations whereby they obtained the beneficiary lists of children with special needs and leading officials of primary schools – has given the young leaders the opportunity to experience the complexity of addressing this issue. Further, the young leaders had the opportunity to advance their interviewing skills greatly because they surveyed a very sensitive group of respondents (parents of children with disability) that usually hesitate to talk about this topic as well as school officials, which requires adaptation of the interviewing style. Lastly, **Working Group IV** is the only group that interviewed a heterogeneous group of respondents (in terms of ethnicity), which will help them to conduct field research in other topics in the future.

As it regards to the research, one of the main achievements is the illustration of a clearer picture of school attendance by children with special needs. The data on the percentage of children who attend education, the types of classrooms and schools where they attend education as well as the reasons for not attending it are very useful in understanding how inclusive is the education system in Gjakova. In addition, this information enables an assessment of to what extent is the legislation on inclusive education being implemented and what are the fields where the activities of the local government institutions and local and international organizations should be focused.

Moreover, the data on children's attendance in local organization activities show that these may act as intermediaries in the process of inclusion of these children in the schooling system; hence, they are very important in informing and planning the next immediate steps to be undertaken in the communities by various stakeholders. Lastly, the interviews with school officials yield a clearer picture of conditions that they provide to children with special needs as well as pinpoint to the fields where the efforts and funds of the local and central governmental institutions should be channelled with regards to improving the system of inclusive education.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND CHALLENGES

One of the main limitations of this research is the fact that the respondents include only the beneficiaries of HandiKOS and One-to-one in Gjakova, that is, the children that have already been identified and are in some way “integrated/included”, despite the lack of the services available to them. Therefore, the findings of the re-

search may lack statistical significance and applicability because they do not include information on children with special needs who are isolated and do not partake in even the most basic daily activities.

Secondly, considering the sensitivity of the topic, the young leaders and volunteers who conducted the research in the field reported that many parents hesitated to give interviews or answer specific questions, which may impact negatively the credibility of results.

Then, having in mind the limited period of time allocated for conducting the research as well as the multiple problems with access to education due to physical barriers for people with physical disabilities, a large part of the questionnaire was focused on this type of disability. This factor limits the number and type of activities to this group of children. The limited time allocated to the research to cover the whole municipality of Gjakova geographically in order to ensure an adequate sample size limited also the number of questions that could be asked to respondents. Therefore, the survey could not collect sufficient information on the socio-economic conditions of the respondent families, a very important factor in terms care, integration and welfare of children with special needs.

Lastly, having in mind the social and cultural factors related to perceptions and treatment of the topic of disability, the inability to collect qualitative information is a rather major limitation to this research.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Findings of the research *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* show that 33% of the children who were identified to have special needs do not attend education. Considering the low identification rate of these children, this figure may be much higher in reality, therefore, the first recommendation of this research is collection of as much data as possible on children with special needs not only at the local, but also at national level.

As it regards to the data collection at local level, the Centres for Social Work and local organizations which offer services to children with special needs could play a very important role on identifying these children. Local organizations could also play a significant intermediary role in integration of children with special needs in the schooling system knowing that a higher percentage of children with special needs attend their activities even if they do not attend any education institution.

Then, considering parents' answers with regards to physical access to schools as well as the answers on the reasons of children for not attending education, the following activities are more than necessary in the near future:

- Powerful lobbying and advocacy of local organizations towards MEST, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and local authorities, to allocate more funds to improve the indoor and outdoor school infrastructure (in the municipality of Gjakova) that would allow children with physical disability to have access to schools;
- Continuous advocacy by local organizations to ensure that the principle of inclusive education foreseen in the national education strategy is being implemented, that is, that the children with special needs are not separated/isolated from other children in special schools as well as that the special/separate classrooms are slowly merged into regular/mainstream classrooms;

- Enhanced collaboration between parents and local organizations with primary and secondary schools that have a higher number of children with special needs so they can jointly request support from the MEST, MLSW and other central and local government structures for employment of personal assistants for children with special needs;
- Establishment of structures and mechanisms which secure enrolment approval of children with special needs in schools by school management. Such structures must include strong collaboration between parents, mediators of local organizations, municipal and MEST officials, to ensure that the legislation on inclusive education is being implemented.

