

THE EDUCATIONAL PROCESS OF THE ROMA COMMUNITY IN THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Education is the main element in the development of a nation. By acquiring the necessary knowledge, a person increases its self-esteem and has the necessary intellectual level in order to participate to a healthy social and political life of his/her own country. This phenomenon shall address not only to the majority of the population, but also to the national minorities, including Roma. In the Republic of Moldova, the education of Roma minority is an important issue as far as their number is rather high: 12. 271 – according to the results of the last general census of population in Moldova (5-12 October, 2004). A particularity of Roma community from Moldova is the dispersion of their living places all over the country. There is no area where Roma minority is concentrated. At this end it is needed a specific support for Roma inclusion through education and other community activities.

On the 7th of December, 2007 the UNDP launched the first integral report on the social-economic situation of the Roma community from the Republic of Moldova. In this report, the statistics and the qualitative analysis confirmed the alarming situation and the social-economic problems that Roma are facing: the high unemployment rate, the high level of illiteracy; the increasing mortality among newly-born children; the low rate of vaccination among Roma children; the lack of adequate conditions for a decent living (electricity, potable water, gas, roads etc.); the lack of didactic materials in Rromani language; the low representativeness of Roma in the Local and Central Public Administration structures etc. The results exposed in this report have the role to bring the precarious state of the Roma population from Moldova to the attention of the governmental bodies and to stimulate the adoption of some adequate public politics in order to solve these problems [1].

Currently, the Government of the Republic of Moldova, after the adoption of the „Action Plan on Supporting the Roma from Moldova, during 2007-2010”

(Decision Nr.1453 from the 21st of December 2006), is concerned about the accomplishment of the main directions for supporting Roma community [2]. In the same time, the Moldovan Government initiated the supporting process of the Roma people in 2001 (Decision Nr. 131 from the 16th of February 2001 „Regarding some measures of supporting the Roma from Moldova”, during 2001 – 2010) [3]; the results achieved by the governors were presented in the report done by the UNDP. One of the UNDP reporters alleged that „in order to solve the social integration problems of Roma, the Moldovan governors have to pass from words to action”. But because of the lack of financial resources, the implementation process of these actions is done „little by little”. For solving the „Problem of Roma”, according to the representatives of the Central Public Administration, it is necessary to implement activities like trainings, round tables, seminars etc. The result of these actions is only words, but so as to pass to the implementation of concrete activities, the Moldovan Government has to assume some responsibilities. One of them is to acquit 20.000 Euro per year so as to accede to the Roma Inclusion Decade (2005 – 2015), supported financially by the World Bank with over 400 million Euro. This Decade is an initiative of 9 governments from the Central and Southern-Eastern Europe: Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Macedonia, Slovakia, Czech Rep., Hungary and Montenegro, having as scope to improve the social-economic situation of Roma in a regional framework, being based on the adoption of the national action plans for 2005-2015. The representative of the World Bank, who invited the Moldovan Government to join this regional structure in order to benefit from the international projects, remained without any answer. It seems that the Roma community situation is going to remain uncertain till 2010, when the “Action plan for supporting Roma from Moldova, during 2007-2010” will expire.

For now the state structures conserve the existing situation of Roma people from Moldova, their social integration remains an unachievable goal, without any external financial support. The politics operated by the governmental bodies are focused on holding some ethno-cultural festivals that have the role to transform the Moldovan Roma in a touristic attraction for foreigners [4].

Education has a major importance not only in reducing the risk of poverty, but also in capitalizing human potential. Ensuring the right to education is a universal right which is incorporated in the Constitution of the Republic of Moldova and in the nationalized Millennium Development Goal 2, where Moldova committed to achieve universal access to secondary (gymnasium) school education thus increasing the enrolment rate in secondary (gymnasium) school education from 88% in 2002, to 88.9% in 2006, to 93.8% in 2010 and to 100%

in 2015. The results of the survey show a significant gap in education and literacy levels between Roma and non-Roma. The education component of the Human Development Index, unlike other components, shows the biggest difference, one-third lower for Roma than for non-Roma. Compared to the rest of population, Roma have a much higher illiteracy rate, a much lower level of education, a significantly lower enrolment in education and a higher drop-out rate. Roma education and literacy levels fall well short of the national average. Every fifth Roma cannot write and read, while a person with college or higher education degree is a rarity, this category constituting only 4% of the total Roma population in comparison to the non-Roma population enrolment of 38%. The drop-out rates at schools and low enrolments among Roma children have alarming proportions and raise the legitimate question: why is this happening? [5].

