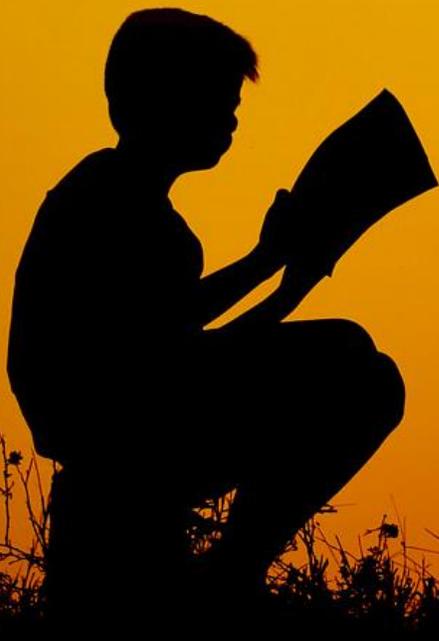


THEMATIC REPORT

**Difficulties that students of Roma,
Ashkali and Egyptian communities
encounter in education**



Thematic report

Difficulties that students of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities encounter in education

This report has been compiled by Samir Shahini 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.”

June 2019, Prishtinë

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1.1 LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

KAS	Kosovo Agency of Statistics
BSFK	Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo
BIRN	Balkan Investigative Reporting Network
KEEN	Kosovo Education and Employment Network
KOSINT	“Kosovo Integration Initiative 2020” Project
MEST	Ministry of Education, Science and Technology
LC	Learning Centre
NGO	Nongovernmental Organisation
KESP	Kosovo Education Strategic Plan
RADC	Roma and Ashkali Documentation Centre
TDH	Terre Des Hommes
TIP	The Ideas Partnership
AI	Administrative Instruction
VoRAE	Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians
NDS	National Development Strategy

2 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In general, it can be concluded that the position of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in the education system in Kosovo has not marked satisfactory progress, which has also been documented in various reports published by local organizations, as well as the international ones. Furthermore, although the situation is assessed to have slightly improved by the parties involved in this research, ranging from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students themselves, their parents, their teachers, and school leaders in their respective municipalities selected to carry out the research, problems and challenges are reported at the same time many, which although were consistently reported have found no solution.

The purpose of this study is to provide easy-to-understand, mainly qualitative, information and analysis on these problems and challenges encountered by Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students in schools. The data in this report have been mainly collected from documents published by MEST, NGOs that engage and monitor the development of preschool education in Kosovo, but also by the schools themselves.

Kosovo continues to have the lowest level of inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children in institutionalized education, while no serious effort that in the near future would improve this situation is noted. Official data show that the gross enrolment rate in compulsory education is slightly above 84.9%, while it falls significantly to 30% in upper secondary education.¹ The long-term goal of eliminating discrimination and racism in schools remains distant, especially in those schools working separately in the parallel Serbian system where there are still segregated classrooms, provision of qualitative education programs, inclusion of parents of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children, factors which would ensure full inclusion of children in primary education and adequate preparation of children for further education.

The research offers evidence of the current situation and makes recommendations that will lead to improving this situation in education at this level, when it is known that all developed countries years ago have increased investment in child education and increase of inclusion, and by doing so they have achieved tangible results in the future of generations.

This report aims to inform the public regarding the situation we are in but to also increase the engagement of all parties, the institutions in particular, to invest in qualitative and inclusive education for children in Kosovo.

1. Council of Europe, 2015 – Guidelines for teachers for social inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians in schools

3 INTRODUCTION

Believing that a society can fully develop only when all individuals are included in the education system, this research analyses the specific challenges of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in schools in Kosovo. Regardless of a large number of laws, regulations and other documents protecting the rights of children within Kosovo legislation, Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children continue to be affected by the low level of inclusion, thus turning into victims, in high numbers, of early drop-out.

The process of involving the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in education sector has been addressed through a series of laws, two strategies, and several administrative instructions. The Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali in Kosovo Society 2017-2021, adopted in April 2017 by the Government of Kosovo, envisages education as one of the four main pillars of intervention. In the field of education, there are a number of activities that are planned to be addressed in the coming years. The Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021 also envisages concrete measures to increase participation and quality of education for vulnerable communities, with a focus on children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

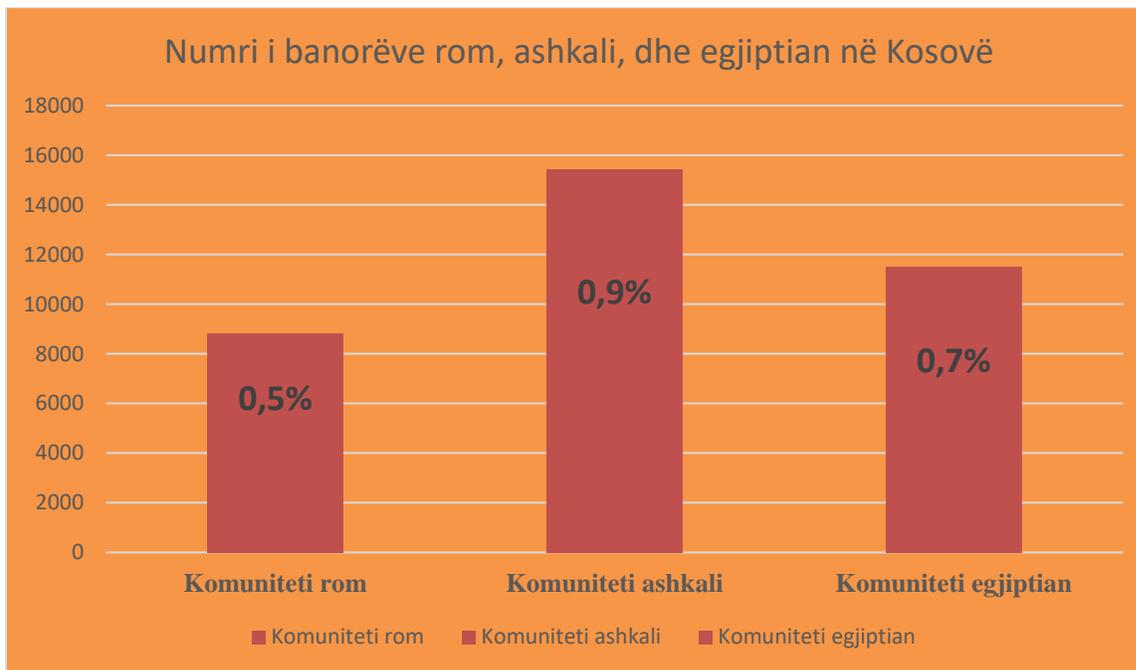
On the other hand, a considerable number of non-governmental organizations have developed various learning assistance programs for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students, programs for mediation with the community, and youth support programs in different locations in Kosovo where these communities are concentrated.