CHAPTER 3

CONCLUSIONS

ACHIEVEMENTS, LESSONS LEARNER AND IMPACT OF THE RESEARCH ON YOUNG LEADERS AND THE COMMUNITY

LEADERS

Considering the lack of experience in field research as well as the age of the young leaders and volunteers, the whole preparatory process for the research, the research itself and the discussion of results was extremely beneficial for their capacity building. In addition to having the opportunity to develop and advance their participatory research skills – including the sample selection and methodology, questionnaire design and conducting the interview – the young leaders had the opportunity to widen their knowledge on problems that their communities face as well as on the complex and multi-dimensional nature of these problems. Also, the intensity of group work and discussions within and among groups during the working process has provided the young leaders and volunteers with numerous opportunities to advance their discussion and teamwork skills.

Initially, even before the field research began, the youngsters had to define the terms of issues that they had decided to research in order to define the sample and design the questionnaire. This component of the process involved a lot of discussion on human and especially children's rights, interrelated factors and fields/sectors which impact these problems, as well as identification of stakeholders (institutions, groups and individuals) related to the specific issues. These activities have enabled the young leaders to understand the complex and multi-dimensional nature of problems that their communities face as well as the need for a comprehensive treatment of these problems so that their treatment succeeds.

Then, during the process of determining the sample and its methodology, the young leaders were incentivized to think creatively about the most appropriate methodology to be used so that the results of the research are statistically significant and the range of information collected is wide and as many aspects of the problem are captured, so that the perceptions of the respondents could be easily verified. Also, considering that some of the selected research topics involved very sensitive issues, the young leaders had to think about indicators and questions which obtain information and evidence on the latter in an indirect way.

Considering the diversity of topics, different groups of respondents interviewed and the numerous institutions that the young leaders contacted, the latter had an opportunity to develop their research skills. To start with, interviewing of different groups of respondents – school-age children, youth, parents (especially caretakers of children with special needs), and school management staff – has enabled the young leaders to not only adapt their interviewing style to each group, but also to understand the role of each of these stakeholders in related issues. It shall be emphasized that this was especially important with regards to interviews of youth (married before the age of 18 years) which included issues such as domestic violence, as well as interviews with parents of children with special needs who were more hesitant to give interviews. Interviewing children younger than 18

years gave the youngsters an insight (although basic) on research ethics and the utmost caution that they should have when interviewing respondents of this age group.

Then, having in mind that the research process was quite challenging because of the young leaders' lack of experience as well as the complexity of the researched topics, they were incentivized by the organization to meet many times during the research process to exchange their experiences in the field. This way, the working process raised the awareness of the young leaders on the importance of teamwork and its effect in facilitating the research process to achieve optimal results.

Lastly, the discussion of the research results as an activity in itself has raised the awareness of the young leaders on the importance of research in addressing problems (at the local and higher levels) as well as to think about the differences between anecdotal knowledge, perceptions and evidence collected through field research.

ORGANIZATION

The whole process of the research was very enlightening for Save the Children. The organization is going to consult this report in its future project designs and initiatives because not only were the findings significant and reliable, but the themes/topics for the research itself were selected by young leaders who are an active part of their community and know best the practical issues and needs of their respective communities.

In 2007, "Iniciativa 6" conducted a research on the topic: "Assessment of the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities" with a special focus on respect and protection of children's rights. Although this research was fairly informative, through the project *Leaders – Young Roma in Action* and its research component, the organization has learned that focused/targeted and in-depth research is essential for designing and planning advocacy, awareness-raising and other activities addressing issues in the communities.