The reasons for school non-attendance are both objective and subjective. From the objective point of view, Roma claim they lack of the financial capacity to support their children's education. There are also child health related problems and problems related to school infrastructure. From a subjective point of view parents invest little effort in encouraging their children's education since many consider that the child has already achieved the necessary level of education. Early marriages and perceived discrimination in schools are determining factors. Another important factor that can influence the educational process of Roma is the migration of the entire family abroad so as to find work [6].

In order to solve the problem of Roma school non-attendance, a series of activities have been undertaken concerning both the enrolment of Roma children in the cycles of compulsory education, and the creation, using the principles of positive discrimination, of favourable conditions for the promotion of young Roma in higher education. However in practice, inclusion of Roma children in the cycles of compulsory education – primary and low secondary (gymnasium) – have not been a significant success - the situation, thus, remaining difficult [7].

In the area of higher education, the Ministry of Education has undertaken actions to simplify the access of Roma youths to Universities. Thus, in 2003 every state institution of higher education reserved two budgetary scholarships and two extra budgetary scholarships for candidates of Roma origin. In 2006, the Regulation for higher education enrolment foresaw a share of 15% allocated to vulnerable categories, including Roma, in the total enrolment places provided by the enrolment plan for budgetary financing. However, there is little evidence that Roma were included in these 15% and were actually getting access to higher education. According to the national educational law, all people from the Republic of Moldova have the right to study in higher education state institutions as well as in

private ones (but they need to pay taxes for studying). The Roma youth are included in the special category of gradutors, who need special facility criteria to be enrolled in higher institutions supported by the state budget. This social category that benefits from these facilities consists of: 1. The orphans. 2. The people with disabilities. 3. The children from very big families (5 and more members). 4. The children whose parents are victims of the Chernobyl disaster (1986). 5. The children whose parents fought in the Afghanistan war (1979-1989).

So, the Roma youth face a big problem in benefiting from this facility criteria, most of them don't have good marks in the graduating certificate of the primary school. Most of the time they work with their parents abroad, for instance in Russia and Ukraine and they miss a lot of courses. When graduating the primary school, the Roma youth have a low general mark and they can not be competitive with other youth included in this social support category. In general, in the Roma communities from Moldova it is not common to be actively involved in the educational process. The *pattern* principle has a big influence on Roma people. According to this principle it is not necessary to study. The main objective of Roma is to be rich, but not smart. *"If I have money, I am an influent person, but if I have the certificate of higher education, I am nothing"*, say the most part of Roma leaders. This is the results of post-transitional society, who strives against poverty [8].

On the other hand, there are some Roma youth who wanted to obtain a good professional degree so as to have an office work. In this way, they wanted to be good specialists, unlike their unemployed friends. So, in the budgeted level of higher education it is a big competitiveness (in some institutions there is corruption in obtaining a scholarship). It was a good practice to initiate a national contest for Roma youth with the support of Soros Foundation. Twenty four Roma students have obtained special financial support from the Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program for 2006-2007. It is the beginning of the biggest process of Roma inclusion in the higher educational level. The main obstacle in this progressive process is the lack of any primary or higher education institutions where Roma educational process is attested in Rromani language. The educational process in the Republic of Moldova is implemented in Moldovan, Russian, Gagauze, Ukrainian, Bulgarian languages, but there are no schools where children study in Rromani language. Now, only in the Institute of Cultural Heritage it is being researched the Roma history and culture, but most of these researches' results show that young Roma students don't know the Roma history and culture as they are missing from the Moldovan schools. So, now it is very necessary to implement the educational process in Moldova in Rromani language for Roma people, so as to stimulate their educational level [9].

