

SUCCESSFUL
EDUCATIONAL
EXPERIENCE:
DECREASING THE
DROPOUT RATE OF
ROMA CHILDREN
FROM SCHOOL

**VIABILITY STRATEGY FOR ITS
IMPLEMENTATION IN
BULGARIA**



Education and Culture DG

Lifelong Learning Programme

CENTER FOR INTERETHNIC
DIALOGUE AND TOLERANCE
AMALIPE

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INTRODUCTION

In this document we describe the viability strategy to be able to carry out the implementation, in South Bulgaria, of one of the eleven successful educational experiences for the inclusion of Roma selected in the framework of the European project *ROM-UP! The inclusion of Roma through quality successful educational experiences*.

In the first meeting, the members of the working group analyzed the viability of each of the 11 selected successful educational experiences, in order to identify the most viable to be implemented in Bulgaria, that would be further worked on in the second meeting, to develop the necessary steps for their implementation. This first analysis was done by identifying those elements that could facilitate their implementation as well as those that could hinder it.

This way, decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school was identified as one of the experiences most viable and important to be implemented in regions in South Bulgaria. In this first analysis, the following were identified as facilities for its implementation in Bulgaria: willingness of families to realize the importance of education as virtue; willingness of families to participate actively in school; willingness of teachers to use interactive learning games and methods; willingness of teachers to receive training on how to work with children from minority groups; maintaining high level of activity among students; the fact that it does not imply further resources. At the same time, the following were identified as difficulties for its implementation: hierarchical organization of schools, difficulties and resistance some teaching staff may have, the existing traditional school model, the prejudices and distrust that Roma families may have towards the school and vice versa.

Considering the first analysis, this strategy has been developed by members of the national working group formed within the European project. The following phases and elements to be considered for the implementation in South Bulgaria have been established:

1. NECESSARY STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCE IN SOUTH BULGARIA

- 1.1. Awareness campaign addressed to schools, teaching staff, teachers and educational agents
- 1.2. Awareness campaign addressed to Roma families, the community, Roma and other social organizations, churches where Roma go to and other referent spaces in the neighbourhood
- 1.3. Implementation of Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school Program
- 1.4. Necessary resources for its implementation

2. SUSTAINABILITY

3. NEEDED COMMITMENTS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION

1. NECESSARY STEPS FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUCCESSFUL EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES IN SOUTH BULGARIA

1.1. AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ADDRESSED TO SCHOOLS, TEACHING STAFF, TEACHERS AND EDUCATIONAL AGENTS

In order to overcome the potential resistances that might exist on the part of teachers and educational agents towards the implementation of the Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school Program, the first step would be to launch an awareness campaign addressed to teaching staff and other educational agents regarding family and community education.

Schools have to be aware in order to achieve the commitment and involvement of the teaching staff, it will be necessary to talk to teachers, to the school board and other educational agents to explain them what the Program is, what results its implementation is giving and what the results of research regarding the implementation are, etc.

To carry out this awareness campaign and ensure its success it is very important to take into consideration the people of reference for teachers and education agents. In South Bulgaria it would be positive to establish a previous contact with the Ministry of Education, Regional Education Inspectorates, local education structures in order to present them the project and, if appropriate, plan jointly the actions for raising awareness that need to be carried out.

This way, in this first phase, one of the objectives would be to reach an agreement with the educational authorities so that they will support the project. Once this commitment is achieved, the awareness campaign and training would focus on teaching staff and other educational agents, explaining them the methodology, benefits and other aspects of the successful educational action: Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma students from school.

1.2. AWARENESS CAMPAIGN ADDRESSED TO ROMA FAMILIES, THE COMMUNITY, ROMA AND OTHER SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

In order to raise awareness among families it is important to contact them and explain them the evidences of success of children education; and the fact that the regular school attendance of Roma children improves their academic results.

We have already found some good ways of communication with families from the community. Center Amalipe have found 11 Community Development Centers in 11 municipalities all over the country, only 3 of them located in South Bulgaria. Each center has 2 Roma moderators, who work “on field” within the community. In order to get in touch better with families, we must find some new ways of communication, not only those that have been used so far.

In order to have a successful awareness campaign, it is very important to take into account the people of reference in the neighbourhood where we want to implement the Program, combining this with an expert in education that may be able to explain the evidences and results of children education. We have to keep in mind that in every neighbourhood there are various people of reference, and it is through these that we have to reach families and give them the necessary information, so that they are present in all the major phases of implementation and success is achieved. We have also take into consideration the specifics of different Roma groups in Bulgaria (Kaldarashi, Burgudzii, Rudari, Ierlii, Millet), their religion, traditions and culture.