COMMUNITY

The research had an impact on the community as well. To start with, by elaborating and explaining the questions of the survey as well as the research topics, the young leaders and volunteers raised the awareness of the respondents and community on the issues of research.

Then, engagement of young leaders and volunteers from the communities themselves in the research gives the community a feeling that the organization is genuinely interested in contributing to the community and engaged in solving the problems that the communities face.

Considering the lack of data on issues faced by the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities not only in Kosovo but also in the region, the research is very important in gaining a deep understanding of these problems and issues. This information includes: collection of evidence on presence and prevalence of these problems in the communities, the characteristics, reasons, influencing factors and some of their consequences, how are they perceived by the community and how are they interrelated. As described in the summary of findings, all the topics and issues are interrelated, therefore, the results of each group could be used as "verification tools" for the results and indicators of the other groups. This makes the research results more credible in feeding into recommendations for activities to be organized by the organization in the communities.

DIFFICULTIES AND CHALLENGES

As it regards to the research methodology, one of the main constraints was the limited number of instruments that could be used for the research. Having in mind the lack of data on the target communities – both Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with special needs – the research had to focus on gathering as much quantitative information as possible. Hence, considering the limited period of time allocated for the research as well as the limited research experience of the young leaders and volunteers, the research did not involve any qualitative instruments which are essential especially for the topics of discrimination and early marriages. Another difficulty or weakness of the research is the lack of literature, even at national level, which could be used to compare and verify the results of the young leaders' research.

Another limitation of the research is the inability to collect information on very important issues such as the socio-economic conditions of the respondents (for all the research topics); domestic violence, sexual abuse, decision-making power, etc., among the young girls/women who got married when they were younger than 18 years, etc., due to the short period of time allocated for the research and insufficient research experience of the young leaders. The data on the socio-economic situation of the families are especially important for verifying other answers across all the research topics. As a result, these limitations make the elaboration of certain phenomena more difficult as well as do not allow for more in-depth analysis of the research topics.

Another difficulty/ concern reported by the young leaders is the lack of interest that the parents expressed to give interviews. This was to some extent influenced by the local elections which were held during the time of the research as well as the numerous researches conducted at the local level which were rarely “translated” into tangible efforts towards or actual improvement of the situation of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Hence, the young leaders expressed concern over the answers of parents, that they did not reflect their actual thoughts/beliefs, which may influence the accuracy and credibility of the results.

Another difficulty/concern over the credibility of the data is related to the circumstances under which the interviews for *Early marriages* and *Social inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system* were conducted. In the first case, the answers of the young girls'/women respondents who were married before the age of 18 years could not be as accurate because they may have been influenced by the presence of their husbands or families in law during the interview. In the second case, considering the level of stigmatization of children with special needs, the parents of these children may not have answered the questions accurately.

Another difficulty related to the interpretation of the results is related to the topics of *Early marriages* and *Discrimination by teachers*, because the questionnaire for these two topics contained too many indirect questions due to the sensitivity of the topics. As a result, these findings are based on interpretations and assumptions, which may negatively impact their usefulness in composing and drafting recommendations.

A limitation worth noting is the sampling methodology for the topic *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system*. Considering that the respondents for this sample were selected from the beneficiary databases of HandiKOS and One-to-one, the research findings as well as the recommendations on this issue apply only to children who are somewhat integrated in the society (because they have been identified by one of these organization), while the children who continue to be isolated remains untreated by the activities of this project.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Despite the differing factors influencing each of the issues researched by the young leaders, a common recommendation which is valid for both municipalities and all four problems is that any project/activity targeted to them must focus on:

- Multiple sectors: social protection system, system of labour and employment, education system, healthcare system, judicial system;
- Different levels of governance: ministries at the central level and municipalities, municipal departments and schools at the local level;

and it should be inclusive in terms of the stakeholders involved, including:

- Officials of the relevant ministries;
- Municipal directors for education;
- Municipal directors for welfare and healthcare;
- Employees of Centres for Social Work;
- Municipal official for communities;
- School directors;
- Teachers;
- Parents;
- Students/children/youth;
- Communities;
- Local NGOs;
- International organizations and
- Media.