However, all of the abovementioned measures have not been sufficient to bring the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities to the desired level of education in Kosovo.

Initially, the research presents a brief overview of the profile of each of the three communities. Secondly, the legal infrastructure covering the field of education, human rights - with particular emphasis on the rights of children, the rights of non-majority ethnic communities, and the developmental aspects of the country, are presented. At the end, results of the research carried out in four municipalities of Kosovo are presented in details, as well as a number of recommendations that have come out as a summary of everyone's contributions.

4 CONTEXT

The data on general population and those of ethnic communities come from the last census carried out in 2011 (Data from the Kosovo Agency of Statistics). A total of 8,824 or 0.5% of the total population are Roma, 15,436 (which is 0.9% of the total population) are Ashkali and 11,524 (0.7% of the total population) are Egyptians.



Graphic 1 – Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population in Kosovo

These communities continue to be the least involved group in primary education and very little involved in secondary and higher education. Also, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children are those who make up the majority of children who have either dropped out of school or are at risk of dropping out.

Based on the Law, pre-university education includes children aged 6-18 years through three levels of pre-university education: primary school (grades 1-5), lower secondary school (grades 6-9), and upper secondary school (grades (10-12/13), where the first two levels are part of compulsory education.

In addition to the fact that the fundamental rights are guaranteed by the Constitution of the country and the rights to education are based on the Law on Pre-University Education as umbrella legislation in education, there are also a series of laws that directly affect the protection and promotion of human rights:

- Law on the protection and promotion of the rights of communities and the members in Kosovo(03/L-047);
- Law on education in municipalities, which envisages a greater responsibility for decision-making of the local level (03/L-068);
- Law against discrimination (2004/3);
- Law on the use of languages(02/L37);
- Law on cultural heritage (02/L-88);

Kosovo can generally be considered as a country that has given a satisfactory focus to promoting diversity and human rights for its entire people, regardless of race, ethnicity or religion, at least in its legal framework. However, the situation on the ground indicates that mechanisms for the implementation of this legal framework are lacking, or they are weak.

5 ROMA, ASHKALI AND EGYPTIANS IN KOSOVO

The Roma community lives all over Kosovo, with a focus mainly on the municipalities of Prizren, Pejë, Graçanicë, Gjakovë, Obiliq and Mitrovicë. Official data speak of 8,824 Roma citizens in Kosovo. Most Roma are Sunni Muslims and speak the Roma language, a language that differs from the official languages in Kosovo. In some municipalities, the Roma community comprises between 2% and 5% of the municipal population.²

The Ashkali community is the largest of these three communities with 15,436 members. The Ashkali community lives mainly in urban areas, with a focus on the municipalities of Ferizaj, Fushë Kosovë, Lipjan, Prizren and Shtime. They are generally Sunni Muslims and speak Albanian.³

The Egyptian community is composed of 11,524 members or less than 1% of the total population of Kosovo. Egyptians mainly live in urban areas with a large concentration in the municipalities of Gjakovë, Pejë, Istog, Deçan and Klinë. They are generally Sunni Muslims and speak Albanian as their mother tongue.⁴

The largest communities live in municipalities such as Gjakovë (majority Egyptians), Fushë Kosovë (majority Ashkali), Prizren (majority Roma), Pejë (majority Egyptians), Ferizaj (majority Ashkali), Lipjan (majority Ashkali) and Istog (majority Egyptians).

Prior to the 1998/1999 period, it is estimated that there were at least 150,000 Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians living in Kosovo. In cities like Prishtinë, Gjilan, Mitrovicë, where these communities were mostly concentrated before the war, there is now only a small percentage of population living there due to their departure during and after the war, and only a few have returned.

² The European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo: Community Profile: Roma Community. Accessible at: <http://www.ecmikosovo.org/uploads/Ashkalicommunity1.pdf>

³ The European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo: Community Profile: Ashkali Community. Accessible at: <http://www.ecmikosovo.org/uploads/Ashkalicommunity1.pdf>

⁴ The European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo: Community Profile: Egyptian Community. Accessible at: <http://www.ecmikosovo.org/uploads/Egyptiancommunity1.pdf>

6 LEGAL FRAMEWORK AND EDUCATION SYSTEM IN KOSOVO

Education has an important role in the socio-economic development of a country, thus enabling individuals to exploit their potential and play a productive role in the development of society. As such, in addition to the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021,⁵ education holds a priority place in various strategic documents of the Government of Kosovo, including the National Development Strategy (NDS),⁶ the European Reform Agenda (ERA)⁷, Economic Reform Program (ERP), Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities in Kosovo Society 2017-2021, and the Government Program of the Republic of Kosovo.

