



THEMATIC REPORT

Reasons that impact on school
drop-outs by students of
Roma, Ashkali and
Egyptian communities

Prishtinë, September 2019



Thematic Report regarding the reasons that impact on school drop-outs by students of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities

This report has been compiled by Petrit Tahiri with the support of “Kosovo Integration Initiative KOSINT 2020” project funded by the Open Society Foundation implemented by Kosovo Education Center (KEC) in partnership with Balkan Sunflowers (BSFK), Syri i Vizionit (SiV) and Roma and Ashkalia Documentation Center (RADC).

The views expressed in this assessment do not necessarily reflect the views of the Regional Cooperation Council or of its participants, nor of the European Union and the Open Society Foundations.”

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ABBREVIATIONS

CRS	Catholic Relief Services
ECMI	European Centre for Minority Issues
KPI	Kosovo Pedagogical Institute
ISCED	International Standard Classification of Education
KEC	Kosovo Education Centre
KOSINT	Kosovo Integration Initiative KOSINT
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
NGO	Nongovernmental Organization
CSOs	Civil Society Organizations
EMIS	Education Management Information System
EWS	Early Warning System
PTA	Parent-Teacher Associations
AI	Administrative Instruction
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund

1. INTRODUCTION

The right to education is guaranteed by all international instruments regulating the field of human rights. Article 26 (1) of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states, “Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory...” Article 28 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child also states that “States Parties recognize the right of the child to education...”. UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) adopted the Salamanca Statement in 1994, which states in its second paragraph: “Every child has a fundamental right to education, and must be given the opportunity to achieve and maintain an acceptable level of learning”.¹

At the state level, the right to education is guaranteed by all legal acts, starting with the Constitution of the Republic of Kosovo,² which in Article 47, paragraph 1, states “Every person enjoys the right to free basic education. Mandatory education is regulated by law and funded by public funds”. In addition, Article 3 of the Law on Pre-University Education in the Republic of Kosovo states: “No person shall be denied the right to education”.

The key common thing of all the documents and articles mentioned above lies on the obligation the state takes over to provide education to all its citizens. Therefore, the right to education is not only guaranteed, but it is also an obligation of all. However, the inclusion of children from vulnerable and marginalized groups into education remains a constant challenge. Constant interventions and reforms that have been made in Kosovo’s education system over the past two decades have made the level of inclusion of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities make significant progress in the education system, especially in primary education (grades 1-5) where participation is at 85%.³ However, compared to Kosovo’s average, participation is still not at the satisfactory level. Moreover, at higher levels of education a negative trend is noted. Thus, only 65% of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children aged 11-14 participate in lower secondary education (grades 6-9), while their participation in upper secondary education (grades 10-12) decreases to 30.3%.⁴ At the general level, however, a significant progress of inclusion is certainly noted.

This trend of improvement of inclusion of children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the education system is significantly affected by the drop-out phenomenon. School drop-outs are also present in developed countries and with a highly consolidated education system, where children from vulnerable groups are more likely to be affected by this phenomenon.

This thematic report aims to identify the reasons that impact on school drop-outs of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Through analysis of the legal framework, programs and intervention projects by the institutions in charge and CSOs, as well as discussions with key stakeholders, it has been attempted to highlight the reasons behind the drop-outs. Based on the findings of the report, some recommendations specific for all stakeholders of the process were also drafted.

This study would not have been possible without the support of school directors, teachers, students, parents, and collaborators from partner organizations. On this occasion, we express our gratitude to all those who contributed with information and helped implementation of the study.

1. http://www.unesco.org/education/pdf/SALAMA_E.PDF

2. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=3702>

3. Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Republic of Kosovo: Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2013-2014.

4. Right there

2. CONTEXT

Since the establishment of the self-governing institutions in Kosovo, namely the establishment of Ministry of Education, Science and Technology - MEST, particular attention has been devoted to the problem of school drop-outs while designing educational policies. In 2003, the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, Parent-Teacher Associations - PTA and Catholic Relief Services - CRS started a project for prevention of drop-outs. This project was implemented in schools for years and aimed at developing mechanisms to prevent and address the issue of school drop-outs.