Even though each of the working groups presented separate recommendations for their research topics, the following section presents a list of issues that should be raised as problems at the local and central government, the role of organization and young leaders in this respect as well as the immediate advocacy and lobbying activities to be undertaken.

The issues that must be introduced urgently in the agenda of the governmental institutions are as follows:

- Collection of highly detailed and comprehensive data on the problems faced by the children and youth of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities as well as the children with special needs with regards to social inclusion, both in the context of human and children rights. It must be noted that such data should allow for disaggregation by gender, because, as the results of this research have shown, the gender differences are significant in some cases and these two groups should be treated differently;
- Implementation of policies, strategies and legislation on inclusive education, with a special focus on: 1. School dropouts, 2. Discrimination and 3. Children with special needs;
- Implementation of conventions and legislation on protection of children's rights;
- Identification of children with special needs.

Based on the list above, the immediate activities that should be organized by the organization in collaboration with the young leaders include:

- Awareness raising campaigns/activities on children's rights and early marriages;
- Awareness raising campaigns/activities on registration of marriages – these are especially important for the future generations with regards to facilitating their access to public services such as education, healthcare, etc.;
- Awareness raising campaigns/activities on children's rights on inclusive education, with a special focus on children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with special needs;
- Mediation from the organization and the young leaders in inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children and children with special needs in the schooling system, including mediation between schools-parents-students in cases of school dropouts and identification and facilitation of school enrolment procedures in cases of children with special needs;
- Advocacy for more inclusive activities in schools after the regular school/class schedule whereby children from all communities and background can participate;
- Advocacy for inclusive education for children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and children with special needs at all levels of governance and all the official institutions

As it regards to proposals for separate issues, the working groups proposed the following activities, each of which was elaborated in details in the previous chapter:

With regards to *School dropouts*, in cases when continuation of school attendance is difficult/impossible, the institutions should establish mechanisms which offer these youngsters to develop/advance skills on crafts and professions which would improve their access to the labour market as well as chances to generate income.

On *Early Marriages*, Working Group II proposed the following additional activities:

- Raising awareness of youth and parents on early marriages through campaigns that include the following elements: 1. Early marriages in the context of human and children's rights, 2. Consequences of early marriages, especially for young girls, 3. Decision-making about marriages, and 4. Registration of marriages at the municipality.

On *Discrimination by teachers*, Working Group III proposed the following activities:

- Requests filed by the local organizations, parent councils and the young leaders that the school management improves the monitoring of implementation of regulations related to equal treatment of students;
- Establishment of a complaint system which is easily accessible at any time for any case and which ensures that the complaints will not have a negative impact in evaluation and attendance of students who file a complaint, is essential. This system would have to include different levels of governance and institutions starting from the school's director, municipal department for education, municipal department for communities, judicial institutions at the local or regional level, up to the MEST at the central level;
- Awareness-raising and informative campaign for the usage of this complaint system by the young leaders and organization (as well as other local organizations).

Lastly, on *Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system*, Working Group IV proposed the following additional activities:

- Powerful lobbying and advocacy of local organizations towards MEST, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare and local authorities, to allocate more funds to improving the indoor and outdoor school infrastructure (in the municipality of Gjakova) that would allow children with physical disabilities to have access to schools;
- Continuous advocacy by local organizations on implementing the principle of inclusive education foreseen in the national education strategy, that is, that the children with special needs are not separated/isolated from other children in special schools as well as that the special/separate classrooms are slowly merged into regular/mainstream classrooms;
- Enhance cooperation between parents and local organizations with primary and secondary schools having a higher number of children with special needs so they can jointly request support from the MEST, MLSW and other central and local government structures for employment of personal assistants for children with special needs;
- Establishment of structures and mechanisms which secure enrolment approval of children with special needs in schools by school management. Such structures must include strong cooperation between parents, mediators of local organizations, municipal and MEST officials, to ensure that the legislation on inclusive education is being implemented.