6.1 INTERRELATION BETWEEN GOVERNMENTAL POLICIES

6.1.1 **The National Development Strategy 2016 – 2021** is a basic strategic document that addresses development policies of particular importance, defining concrete measures and activities for a medium term. The field of education as one of the priority areas is addressed in the first chapter of the Strategy - Human Capital Development. This pillar provides for measures to increase children's participation in preschool education, improve the quality of pre-university education, link education with labour market needs, and strengthen accountability through inspection, evaluation of performance and external tests, as well as optimizing spending on education through data systems.

⁵ Kosovo Education Strategic Plan 2017-2021: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/PLANI_STRATEGJIK_I_ARSIMIT_NE_KOSOVE.pdf

⁶ National Development Strategy 2016-2021: http://www.kryeministri-ks.net/repository/docs/Strategjia_Kombetare_per_Zhvillim_2016-2021_Shqip.pdf

⁷ European Reform Agenda: <https://www.mei-ks.net/repository/docs/erafinalsq.pdf>

6.1.2 **The European Reform Agenda** is a strategic document outlining concrete short-term measures and activities for three priority areas: good governance and the rule of law; competitiveness and investment climate; as well as education and employment. Within the field of education for the period 2016 - 2017, ERA envisages three measures, as in the following:

- Adopting the remaining legislation that provides the basis for policy reforms in the education sector.
- Improving the quality of education through:
 - a. Increasing attendance of preschool education;
 - b. Conducting external evaluation and accelerating the implementation of new curricula, including new textbooks in pre-university education;
 - c. Developing mechanisms for evaluating and improving initial and in-service teacher training programs;
 - d. Improving the overall quality of higher education;
 - e. Promoting better links between higher education and the labour market by facilitating and encouraging the establishment of industrial boards in universities which advise higher education institutions on the importance of curricula, identifying skills gaps in graduates, participating in training and teaching (visits, seminars) and provision of training, and hands-on experience for students.

6.1.3 **The Economic Reforms Programme (ERP)** sets out the Government's priorities for meeting Kosovo's key obligations from the SAA⁸ in the field of economy. In this regard, Kosovo's key objective in the field of education is to link education and training with labour market requirements, which is in line with NDS, ERA and KESP.

⁸. SAA – The Stabilisation and Association Agreement. More information at <https://www.mei-ks.net/sq/procesi-i-stabilizim-asociimit-78>

6.2 GOVERNMENT PROGRAM OF REPUBLIC OF KOSOVO 2017-2021 AIMS TO BUILD A NEW EDUCATIONAL MODEL THAT WILL FOCUS ON CONCRETE REFORMS FROM PRE-SCHOOL EDUCATION TO ACADEMIC ADVANCEMENT. WITHIN THIS PROGRAM, THE MINISTRY OF EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY (MEST) ENVISAGES FIVE OBJECTIVES FOR THE FOUR-YEAR PERIOD 2017 – 2021 AS IN THE FOLLOWING:

1. Reforms in the education system;
2. Improvement of legal infrastructure;
3. Adapting the education system to the needs of labour market;
4. International cooperation in education;
5. Development, research and innovation.

6.3 NATIONAL STRATEGY FOR INCLUSION OF ROMA AND ASHKALI COMMUNITIES IN KOSOVO SOCIETY 2017-2021

The Strategy for the Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali communities is a continuation of policies of the Government of the Republic of Kosovo to strengthen the multi-ethnic and multi-cultural character of Kosovo society. Lessons learned from the implementation of the Strategy, Action Plan for the Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities 2009-2015,⁹ as well as the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies by 2020¹⁰ were taken into consideration while drafting this document. The framework defines four areas of action that need to be addressed by national strategies: education, employment and social welfare, health and housing. Drafting of this strategy, divided into four areas, implies that deep cross-sectoral cooperation between the line ministries for each pillar is more than necessary.

⁹ Strategy for integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the Republic of Kosovo 2009-2015, December 2008

¹⁰ EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020

7 ROMA, ASHKALI AND EGYPTIANS IN EDUCATION SYSTEM

Kosovo Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children continue to face challenges in accessing qualitative education and are disproportionately affected by high non-enrolment, drop-outs, high illiteracy rate, and low educational achievement.¹¹In October 2012, the MEST issued an Administrative Instruction giving municipal educational institutions responsibility for establishing and operationalizing “Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in compulsory education” (PRTANs).¹²Further, in October 2014, MEST developed and approved terms of reference to help operate the PRTANs. Being compulsory at the school and municipal levels, PRTANs seek to coordinate actions to handle drop-outs and combat low enrolment and they are expected to provide special support to children of these three communities. On the other hand, no progress has been achieved in addressing the issue of the existence of two separate education systems that inevitably impacts the further segregation of communities. Despite the recommendations of the Independent Commission for Revision of Serbian Language Teaching Materials published in 2010 on the importance of a unique education system for all communities in Kosovo¹³no serious efforts were made to address the special provision of teaching in Serbian language, mainly due to general political circumstances. Furthermore, it is not possible for either Kosovo Albanian or Kosovo Serb students to learn languages of the numerically smaller communities, which would help to better preserve and promote Roma language and culture in Kosovo, in particular. In general, continuing education reform in Kosovo has not yet addressed these common needs for language learning, education and integration.

The opportunities for interaction between students attending classes in the two separate education systems are limited to scattered and rare initiatives undertaken by international organizations or local non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Interaction between students from different communities, even within the same education system itself, is also limited and although general

¹¹ Kosovo Pedagogical Institute: Children out of school in Kosovo: Base study on practice of prevention and reaction to school drop-out and non-enrolment

(2014), <https://masht.rks-gov.net/uploads/2015/06/shqip-small-quality.pdf>

¹² Administrative Instruction no. 19/2012 on establishment and enforcement of Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in compulsory education, <https://gzk.rks-gov.net/ActDetail.aspx?ActID=8222>

¹³ MEST's independent commission for revision of teaching materials in Serbian, pg. 15, at: <http://archive.erisee.org/sites/default/files/-%20Comprehensive%20Report%20of%20Independent%20Commission%20for%20the%20review%20of%20serbian%20language%20teaching%20materials.pdf>

cultural and sporting events are organized by the schools themselves, activities aimed at promoting dialogue and interethnic contact are mainly organized by NGOs.¹⁴

While education policymakers still need to make clear provisions to promote inter-ethnic dialogue and contact between communities, a positive development is the reference to promoting cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity in the Inter-Ministerial Local Government Strategy 2016–2026.¹⁵ The Strategy foresees municipal action plans to promote ethnic and linguistic diversity, including teaching in the local language, curricular activities for multiculturalism and human rights, as well as joint extracurricular activities to bring together students from different communities.