To improve enrolment of Roma children in primary education, the Ministry of Education monitored the activity of education departments concerning school attendance by children from Roma families. According to the newly approved Plan of Action to Support Roma in the Republic of Moldova, during 2007-2010, the Government committed to develop a specialized curriculum for the discipline “Language, History and Roma Culture”, as well as to deliver specialized courses on teaching this discipline in pre-university (secondary and high school) education institutions in Roma densely populated communities. Enrolment of Roma children in pre-university (secondary and high school) education, the parents’ motivation in ensuring participation of their children in the educational process, the development of legal framework to support the organization and activity in Sunday schools, as well as other programmes targeted towards eliminating Roma illiteracy are among other planned actions. Certainly, these are important actions. However they are quite broad and incomplete for ensuring the enhancement of Roma education, Roma enrolment in the labour force market and overall sustainable human development. The action plan also does not include any measures in terms of development and improved access to educational materials, as well as human resources. The number of Rromani teachers is very low, which contributes to perceived barriers in access to education and teaching in native language [10].

Nowadays, the Roma represent the most prominent group of risk regarding poverty. From many interdependent reasons, the poverty among Roma people was caused by their unfavorable start point at the beginning of the transition from the planned economy to the market economy. The low level of education and the over-represented sector of unqualified jobs created disadvantages on the labour market, combined with the discrimination and mistrust of the employers. In this way, the Roma people had more difficulties in accessing the labour market than other groups and became a prisoner of a vicious circle of poverty. The additional barriers include the lack of access to loans and clear rights of property. These factors combined with the over-dependence on the humanitarian aids, create a trap of poverty that impedes many Roma people to improve their living conditions or to start their own enterprise. The persistent disadvantages of Roma in the framework of the educational process are the lack of the minimum needed knowledge that is included in the scholar curriculum. The positive discrimination at which the Roma people are exposed because of the lack of didactic staff that knows the Rromani language, increase the probability that the next generation of Roma will remain the poorest social segment if there it will not be produced strategic interventions to smooth away this social disadvantage. At the

same time, the majority of the Roma people are indifferent about the local or national public policies, a thing that reduces considerably the resonance of their political voice [11].

Despite all these, although there are multiple problems that Roma people from Moldova face, the education remains the major handicap in improving the social-economic situation of this ethnic group. The governmental measures focused on the clearance of these social problems, didn’t reach the expected result yet, because the state doesn’t have sufficient financial resources to reverse its engagements taken in the Action Plan for 2007-2010. In April 2003, the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights from Moldova made an analytic study in the Roma communities. According to the data exposed in the report, each non-Roma child was allocated 25 Euro from the local budgets for education, comparing to 0, 01 Euro for a Roma child, which is 200 times less [12]. In the Ursari village (Calarasi district), all the pupils from the 1st to the 4th forms, study in only one classroom, without central heating and electricity. In the majority of Roma communities there is a lack of kindergartens, this degrading condition creating a huge disadvantage to the integration process of children in the primary education system. So, currently the state doesn’t have a national strategy to improve the education level of the Roma people from Moldova and the needed competent staff for the efficient implementation of this objective; that is why this problem is solved in an undirected way by different actors of the civil society [13].

The first attempt in this domain was made by the Public Association “Ograda Noastră”, which grace to the financial support of the USA Embassy in 2004 opened a Club for Roma Children in the Zirnestic commune (Cahul district). In this club, about 30 Roma children together with their non-Roman mates study the English language and literature and get relevant knowledge in the health, ecology and human rights areas [14].

In 2005, the Union of Young Roma “Tarna Rom” created the “Network of the Roma Children”, formed by 20 children and representatives of Roma communities from the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Moldova. With the financial support of the Holland foundation “Spolu” the Roma pupils and members of the national network had the opportunity to study the “History and Culture of Moldovan Roma” together with their non-Roma mates, to participate at different competitions on Roma holidays, to organize local debates etc.

Another relevant case of primary education stimulation among Roma children took place in Talmaza commune (Stefan Voda district). Participating at one of the ordinary meetings of the district Council of Stefan Voda, where it was discussed the problem of the low level of school housing of the children from the

district, Mr Vladimir Plesca, mayor of Talmaza, was surprised about the data presented by the functionaries from the educational directorate. According to these data, in September 2005, the number of children not attending school in Stefan Voda district was 0. To his question regarding how many Roma children were attending school, the chief of the district directorate answered that Roma children had not been included in the report, as “they all didn’t go to school being always taken by their parents to work abroad”. This intolerant statement made the mayor “protest”, he tried to explain the governors that the situation was different. So, for the first time in the educational practice from Moldova, in 2005, the mayor Vladimir Plesca, gave money from the local budget of the town hall to open a class for 11 Roma children of 7-12 years old in the primary school nr 1 from the Talmaza commune. The purpose of this action was to give general knowledge to these children (reading, writing, multiplication table, etc.) so as to form them as good citizens. At present, the Roma class has 14 pupils who study already courses of the 3d level of primary compulsory education. [15]