In 2004, MEST in cooperation with UNICEF drafted the report “Girls’ Enrolment and Drop-out in Kosovo”. According to this study, the main reasons that influence students to drop out of school in Kosovo are: the grave economic situation; lack of desire for education by children and early employment of children.⁵

During 2009, MEST drafted the “Action Plan for Prevention and Response to School Drop-Outs” which from 2011 became part of the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2011-2016. Based on data from EMIS - Education Management Information System and conducted research/studies, MEST in cooperation with development partners have designed and implemented projects and programs in order to prevent drop-outs.

In 2012, the Administrative Instruction AI 19/2012 on the Establishment and Strengthening of Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education (PRTANs) has been drafted. In order to facilitate implementation of AI 19/2012, in cooperation with ECMI and UNICEF, MEST has developed the Manuals for Municipal and School Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education (PRTANs).

During 2016-2017, an Early Warning System (EWS) module has been added within the Education Management Information System - EMIS, which generates information on cases at risk of dropping out, which are identified and reported by schools.

During 2018, the AI 19/2012 was revised and supplemented. This process was concluded with the approval of AI 08/2018 on the Establishment and Strengthening of Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration of students in Pre-University Education.

Monitoring reports on implementation of policies and strategies show that despite the ongoing interventions and improvement of the legal framework, the problem of school drop-outs by children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities remains at high levels in schools.

In the 2017 Implementation Assessment Report of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society, 4 of the 14 key findings are directly related

5. “Girls’ Enrolment and Drop-out in Kosovo,” UNICEF, MEST, November 2004

to the school drop-outs issue. The report states: *“Children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, and especially girls, continue to face a high school drop-out rate ...”*⁶ Therefore, despite interventions made within the institutions in charge, or those undertaken by the CSOs, much remains to be done to consolidate the prevention and response system to the issue of drop-outs.

3. METHODOLOGY

Starting from the fact that a large number of researches and monitoring and evaluation reports on the phenomenon of school drop-outs have been conducted in Kosovo, this analysis has been characterized more by reviewing existing documentation, and by analysing reports and key findings from these reports and researches, supplementing it with data also found during the work in the field.

The whole process had three main phases. During **the first phase**, all relevant documents on the issue of drop-outs by children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities were studied and analysed. These documents include over ten reports from previous researches, monitoring and evaluation, all laws and bylaws regulating the field of education, namely the area of inclusion, central and local level policies and strategies, statistics from EMIS, etc.

The second phase was characterized by field visits where semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with students, parents, teachers, school directors, staff of nongovernmental organizations and education officials. It should be noted that this process has also been characterized by many individual and group meetings in order to validate the information found during the content analysis (first phase), or to supplement it with additional information.

During **the third phase**, visits of observing character were made to schools and instant conversations with school staff and CSO activists.

It should certainly be emphasized that this analysis is dominated by data extracted from existing documents, enriched with data from the field and international literature.

During work in the field, special attention was paid to the ethical aspects. Given that the research has a high dose of sensitivity, as it deals with children and personal issues, we have done our utmost to create a friendly environment during conversations, where care was paid to safeguarding children’s integrity and maintaining confidentiality of the collected information.

6. 2017 Assessment Report – Implementation of the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society

7. “Regjistrimi dhe braktisja e shkollës nga vajzat në Kosovë”, UNICEF, MASHT, Nëntor 2004

4. STUDY FINDINGS

In the “Everyone in School” Handbook,⁷ drafted as part of a joint initiative by MEST and CRS, three main causes that lead to drop-outs have been listed:

1. grave economic situation
2. lack of desire on the part of children
3. early employment of children and young people

These causes have been identified by the research “Girls’ Enrolment and Drop-out in Kosovo”⁸ conducted by UNICEF and MEST in 2004. All researches conducted over the years list the grave economic and social situation as the main reason contributing to school drop-outs. This is very common among children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Findings of the 2017 Implementation Assessment Report⁹ of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society, together with the findings of this study highlight the following causes:

1. grave economic conditions,
2. high unemployment rate,
3. low level of education and awareness of parents about the importance of education,
4. discrimination in school,
5. access to relevant infrastructure until school,
6. lack of teachers of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian origin, and
7. migration of families for economic reasons and return to Kosovo.