Another document of great importance is also the Administrative Instruction on the Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centres 19/2018, which will be elaborated in more detail below.

¹⁴ Some of the organisations operating in this field are Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo (BSFK), Voice of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians (VoRAE), Roma and Ashkali Documentation Centre (RADC), and Terre des hommes (TDH).

¹⁵ Strategy on Local Self-Government 2016-2026 http://kryeministri-ks.net/wp-content/uploads/docs/Strategjia_per_veteqeverisje_lokale_shq,ser,ang.pdf

8 LEARNING CENTRES IN KOSOVO

The role of Learning Centres is to provide complementary or alternative educational services to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in the area where they operate, in order to include and improve their school performance as well as their integration into the wider society. Learning Centres are community-based and school-based. Currently, over 50 Learning Centres operate in 20 municipalities of Kosovo, mainly in municipalities where the majority of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities live. These Centres are run by more than 10 civil society organizations in Kosovo with financial support mainly from international donors, but there is also an increase in financial support from the institutions. The largest number of Learning Centres is in the municipalities of Gjakovë, Prizren, Pejë and Lipjan.

According to data provided by NGOs that manage Learning Centres, there are a total of 5,555 children attending activities in Learning Centres, where the number of children of both genders is almost equal. The municipalities of Fushë Kosovë, Gjakovë and Shtime have the highest number of children attending activities in the Learning Centres. Learning Centres operate mainly through donor financial support, and this support is not sustainable. The annual budget of all Learning Centres is 1,807,750.40 euro, while the average annual expenditure of all Learning Centres is EUR 325.4 or EUR 27.1 per month. Despite the fact that the Strategy for Inclusion of Roma and Ashkali Communities foresees support for the work of the Learning Centres, MEST has not allocated funds for this purpose.¹⁶

At the end of August 2017, the Administrative Instruction 12/2017 on Establishment and Operation of Learning Centres was approved, a document which was revised in September 2018, and approved in December of the same year. The new Administrative Instruction No. 19/2018¹⁷, has already been followed by the drafting of a guideline setting out the forms of planning, registration, financing, evaluation and reporting at MEST and at the municipal level. This guideline will eventually draw up the learning centres on the map and provide them with institutional recognition and support. Furthermore, an amount of EUR 500,000.00 was transferred to the MEST budget last year from the state treasury to support the continuation of the work of the centres, an amount which was not put at the disposal of the organizations that manage these centres until the time of writing this report.

¹⁶Information borrowed from the report "Impact of Learning Centres on inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in education", published by the KOSINT Project in November 2018: http://keen-ks.net/site/assets/files/1446/qm_ne_kosove-_alb-1.pdf

¹⁷Administrative Instruction 19/2018 on the establishment and functioning of Learning Centres <https://masht.rks.gov.net/uploads/2018/12/ua-nr-19-masht-per-themelimin-dhe-funksionimin-e-qendrave-mesimore-x.pdf>

9 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The methodology used for this thematic report on the difficulties of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in education, with a focus on the municipalities of Fushë Kosovë, Shtime, Obiliq and Prizren, is based on data from reports and statistics available at the national and municipal level on the one hand and the data collected by the municipalities above for the purposes of this particular assessment on the other hand. The reports that were analysed to collect data for this assessment included:

- MEST statistical reports for 2016, 2017 and 2018 (coming from EMIS Division);
- KOSINT 2020 Project Report - Integration of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities into the Education System in Kosovo
- Community Rights Assessment Report on Kosovo by the OSCE, 2015
- KOSINT 2020 Project Report - Impact of Learning Centres on Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Children in Education
- Annual report of the KOSANA project for 2015
- Report by The Ideas Partnership organisation on the phenomenon of early marriages of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Fushë Kosovë
- Report on the number and needs of children with disabilities, 2018 (EDI Project 2)

Meanwhile, field data were collected through the organization of four focus groups in each of the four selected municipalities - Fushë Kosovë, Prizren, Obiliq and Shtime. The municipalities were selected in agreement with the KOSINT project coordinator and other persons involved in the project.

The focus groups were organized with primary school students in the respective municipalities, with parents of low school cycle students, teachers in combined composition between primary and low school cycle grades 6-9, as well as with school management, respectively with school principals. The focus groups consisted of two or more participants, but no more than eight in each format.

The questionnaire was composed of a set of 8-9 basic questions, depending on the group, upon which in-depth interviews were conducted with participants to take our more complete and realistic information from situation in the field.

In order for the information extracted from the focus groups to be more complete and accurate, the interviews were audio-recorded, which were then carefully transcribed. In all cases, the recording was done after all participants agreed with this interview format. The data from the focus group recordings transcripts were placed in a detailed matrix, and then the qualitative and quantitative research data were extracted from this matrix.

10 RESEARCH RESULTS

The research conducted on reports and findings from prior research, and then through focus groups conducted in four different municipalities of Kosovo, brings out that Kosovo students generally face numerous challenges in their educational journey. Lack of adequate working space in some schools, large numbers of students in classrooms, distance from school, economic and social conditions of families are just some of the challenge's students face in Kosovo. Further, the research has highlighted numerous factors and barriers that Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students face in particular.

According to a study by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics,¹⁸ the literacy rate among the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities is very low compared to the majority population, and the same applies to the educational level of communities.