REFERENCES

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES (ECMI). (JULY, 2012). Segregated education in Kosovo. Retrieved from: http://www.ecmikosovo.org/wp-content/Publications/Policy_briefs/2012-07_ECMI_Kosovo_Policy_Brief_Segregated_Education_in_Kosovo/eng.pdf

EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MINORITY ISSUES (ECMI). (OCTOBER, 2012). Manual on Improving the Delivery of Education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities. Best Practices and Recommendations. Retrieved from: http://www.ecmikosovo.org/wp-content/Publications/Hand_book_and_manuals/2012-10_ECMI_Kosovo_Manual_on_Improving_the_Delivery_of_Education_for_Roma_Ashkali_and_Egyptian_Communities_Good_Practices_and_Recommendations/alb.pdf

KOSOVAR FOUNDATION FOR OPEN SOCIETY (KFOS). (2009). Baseline study: The State of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo. Retrieved from: http://kfos.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Gjendja_e_komuniteteve-Rome_Ashkali_dhe_Egjip-tas_ne_Kosove_Raport_i_hulumtimit.pdf

KOSOVAR FOUNDATION FOR OPEN SOCIETY (KFOS). (DECEMBER, 2013). Reality or fireworks: Strategy for Integration of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities. Retrieved from: http://kfos.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/01/Reality-or-fireworks_ENG.pdf

LAW NR. 2004/32. Law on Family in Kosovo.

ORGANIZATION FOR SECURITY AND CO-OPERATION IN EUROPE (OSCE) – Mission in Kosovo. (September, 2012). School dropouts and non-attendance in Kosovo. Retrieved from: <http://www.osce.org/kosovo/95112>

UNESCO. Guidelines for Inclusion: ensuring access to education for all, 2005, Paris.

UNICEF. (2009). Denied justice: State of Education of Children with Special Needs in the post-war Kosovo. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/kosovoprogramme/Justice_albanian05.pdf

UNICEF. (2012). The Right of Children with Disabilities to Education: A rights-based Approach to Inclusive Education. Position Paper. Retrieved from: http://www.unicef.org/ceecis/IEPositionPaper_ENGLISH.pdf

UNITED NATIONS POPULATION FUND (UNFPA) KOSOVO. (OCTOBER, 2012). Child marriage. Retrieved from: <http://eeca.unfpa.org/webdav/site/eeca/shared/documents/publications/KOSOVO%20-%20English.pdf>

ANNEX

WORKING GROUP I: School dropouts

LEADERS:

Nuhi Morina
Valon Gashi
Ylveha Braha
Resul Milaimi
Ilajda Qorri

VOLUNTEERS:

Fatlum Kryeziu
Furkan Ago

WORKING GROUP III: Discrimination by teachers

LEADERS:

Albertina Monika
Vilson Dura
Zejnepe Qabrati
Adelina Kabashi
Besart Mersula

VOLUNTEERS:

Alban Morina
Dardan Fetahaj

WORKING GROUP II: Early marriages

LEADERS:

Sanije Mergjollar
Jemina Osmani
Egzon Sehari
Majlinda Shala
Lavdim Morina

VOLUNTEERS:

Amir Osmani
Ergjan Sehari

WORKING GROUP IV: Inclusion of children with special needs in the schooling system

LEADERS:

Bleta Qehaja
Masar Derri
Gëzim Qehaja
Avnore Morina
Rreze Oseku

VOLUNTEERS:

Granit Hoxha
Bujar Luboja

376-054.57(497)(048)

Participatory Action Research / The report was prepared by Erëblina Elezaj. – [Prishtina] : Save the Children, 2014. – 57 f. : ilustr.; 30 cm.

References : f. 56

I.Elezaj, Erëblina

ISBN 978-9951-534-24-6

ISBN 978-9951-534-24-6



9 789951 534246