The research “Improvement of Inclusive Education in Kosovo – promotion of inclusive education and diversity in Kosovo schools¹⁰ “states”... the drop-out rate is worrying, while economic issues are among the main causes of school drop-out ...”¹¹

Evaluation and research reports on the drop-out phenomenon published by the Kosovo Pedagogical Institute,¹² also list the grave economic conditions as one of the main reasons for school drop-outs.

The causes or reasons that influence school drop-outs by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students mentioned above indicate the general situation of the school drop-out phenomenon. This study also highlights other factors that influence the drop-out. The Handbook “Everyone in School” mentions four groups of factors that influence the phenomenon of non-enrolment and drop-out. These factors are grouped into: 1. Individual factors; 2. Family factors; 3. School factors and 4. Social factors. The factors outlined above are also part of the Manual¹³ on the School Teams for Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education, as a tool which was provided to all schools to help implement AI-19/2012 (now AI -08/2018).

There is a great correlation between these four groups of factors, which is presented in the chart below, and in the continuity of the study we will present all the factors by comparing them with the data from interviews and discussions with the school community and other stakeholders involved in the process.

10. Improvement of Inclusive Education in Kosovo - Promoting Inclusive Education and Diversity in Kosovo Schools, ECMI Kosovo, published in the framework of the “Equal Rights for All Coalition(ERAC)”, Prishtina, July 2018

11. Right there, f. 15

12. <http://ipkmasht.rks-gov.net>

13. http://www.ecmikosovo.org/uploads/Doracak%20per%20EPRBM%20Shkollore_SHQ.pdf

4.1. Individual factors

Always according to the Manual on the School Teams for Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Compulsory Education, the individual factors that may lead to drop-outs are: various illnesses, disabilities, early marriages, family support, involvement in adverse events, individual approach toward education etc.

Children who have a certain chronic illness or disability have a high likelihood of not enrolling at all at school or, if enrolled, to drop it. Approach toward these children from the family to the school environment is very important. Adequate cooperation between the school and the family would directly help and influence creation of a child-friendly environment.

Early marriages among members of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities continue to be contributing factors in dropping out of school. According to MICS data¹⁴- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey for Kosovo Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities conducted in 2013-2014, the percentage of young people aged 15-19 who are married or in cohabitation is as follows: Females 17.8% and Males 3.8%. However, from the meetings and interviews conducted in the field we realized that there is a significant difference in the occurrence of this phenomenon in different towns and villages. In other words, due to the great work being done in raising the awareness, especially by non-governmental organizations, regarding the phenomenon of early marriages, in urban areas there is a trend of decreasing this phenomenon, while in areas where activities and work of organizations were more limited, we have a slightly more complex situation, which is also reflected in the MICS data. This complexity stems from the cultural mentality and patriarchal attitudes that refuse the changes, which are a derivation of the stereotyping of work done by many NGOs.

Individual factors include family support and individual approach towards the education. It would be utopic if we think that school-age children, especially those in compulsory education, can develop a clear attitude toward the importance of education. Children may or may not love school because of the school environment, because of their interaction with their peers, because of (non) work and (non) commitment on the part of school staff and family.

The child as a fragile being and in the process of personality shaping, finds it difficult to rationally analyse and reason on issues on which his/her future can be built. For this reason, the family plays a key role in the proper management of individual factors.

14. <http://ask.rks-gov.net/media/1883/komunitetet-rome-ashkali-dhe-egjiptiane-ne-kosove-2013-2014.pdf>

4.2. Family factors

Family factors that may lead to school drop-outs are: lack of adequate parental care, level of education of parents, cultural mentality of families, non-co-operation/non-adaptation of the family to the environment, children as family carriers etc.

When it comes to family factors we should definitely mention the Framework for Involvement¹⁵ developed by sociologist Joyce L. Epstein¹⁶ of Johns Hopkins University. In the model of family involvement to foster school success and school-family partnerships, she introduces six forms of involvement: Parenting, Communicating, Volunteering, Learning at Home, Decision Making, and Collaborating with Community.