Examples of people of reference that we may find in neighbourhoods are: Roma leaders, academic Roma people that are respected by the community, other Roma people of respect for the community, school promoters or Roma mediators in the neighbourhood, etc.

Thus, we have to take into consideration all Roma, educational, or social organizations in the neighbourhood, so that most of these institutions also collaborate in the organization and implementation of children education, as well as in bringing the information to the people.

Given the implementation of other previous projects that have been done so far in several regions, such as Roma culture classes, the involvement of moderators in the neighbourhood is key to achieving success in the implementation of regular attendance of children in schools, as well as in the involvement of families in the different processes.

The aim of this second phase would be to inform the community and Roma families about regular attendance of Roma children to school through assemblies in the neighbourhood, presenting it as a successful educational action.

1.3. IMPLEMENTATION OF DECREASING THE DROPOUT RATE OF ROMA CHILDREN FROM SCHOOL

Once the awareness campaign has been addressed to all members of the community (teaching staff and educational agents/ Roma families/ organizations and other institutions in the neighbourhood, Roma leaders , etc.), we must be aware of what everyone is able to do or willing to do for the implementation of regular attendance of children in the schools in the neighbourhood, and what commitments everyone accepts.

A useful way to organize the implementation is by involving **volunteers from the community, academic Roma people**, who can share their educational experience and will promote education as something of great importance for the life standard improvement of the community.

Education should be promoted by **Roma leaders or other Roma people of respect** for the community in the neighbourhoods, because of the specifics of Roma groups in South Bulgaria. Each neighbourhoods must decide which ways and methods to use to organize and ensure the implementation of the Program for Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school.

Other activities, which have already become a model to implement the Program in 180 schools in other regions in Bulgaria are:

- Training of all teachers for effective working in multicultural environment, using the “Teacher training teacher” method;
- Implementation of Roma folklore classes in the school curriculum;
- Activities used for active parental involvement in school life – over 70 parental unions are established, which are included in the school boards and are involved in the decision making of different Roma issues.
- Activities used for student activation – more than 60 student parliaments are created, which include mentoring students, to help the students in risk of dropout to stay at school and raise their motivation.

Finally, we highlight the fact that, although the implementation strategy of this successful educational experience is aimed at Roma families, it will be beneficial for the process of implementation for other non-Roma families in the same school to participate, improving the social cohesion of the school and the community.

1.4. NECESSARY RESOURCES FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION

On the one hand, with regard to human resources for the implementation of family education, we propose to carry it out with the work of teachers and volunteers (families themselves, people in the neighbourhood, students, associations and neighbourhood organizations, etc.), to minimize the cost of the activity.

On the other hand we have trained teachers, called mentor teachers, who have to train their colleagues to work in intercultural environment.

For the better implementation of the Program and in order to provide a good support for the implementation of the Roma culture classes in the school curriculum, Center Amalipe has made several handbooks (*Stories near the fireplace* – a textbook for students from 2nd to 4th grade; *Narrated roads* – a textbook for students from 5th to 7th grade; *Preventing early marriages; Women Destiny*) and interactive disks (*Life is wonderful, Stories near the fireplace, Narrated Roads, White swallows* (short film about Roma medicine students), *Mission Amalipe*), which are provided free of charge for use by schools.

2. SUSTAINABILITY

The proposed viability strategy for the implementation of the Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school Program is sustainable in the short and long term, as has been explained throughout the strategy.

The implementation will be based, on the one hand, on the existing resources from the different administrations and, on other hand, on the existing resources in the neighbourhoods and communities. Thus, its implementation will have a low economic cost which ensures its viability and sustainability over time.

At the same time, the previous implementation of the Program in other regions in Bulgaria ensures the success, the need, and the sustainability of the project in the long-term.

3. NEEDED COMMITMENTS FOR ITS IMPLEMENTATION

Prior to the awareness campaign addressed to teachers, teaching staff and educational agents, it would be important to count on the commitment of the Department of Education to plan and promote the implementation of this successful educational experience in the schools, located in South Bulgaria. At the same time, it is important to have the commitment of the administration to facilitate and promote the implementation of the Program in all schools.

The program can influence the local policies by involving the local authorities and determining them to adopt methods and techniques that we used in our program.

The commitment from teachers to implement the Program in schools and the empowerment of Roma parents and their active involvement in the school life of their children aiming to improve their academic results, is one of the key pieces to the successful implementation.

The engagement of families in the spaces of discussion, decision and participation is essential, and is ensured from the moment they become active agents in the whole process of implementation the Program Decreasing the dropout rate of Roma children from school.

National working group of ROM-UP! project
Veliko Tarnovo, November
15th 2012