The level of education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Fushë Kosovë municipality, for example, is very low. According to the results of The Ideas Partnership research, out of 502 people interviewed, 31% of them have only completed elementary school, 14% completed high school, and 29% of respondents were without education, who were never part of the Kosovo education system, and only one respondent has attended university studies.

The main data of this study concerning the educational level of communities are presented below:

- Literacy skills - Percentage of young people aged 15-24 who are able to read short sentences about daily life, or who have attended upper secondary or higher education:

(a) Females – 72.8 % (98% at Kosovo level).

(b) Males – 86.5 % (97.6% at Kosovo level).

- Education attendance at the early age - Percentage of children aged 36-59 months attending a preschool education program: 16.1% (13.9% at Kosovo level).
- Preparation for school - Percentage of children in the first grade of primary school who have attended pre-primary education during the previous school year: 53.9% (75.5% at Kosovo level).
- Net enrolment rate in primary education: 68.1% (91.6% at Kosovo level).
- Percentage of children of primary school age currently attending primary or secondary education: 85.3% (98% at Kosovo level).

¹⁸ Kosovo Agency of Statistics, Roma and Ashkali communities in the Republic of Kosovo, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2013-2014

- Children at work - Percentage of children aged 5-17 who are engaged at work: 16.6% (10.7% at Kosovo level).

Government of the Republic of Kosovo has approved the Kosovo Education Strategic Plan (KESP) 2017-2021, which foresees measures for achievement of several specific indicators for the education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities by 2021:

- Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in pre-primary education (Target: 70%)
- Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in primary education (Target: 95%)
- Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in lower secondary education (Target: 85%)
- Inclusion of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in upper secondary education (Target: 50%)
- Transition rate in upper secondary education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children (Target: 80%)
- Gender Parity Index for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities (Target: LPSS - 1, HSS - 0.90)

The various factors that present obstacles and difficulties for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students in schools, and may at the same time hinder the achievement and completion of the KESP indicators above, are divided into 7 categories as follows:

10.1 ECONOMIC FACTORS

- **Inability to secure textbooks and other materials needed for school**

In most cases the parents interviewed stated that securing the materials needed for school continues to be a challenge. Although textbooks for all subjects are provided by the Ministry of Education to all students, in many cases teachers have reported that Roma, Ashkali, or Egyptian pupils have lost them along the school year. Furthermore, any school material needed in the teaching process falls on the already heavyburden of the parents or custodians of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children.

In three of the four research locations, various non-governmental organizations provide school packages for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian pupils in each school year. While being extremely helpful, this is not a sustainable solution.

- **Lack of clothes**

The lack of school-appropriate clothing, especially during winter season, is one of the factors that have led to drop-outs in many cases. This was also confirmed by the field research, which turns out to be one of the main difficulties in the listing of difficulties mentioned by parents, students, but also by teachers and school management.

- **Inadequate personal hygiene**

Living conditions, lack of water or frequent reductions, large numbers of family members sharing the same living space, and aggravated economic conditions contribute to the inability to maintain adequate personal hygiene. In some cases, various organizations operating at the local level have donated hygiene kits along¹⁹ with oral and body hygiene guidelines and tips. As stated above regarding school packages, although it is a great help for these communities, it does not represent a sustainable solution.

¹⁹In Fushë Kosovë, The Ideas Partnership organization as well as Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo organization has donated hygiene kits in several cases for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families.

- **Involvement of children at housework, in the street or other hard works**

The grave economic situation of most of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian families in Kosovo is inevitably related to the education and consequences it has on the education of children of these communities. In many cases Roma, Ashkali or Egyptian children drop out of school in the early years of the 6-9 primary school cycle, to help their families through work and money earning.

A BIRN report published in May 2019²⁰, presents the difficult economic and social situation of families of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in the village of Plemetin, Obiliq municipality. Families of these communities do not live economically better in other municipalities either. In a report released by the KOSANA project in 2015, it is stated that only 3.76% of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian population in Kosovo have incomes of over 300 euros a month, while the majority of them, 40.06%, have less than 80 euros incomes a month. On the other hand, 42% are on social assistance.²¹

²⁰ Story from Plemetin – Children who do not celebrate their Day

²¹ Annual report of Kosana project for 2015, page 57

10.2 HEALTH ISSUES THAT ARE RELATED TO EDUCATION

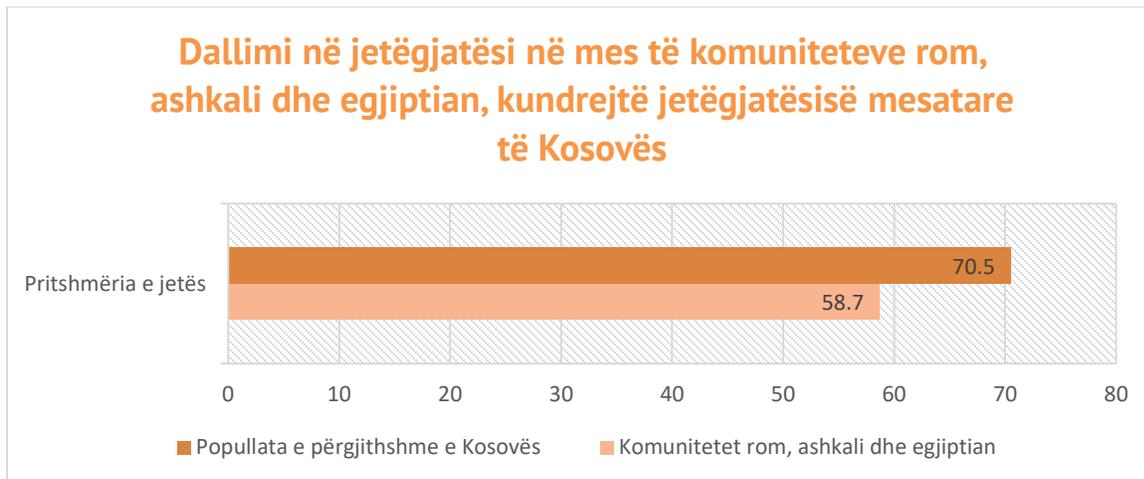
- **Inability to receive immediate health treatment and prolongation of recovery**