If we analyse each of these six forms of involvement proclaimed by Epstein, we note that family involvement in school has a key and irreplaceable role. This is also confirmed by interviews with teachers and school principals. Each of them has emphasized the importance of involving parents, namely family in school. But for this to happen, the cooperation must be mutual, namely, the school institutions must create such a friendly environment also for the parents from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. A negative example against this approach was given to us during a discussion with representative of NGOs operating in a school in Prizren, where the school director demonstratively forced out parents from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who had come to school to meet with Mediators that facilitate school communication with the families.

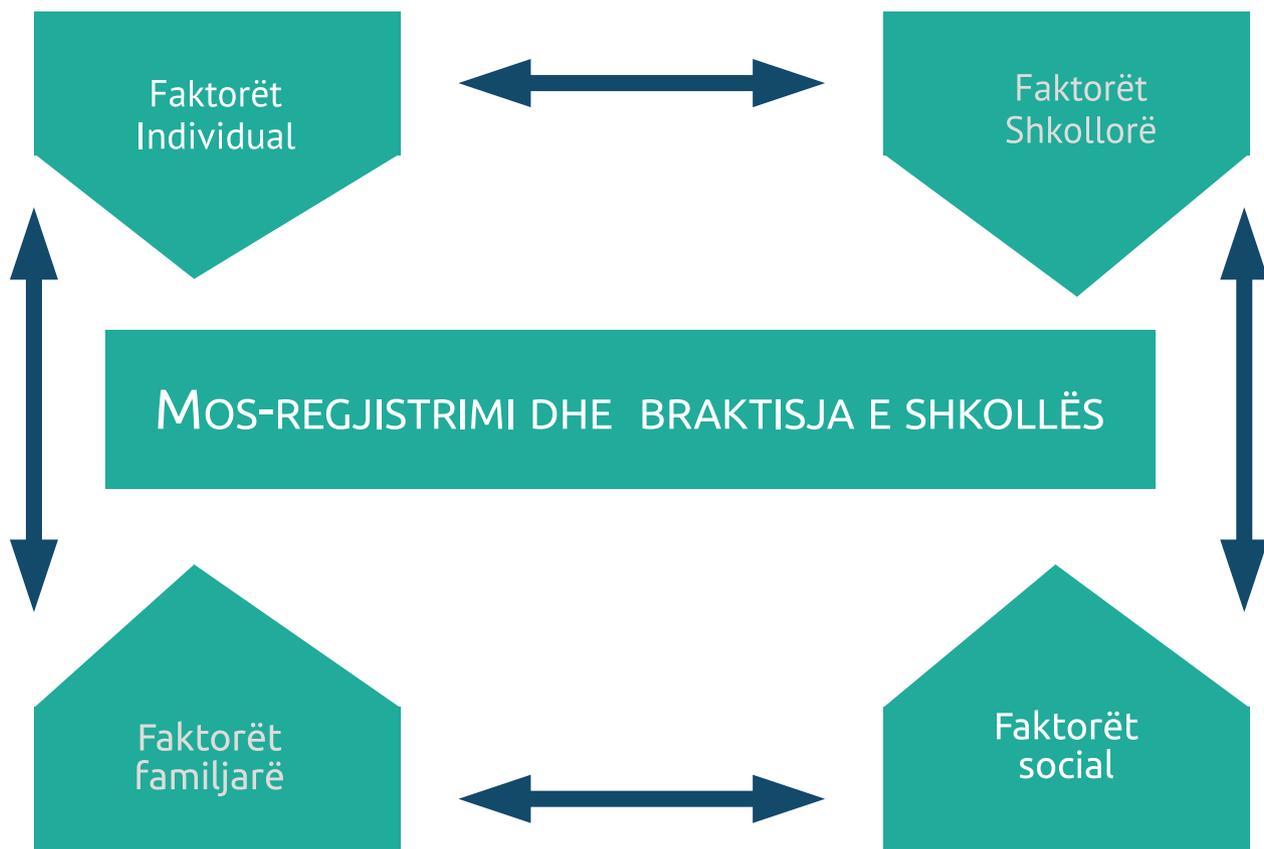
4.3. School factors

Another group of factors that may lead to school drop-outs are: geographical location of schools, teacher-student and student-student relations, lack of professional services in dealing with problems within the school, lack of cooperation between schools with the municipality and community, impacts of external negative phenomena, etc.