In November 2007, in the Theoretic Lyceum „Mihai Eminescu” from the Hincesti city it was opened a class for 24 Roma pupils from the 1st to the 10th forms, where they were studying an advanced Rromani language. Ms Elena Bogdan and Angela Mirciu, after having participated in Romania at an international course of studying Rromani language (professor Gheorghe Sarau), came back to Moldova as the first teachers of this course. This inedited activity which is very necessary for preserving the Roma traditions in Moldova was implemented grace to the financial support given by the Regional Centre “Project on Ethnic Relations” for Central, Eastern and Southern-Eastern Europe (Bucharest) and was efficiently managed by the “Women’s Political Club 50/50”.

Conclusively, it could be observed that poverty in Roma communities is determined by the high rate of unemployment, the illiteracy among mature people and children. That is why the main source of “income” for Roma is beggary. Children are the ones to be the mostly involved in this activity, they don’t attend school and they will become unemployed like their parents. The breakage of this vicious circle Education-Unemployment-Poverty will not be successful while the Roma children are neglecting school. The main way to stimulate the upturn of the educational level of Roma children is to show them examples of Roma personalities who through knowledge managed to grow out of the impasse generated by poverty. But as nowadays “money is the power” and “those who possess it” don’t realize the importance of the educational process, Roma remain with their archaic and long-lasting point of view – “so as to make money, you don’t have to study”. That is why the parents of Roma children usually deter-

mine the end of their educational process and send their children to Moscow to earn money through beggary, as this activity became very profitable the last period of time. A solution asked from the governors is to stop the massive exodus of Roma people abroad, especially during their primary compulsory education period (September-May). [16] On the other hand, nobody can force somebody to learn, without ensuring a stable future on knowledge base. So, in present it is being attested a double disregard in school enrollment of Roma children. From a point of view, the Roma children together with their parents alienate themselves consciously from the educational process, from another point of view the local and central governance don’t find solutions to stimulate their own staff (Roma and non-Roma) to earn money in their own country and stop them going abroad after finishing their studies and prevent them from becoming hacks like Roma. [17] This “surviving” way is uniting Roma and non-Roma, despite their different educational status. However, the attempts of some functionaries to stimulate the access of Roma to the educational process, should be highly appreciated as in the case of the mayor of Talmaza, Vladimir Plesca, who cared about the these children whose future without knowledge would become bleak. [18]

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Думініку Іон. Освітній процес для ромських громад в республіці Молдова

В статті, на підставі аналізу впровадження освітнього процесу для ромських громад в республіці Молдова, висвітлено численні об'єктивні й суб'єктивні проблеми, які виникли в перехідний період. Молдовське суспільство перебуває на початковому етапі пошуку потрібних механізмів впровадження ромських освітніх програм. Незважаючи на досить інтенсивні зусилля неурядових організацій і, частково, державного сектору більшість проблем освіти ромів залишаються невирішеними.

Думиника Іон. Образовательный процесс для ромских общин в Молдове

На базе анализа организации образовательного процесса для ромских общин в республике Молдова, статья освещает многие объективные и субъективные проблемы, возникающие в переходный период. Молдавское общество пока пребывает лишь на начальном этапе поиска подходящих путей к решению ромских образовательных программ. Несмотря на относительно интенсивные усилия неправительственных организаций и, частично, государственного сектора, большинство проблем образования ромов все еще не решены.

Duminica Ion. The Educational Process of the Roma Community in the Republic of Moldova

On base of the analysis of the Educational Process of the Roma Community in the Republic of Moldova, this article demonstrates the many objective and subjective problems that appear in this transitional period. Moldovan society is still only at the beginning of its search for appropriate ways of solving Roma educational issues. In spite of the relatively intense efforts of non-governmental organization and partially also the governmental sector, the situation of Roma education is not yet being solved in the most efficient way. As suggested in the text, there are some strategic possibilities for taking responsible measure.