In many cases one of the reasons why Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students make many absences, which automatically affect their overall performance and success in school, is the untimely and inadequate treatment of various health problems. Evident problems are also observed in the immunization process of children in these communities, which in some cases has resulted in epidemic outbreaks of contagious diseases such as measles. The most recent case of measles outbreak occurred in October 2018, where a few months old baby died in Fushë Kosovë.²² The effect of this outbreak of measles has also been noted in education, where many Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students have been absent from school, thus deepening the differences in performance with the Albanian children. On the other hand, these diseases are almost entirely part of the past in other communities in Kosovo.

²² Reported by the local organization Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo

- **More contagious diseases due to lack of personal hygiene**

The lack of personal hygiene has resulted in one of the reasons for the much shorter life expectancy in these communities, compared to the average life expectancy of the country.



Graphic 2 – Differences in life expectancy of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian population versus average life expectancy in Kosovo²³

Except the personal hygiene, malnutrition, lack of adequate clothing, exposure to various pollutants and various poisonous materials also has a major impact. An interesting fact that was taken out from interviewing of teachers at Pandeli Sotiri school, branch in Plemetin village, shows that a big number of Roma students in this village have been expelled from the school located in the same yard as Pandeli Sotiri, but operating in the Serbian language and parallel system. The main reason for these expulsions appears to be the inadequate level of personal hygiene of these students.

²³ Annual report of Kosana project for 2015, page 10

10.3 SOCIAL ISSUES

- **Extreme poverty**

According to the 2017 Household Budget Survey conducted by the World Bank and the Kosovo Agency of Statistics, it is estimated that 17.6 percent of the population in Kosovo live in absolute poverty, with less than 1.82 euro per adult person, while 5.3 percent of the population live on the extreme poverty line, with less than 1.30 euros a day.

Most of the other Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian families belong to the latter category.²⁴ This fact is repeatedly mentioned in the European Union Progress Reports on Kosovo and in the World Bank Reports on Kosovo.

- **Lack of support by the parents**

All the respondents from school management groups, as well as 100% of the teachers interviewed, stated the lack of support from parents in teaching and homework for their children as a key factor in poor performance of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students at school. This happens because most parents of school-age children have themselves dropped out education at an early age to engage in work, or even get married. In many cases, older children are halted from going to school in order to provide care for their younger siblings, or to help with house work.

About half of the parents interviewed do not attend meetings organized by teachers for their children. In all municipalities that have been part of the research, school boards and parent councils are composed of members from the Roma, Ashkali, or Egyptian communities.

²⁴ 2017 Household Budget Survey, 2017

- **Underestimation of girls' education**

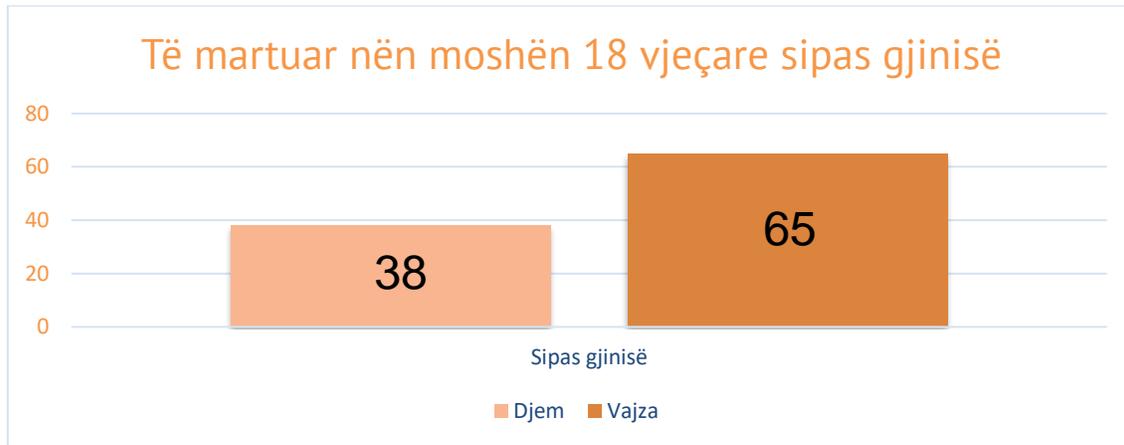
The research conducted at the four selected locations shows that most parents, with few exceptions, rate education of boys as more important and priority than the education of girls. They consider that boys bear the burden of maintaining a family with financial income, while girls are expected to change homes and families when they get married, therefore investment in their education is not seen as a return on investment.

Furthermore, early marriages affect girls more severely than boys, because the expectation is always that the woman will be younger than the man in a marriage. Due to this many girls drop out of school before their brothers or other male peers.

- **The phenomenon of early marriages**

Early marriages hinder the emancipation of young people from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, which have led to drop-outs and low levels of education among young people in these communities. A survey conducted by The Ideas Partnership in 2017 in Fushë Kosovë on the phenomenon of early marriages²⁵, shows that 53.57% of the respondents were married under the age of 18. This has inevitably affected the low number of those who enrol in secondary and university education. This is also confirmed by the data collected in the field during the research, according to which 99% of the respondents did not continue their education after marriage.

²⁵ The Early Marriage Phenomenon in Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Fushë Kosovë



Graphic 3 – Marriages under the age of 18 divided according to gender among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Fushë Kosovë

- **Lack of self-esteem and safety at school**

The interviewed Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students were specifically asked to tell about insults made to them based on ethnicity, skin colour, or other differences they have with students from the majority community. Student responses indicate that 3/4 of respondents were insulted with words like “maxhup” or “gabel” [*gypsy*], or they were even physically assaulted by predominantly older students belonging to the majority community. Assaults and insults in most cases occurred outside the school premises, or even outside the school yard. The research also shows that such incidents become more common in the upper grades of elementary school, or even in secondary school.