Based on the data from interviews and meetings conducted, it is concluded that the problem of the geographical position of schools may have a greater impact on school dropouts during the transition to education levels, namely the transition from lower secondary to upper secondary education. However, if we make a correlation between the different factors, we can conclude that many factors feed on each other. For example, the greater commitment of the family to support the child in continuing his/her education, despite the geographical position of the school, despite the distance from home to school, has thus had its effect. Also, support for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students through a scholarship scheme by the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in cooperation with development partners and non-governmental organizations (KFOS, KEC, HEKS, VoRAE, REF) has greatly influenced the inclusion of students in ISCED Level 3 education system.

15. <https://www.sps186.org/downloads/table/13040/6TypesJ.Epstien.pdf>

16. <https://education.jhu.edu/directory/joyce-l-epstein-phd/>



Factors affecting the phenomenon of non-enrolment and school drop-out

Another important factor is the environment that is created in our schools, which relates to the relationships and the level of cooperation between teachers and students, in this case with those from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. The friendly environment also has to do with the treatment of students by school staff, but also by the peers themselves. A data from the 2017 Implementation Assessment Report¹⁷ on implementation of the Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo, identifies school discrimination as one of the causes that impacts on school drop-outs by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students.

“Everyone should have an opportunity to learn in a positive environment, to enjoy the learning process, and feel comfortable and content within it”¹⁸. This quote by Mr. Barry Saide, School Principal at Roosevelt School, a well-known author of many articles and publications in the field of education, demonstrates very clearly the importance of a positive, safe and attractive environment for all children to enable them to achieve higher achievements and use of potential. In this context, it must be said that the school staff should take utmost care to make our schools such environment friendly, positive and open to respect diversity as a human value.

From the interviews conducted and observations made it was noted that there were cases of discriminatory treatment of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children by their peers, and even there were cases of discriminatory treatment by teachers themselves. This happens because many teachers are insufficiently equipped with competences to manage classroom situations on the principle of social equality, and therefore use the wrong methods of discipline. There have also been noted cases of non-constructive communication with children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, non-integration of these children into extracurricular and out-of-school activities, placing them in the last rows of classrooms, and sometimes stigmatizing them through different types of psychological oppressions.

4.4. Social factors

Always according to the Manual on the School Teams for Prevention and Response towards Abandonment and Non- Registration in Compulsory Education, the individual factors that may lead to drop-outs are: social problems/poverty, deficient level of inter-institutional and community cooperation, negative phenomena within society, migrations, etc. Social factors may otherwise be defined as external factors that may affect school drop-outs. In all the researches and assessments done so far on the issue of drop-out, one of the main causes of the drop-outs by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students is the social and economic status of families. Social mobilization and increased collaboration between different institutions at the local level with CSOs has shown that despite the fact that many families from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities face major economic

17. 2017 Assessment Report – Implementation of the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society

18. BarrySaide, School Principal at “RooseveltSchool” (<https://www.barrysaide.com/>)

19. <http://kec-ks.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/A2.1.5.2.-Need-Assessment-ALB-Final-Report.pdf>

problems and poverty, children have continued their education and their attendance has been regular. The provision of free textbooks by MEST and the support with school packages from various projects has also impacted on the regular school attendance of children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. Based on the data collected during the meetings with the teachers, it has been realized that provision of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students with school supplies has had a positive impact on attendance. Furthermore, many teachers have even said that any such affirmative measure has had a motivating effect on students. A positive example in this regard may be the projects that have supported the Learning Centres. The report “Situation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in the Municipalities of Gjakovë, Pejë dhe Istog”,¹⁹ compiled during 2016, shows that in locations where the Learning Centres exist, a much higher inclusion of students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities is noted at all levels of education. Also the study *“Impact of Learning Centres on Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Children in Education”* confirms that *“Learning Centres contribute to improvement of performance of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in school. The work of the Centres has resulted in more regular attendance, better grades, lower drop-out rates and increased social inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children.”*²⁰

Findings of the 2017 Implementation Assessment Report²¹ the implementation of Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society show that migration of families for economic reasons and return to Kosovo has also had an impact on school drop-outs. For the repatriated families, the problem of drop-out is quite evident and the impact remains multidimensional with regard to school drop-outs. The first issue is that repatriated families face major problems, starting from shelter, food, economic issues, and sending children to school is considered irrelevant or a second-hand issue. The second issue is related to continuation or non-continuation of schooling by children while out of Kosovo. Recognition or non-recognition of documents, the difficulties in obtaining these documents from the countries they have been to, remains a major challenge for the repatriated children. The third issue is the lack of understanding of the Albanian language by some repatriated children. So, as defined in Regulation (GRK) no. 13/2017 on the Reintegration of Repatriated Persons,²² responsible bodies and mechanisms should take all actions to ensure inclusion of children from repatriated families in Kosovo at school.

20. Impact of Learning Centers on Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Children in Education, KOSINT 2020, Prishtinë, November 2018

21. 2017 Assessment Report – Implementation of the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society

22. <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=15304>

5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study intertwined with the findings of many other researches and assessment done so far to address the issue of school drop-outs the best, the following key recommendations are given:

1. All the institutions responsible should be more committed to improvement of economic conditions and reducing unemployment and poverty among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, in order to create the necessary conditions within families to support children's education;
2. Despite the work so far to raise awareness of parents on the importance of education, comprehensive information and awareness campaigns for members of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities should be undertaken so that they can understand the crucial role that education plays in education of their children, in order to improve the quality of life in the future. Presentation of "success stories" by community members can play an important role in these campaigns.
3. Trainings held with teachers in terms of inclusiveness, anti-discrimination and diversity have had an impact only in those schools where the application of these techniques and methodologies in the classroom has been overseen. There is a major discrepancy between the declarative level of respect for diversity compared to reality in our classrooms. Organization of such trainings, followed by direct classroom implementation and rigorous monitoring by institutions and responsible, is essential.
4. Continuation of support with scholarships for secondary school students is essential. This support should be followed by constant mentoring of the beneficiary students, and monitoring of the fulfilment of obligations by the beneficiaries.
5. Institutions and NGOs that provide any support (scholarships, school packages, meals, didactic materials, etc.) for students of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities should take care of the manner of distribution and obligations that the beneficiaries must meet against the benefit. It is vital that the support offered does not create dependency, as the data from the analysis show us that dependency on support can at some point become a major cause of drop-out.

6. Each day more there are representatives from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities who have completed the respective university education and willing to get employed in educative institutions. Municipalities should respect the employment quota thus enabling employment to teachers from these communities.

7. Beyond the positive developments in terms of drafting policies that address this problem, there is a need for those responsible to strictly implement obligations arising from the Regulations, Administrative Instructions, Strategies and Action Plans. Institutions in charge of oversight should be more active in overseeing the implementation of policies and legal obligations. Impunity for non-implementation sets a negative example and has a chain effect on other institutions as well.

8. Each school and municipality that has created and put in place Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in Pre-University Education has achieved very positive results in preventing and addressing the school drop-outs phenomenon. Functionalization of Teams in all schools would create a new situation in Kosovo education in relation to the phenomenon of drop-outs.

6. CONCLUSIONS

Findings of this study, intertwined with the findings of many other researches and assessments conducted until now, have identified the reasons that impact on the school drop-out rate of students from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, which have been grouped into four groups of factors: 1. Individual factors; 2. Family factors; 3. School factors and 4. Social factors. All the identified factors were elaborated and justified within this study. Based on the findings, we conclude that the phenomenon of drop-out is very complex and implies a comprehensive, gradual and resolute approach, in order for the treatment of drop-out issue to be normed as a value within each educational institution, and never remain at the level of fulfilment of the formal and declarative aspect.

At the very end, grouping of factors aims to facilitate the work of those responsible to address the issue of drop-outs. However, no intervention should be standardized and used as a set of actions to be replicated in each case. Therefore, each case of drop-out is unique and requires unique actions, therefore it is necessary to use procedures stemming from the Early Warning System to identify each case in its beginning and take concrete actions, depending on the specifics of the case.



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