In many cases students are also verbally insulted by their teachers. One of the parents of the focus group in Fushë Kosovë said he removed his daughter from school in the second grade as a result of the misconduct and negative psychological effect that her teacher had on her at Selman Riza school. Another case that is reported separately, but fully consistent in their statements by students and parents in the village of Plemetin in Obiliq, is related to a teacher at the Pandeli Sotiri school in Obiliq, who, reacting to the inappropriate behaviour of some Ashkali students, told them: *“I would beat you, but I don’t want to get my hands dirty because you’re sweaty.”*

While interviewing the teachers it was observed that most of them consider that poor personal hygiene, early drop-out, lack of interest from parents are normal things that follow Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptians; more over consider that are characteristic of them. This fact is very disturbing when it is also related to other aspects of discrimination of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students, which occurs on a daily basis without prompting reactions from almost anyone, it is an alarming situation.

10.4 LEARNING PROBLEMS

- **Lack of basics and lagging behind in learning versus their peers**

From the Kosovo Preschool Education Assessment Report data²⁶, published in November 2018 by the KEEN project, 90.1% of children or 24,308 of 26,977 five-year-olds in Kosovo enrolled in preschool, and only 4.8% or 6,760 children 0-4 year-olds out of 139,961 enrolled in preschool classes for the 2018/2019 academic year.

Of these children, only 357 Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children were enrolled in preschool. The low level of inclusion of Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children in preschool and pre-elementary school classes is a “prerequisite” for creating a performance and learning gap between Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students versus the Albanian ones.

The situation unfortunately does not improve with the beginning of the first grade, because in most cases Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students, lacking the support of their parents at home and often not the adequate support of teachers in the early grades, starts and creates a gap between their performance and the majority community students.

- **Undiagnosed problems with eyesight, hearing and other disabilities**

In a research conducted by the EDI 2 project in the municipalities of Fushë Kosovë, Obiliq, Lipjan, and Shtime on the number and needs of children with disabilities in Kosovo,²⁷ it turns out that in most cases parents cannot provide an accurate answer regarding the disability of their children. Findings of this research also indicate that additional academic support and higher expectations for their children by teachers is seen as being of paramount importance to their children’s success at school.

Further, systematic medical examinations that should precede first-class enrolment are not done for most Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian children. In this way teachers are found in a disadvantageous situation, unable to adapt techniques and work methodology to include as many children with visual, hearing, learning problems, or even any certain disabilities.

²⁶ Assessment report on pre-school education in Kosovo - KEEN Project

²⁷ Empowering Kosovo minority communities through Education, Dialogue for Inclusion in Decision-Making Processes - A project supported by the Austrian Development Agency (ADA) in Kosovo, and implemented by the NGO consortium Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo, The Ideas Partnership, and PLAY

- **Learning problems for certain subjects**

Results of the field research hardly make any particular subject more problematic than the other subjects. However, it has been noted during the interviews of students and teachers that theoretical subjects present a little more problem than the subjects that contain more practical activities. 3/4 of students interviewed stated that in many cases they have difficulty understanding the instructions given by teachers in Albanian, but also in English. This is due to the fact that teachers use standardized language in most cases, which significantly differs from the language these students speak at home.

In some cases, teachers have raised the issue of supporting Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students in subjects of physical education and music, be it through catch-up classes by them or through learning-centre programs. This is due to the fact that, in distinct numbers, Roma, Ashkali, or Egyptian students performed significantly better than Albanian students in the above-mentioned subjects, the interviewed teachers stated.

- **Absences in class**

The phenomenon of numerous absences has constantly followed Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students. Moreover, this factor has also led to the high drop-out rate of a large number of these students. In all other cases, numerous absences have undermined their consolidation in the teaching process, contributing to the gap between them and Albanian or Serbian students created by low involvement in preschool and pre-elementary classes, and lack of support from their parents at home.

While interviewing students in focus groups, it has been learned that at least 3/4 of them have made unreasonable absences over the last year in significant numbers. Moreover, it has been noted that their justification for the importance of not marking such absences is lacking, considering absences as something generally normal.

Some of the reasons that lead to a high number of absences are health issues, family plans that are made with a little or not taking education of children into consideration at all, be it for family visits or summer vacations, lack of clothing, lack of transportation, lack of homework and fear of different punishments from the teachers.

In many cases when students have been absent for several days, the fear of punishment from teachers has led them to complete drop-out.

On the other hand, the interviewed teachers complained about the high number of absences from students of these communities. As a result, they have encountered problems with implementing their curriculum and, thus trying to provide additional support to students who have been absent for several days, they have in some cases damaged regular students with a lack of attention for them.

Asked about the reasons for their children's absence from school, parents report their children's unwillingness to go to school, their lack of awareness of the importance of educating their children, planning family visits outside of towns and villages where they live, without taking into account the hours their children lose, and so on.

10.5 DISCRIMINATION

- **By the teachers: Division in classrooms, disparagement, lack of care and attention**

In all the municipalities where interviewing in focus group was done, an inappropriate teacher approach to students from Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities was reported. Reports of cases of mistreatment by teachers were reported by parents of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students in Obiliq and Fushë Kosovë, municipalities which were part of the research. However, numerous cases have also been documented in other municipalities and villages over the years.

Harassment or ill-treatment takes many forms. In some cases teachers ignore students from these communities and carry out the learning process by hardly involving them, or not involving them at all. In other cases, teachers have verbally disparaged Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian students.

In all cases, teachers have been reported to lack the care and attention for community students in the teaching process. This lack of attention has also been reported in some cases of students being placed in rows or in groups within classrooms. However, in the random classroom observations made available in Shtime, Fushë Kosovë, and Obiliq, this was not noted in any of the observed classrooms.

- **By their peers: harassment, exclusion, and other forms of bullying**

3/4 of the students interviewed stated that they were bullied by their peers or older students in the respective schools. In many cases, they were insulted with racist words and expressions and in the simplest cases they have been excluded from society in various school activities, but also social activities in and out of school.

One of the students interviewed in Fushë Kosovë shows that although he is a very good friend at school with an Albanian classmate, they have never visited each other in their homes, while he says that this is frequent among Albanian or Ashkali peers.

In some cases in Plemetin of Obiliq, Ashkali students were not allowed to take long breaks in the hall or schoolyard and were locked in classrooms by Albanian students, while they were helped by teachers or other Albanian students, who are their classmates.

- **Bullying on the way to school, or from school, as well as in the schoolyard**

Bullying, insults, exclusions, and neglecting made to Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students at school by teachers and other students are not isolated incidents in school environments.

In all municipalities where the focus groups with students were organized, they reported being bullied at least once on the way to school or from home to school by pedestrians with offensive and racist words. Moreover, most cases of conflicts between students do not occur in the school premises, but in the schoolyard or on the streets in vicinity of the school.

It is worth mentioning that 5 cases of school drop-outs were identified last year at the Hivzi Sylejmani Gymnasium of Fushë Kosovë by the local organization Balkan Sunflowers Kosovo, as a result of incidents and bullying of Ashkali students in this gymnasium.

10.6 LANGUAGE

- **Education in a language other from the mother tongue (Roma community mainly)**

Most of the Roma students in the municipality of Prizren go to school in Albanian. In this regard, students can learn the Roma language as one of the school subjects. Romani language teachers are scarce and face numerous challenges in terms of textbooks and other materials for organizing classes in this language.²⁸

“The society has not invested in creating the conditions to enforce their constitutional right to use the language at all levels, from pre-school education to the university one. Therefore, I think that Roma are discriminated in this regard.” Bexhet Shala, Director of the Council for Defense of Human Rights and Freedoms

The remaining part of community students, Roma mainly, go to Serbian language schools and schools that mainly operate under the Serbian system. In these schools teaching is entirely in Serbian and Roma language is not even offered as an elective subject.

²⁸ Romani language, the most discriminated language in Kosovo, article on Romani language on Free Europe

10.7 APPROACH

- **Distance and other difficulties to school access**

In addition to the factors elaborated above in the long list of difficulties that Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian students encounter, there are also many physical barriers associated with their access to school. Among the main difficulties identified in the focus group interviews conducted in the four municipalities turns out to be the distance from school. In Fushë Kosovë, the local organization The Ideas Partnership has partially helped solve this problem by paying for a bus to transport students during the wintertime from Lagja 29 to the “Selman Riza” school yard, and the other way around.

Except the distance from school, Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students, especially in Fushë Kosovë and Obiliq, face other difficulties on the road. Stray dogs, lack of street lighting, and uncleaned roads during the winter from the snow and ice, present great difficulties in their access to school.

During the various observations, organized or random in the school premises in all municipalities included in the research, it was noted that the indoor areas are filled with various works that reflect Albanian history and culture in Kosovo. Unfortunately, no works have been that demonstrate the culture and history of the Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian communities in Kosovo and in the world have been exhibited. This certainly contributes to creation of a less welcoming environment for these students, and in a way affects their cultural assimilation.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

- At the elementary and lower secondary levels of education, to work more with students from these communities (also through additional learning and catch-up classes) so that their success can be improved and for them to be able to enrol in directions they like and be successful during school.
- Teachers to focus on certain subjects and skills that Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students have in order to give them an opportunity
- MEST to implement the legal framework on the operation of Learning Centres, namely the Administrative Instruction No.19 / 2018 on the Establishment and Functioning of Learning Centres.
- Local institutions in collaboration with non-governmental organizations to operationalize Prevention and Response Teams towards Abandonment and Non-Registration in compulsory education by ensuring participation of parents and representatives of Learning Centres in these teams.
- Learning Centres' staff to systematically collect data and indicators on educational achievements of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children in school in order to monitor the work of teachers and other school staff.
- Learning Centres' staff to systematically collect data and monitor overall school safety for Roma, Ashkali, and Egyptian students so that cases of insults, bullying and physical assaults at school are prevented and handled.
- Schools to increase their collaboration with parents and the community in order to achieve a greater impact on raising awareness on the importance of their children's education and social inclusion.
- Awareness and information campaigns for parents, so that they become aware of the importance of educating their children despite grave economic conditions and do not stop children from school to work, beg, or do housework.
- Donors and local and central institutions to support students of families with severe social conditions with school packages and clothing.
- Class and subject teachers should be trained to be more aware of the importance of maintaining diversity and to have more inclusive approach for students of these communities.
- Awareness campaigns for parents aimed at eradicating the phenomenon of early marriages.

- All-day learning helps avoid engagement of children in labour and gives teachers time and space to be closer to students for whatever difficulties they have in learning.
- The RADC - Roma and Ashkali Documentation Centre reported that in the northern part of Kosovo, within the Serbian education system in this area, Roma community is treated differently in school and it is not worked with the same curriculum as with the Serbian children in this area. It is recommended that institutions of the Republic of Kosovo, respectively the education inspectorate, go out in the field to confirm these reports of RADC organization.
- To develop various in-school small project co-generation programs involving children, be it theatre plays, short documentaries, or other activities in the community. This would help parents to become more active and involved in presentation of these projects and activities, which in itself is a great opportunity to discuss various issues in the interest of their children's education.
- Teachers and school management should receive training in their ability to commit to a school free of racism and xenophobia. It would be good for the MEST and MEDs in each ethnically-mixed municipality to commit to providing training modules on fighting racism and xenophobia in schools.



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