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ANALYTICAL REPORT

Inequalities in Education



EduPod 2



KEC
Qendra për Arsim e Kosovës
Kosova Education Center

The project Innovating Development for Education Advancement - **IDEA 2022**, is funded by the Office of the European Union in Kosovo (EUOK) and implemented by Kosova Education Center (KEC). With the aim to improve the quality of education, the project seeks to identify core issues in the field of education in Kosovo by expanding opportunities for public debate by means of podcasts as innovative technology. These discussions include key parties involved in the education system, such as students, teachers, parents, policymakers etc. who come together to share their thoughts compare points of view.

The series of podcasts **EduPod** is the first of its kind in Kosovo, as the first podcast that focuses specifically on issues of education in this form. EduPod seeks to expand the outreach of education debate by allowing the voices of all parties to be heard, with special focus on students themselves. These analytical reports contain summaries of the discussions and recommendations from the podcasts.

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Introduction

“EduPod2”, the second in a series of podcasts of specific educational/instructional character in Kosovo, was produced on April 27th, 2022, in the framework of the Project Innovating Development for Education Advancement – IDEA 2022, funded by the Office of the European Union in Kosovo and implemented by Kosova Education Center, KEC. IDEA 2022 seeks to improve the quality of education by employing broad-based public debates to identify and address education issues in Kosovo. The topic of this second episode of the EduPod series of educational podcasts was “**Inequalities in education**”.

This topic deals with a very sensitive aspect in the field of education: existing inequalities between pupils, especially those coming from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, but also those from other vulnerable groups such as children with special needs, children from families of low socio-economic status, etc.

Previous research conducted by KEC has shown that public discussions on these issues are a useful tool for identifying the multidimensional education problems faced by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in Kosovo, as well as other vulnerable groups. It aims to address existing problems as well as new challenges, such as the Covid-19 pandemic, many of which directly affect these groups and impact their education.

In order to address these issues and other points related to the topic in question, the guests at EduPod 2 were Mr. Orhan Butic, Education Projects Manager at the organization Voice of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptians (VORAE), and Mrs. Luljeta Kabashi, Acting Head of the Division for Inclusive Education at the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).



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Mrs. Luljeta Kabashi Acting Head of the Division for Inclusive Education at the Ministry of Education, Science, Technology and Innovation (MESTI).

Discussions

Luljeta Kabashi is an official of the Ministry of Education since 2004, in the sector of education for children with special needs and other marginalized groups, as well as children with special talents, repatriated children, etc. She stated that the education policies designed for these groups of children have sustained changes over different periods of time, in search of the best policies for them. MESTI has constantly worked to advance and increase the quality of inclusive education, and the work has been tailored to the specific requirements of each of these groups.

“We are currently in the phase of drafting and amending the policies of the Law on Early Education and relevant instructions. We will soon be drafting an Administrative Instruction on first grade enrolment, which adopts a new perspective on enrolment. This implies early identification to make sure children enroll in school at the right time, especially those who have learning difficulties and who often exceed the age of enrollment in the first grade”, Kabashi said.

She mentioned that children with special needs are enrolled in the first grade at an older age, when there are fewer opportunities to intervene in their formation.

Orhan Butic, Education Projects Manager at the civil society organization VORAE, announced that since 2011, together with the partners of this organization, they have worked to increase the number of pupils from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and advance their position in regular education.

Speaking about the challenges faced by Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities and other vulnerable groups in pursuing an education, Butic said he was very enthusiastic about the latest administrative instruction on first-grade enrollment, drafted by the MESTI, hoping that it will help achieve the desired changes to the unsatisfactory situation regarding the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

Butic said that, since he started working with VORAE in 2011, reluctance to enroll in school, to pursue an education, and the inclination to drop out are mainly due to lack of information and awareness on behalf of the children’s parents and families.

“The problem lies in the awareness of parents, but also of children. We know that up to the 9th grade education is mandatory, and it is not a question of whether one wants to go to school or not. We have explained to parents that this level of education is mandatory and they must comply, but Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities do not always understand this,” he said.

He stressed that Kosovo has one of the best laws that can exist in the field of education, but when it comes to its implementation in practice there are many shortcomings. Mistakes are made precisely in the enrollment of children in school and the completion of at least the compulsory level of education, but there is no proper oversight on whether or not children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities comply with the law in this regard.

There is no reason to change the rules when it comes to these communities, according to Mr. Butic. Institutions should not be tolerant and negligent in terms of overseeing the level of compliance of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities with the law, he added.

He underlined that a comparative analysis between reports published by the Kosovo Agency of Statistics (KAS) in 2010 and in 2013 shows that there has been no positive movement in terms of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities' participation in education. According to the KAS report, 85% of children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities attend primary education, 65% attend lower secondary education, and only 30% attend upper secondary education, Butic said, adding that these statistics have not changed since 2013.

Since 2014, MESTI and civil society organizations have cooperated in establishing a system of upper secondary education scholarships for children from the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, providing 500 scholarships each year.

“We have encountered situations when parents are not even informed that there is a law on compulsory education in Kosovo. Sometimes parents know this but are not willing to take responsibility and enroll their child in school. This is obviously affected by the difficult economic situation of these communities, but we must not allow this to be the reason why children of these communities receive no education,” Butic said.

He mentioned that his organization, present with partner organizations in 38 locations in Kosovo, has proven that in the areas where it operates there are positive developments in terms of increasing the readiness for education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities.

“But these 38 locations are not enough, because we have to act wherever there is a need. It has been proven that in the areas where we operated the enrollment of children in school has reached 98%, but how many of them actually complete a school year or a level of education this is another matter,” Butic said.

According to him, the biggest problem continues to be the dropout phenomenon. If 15 children in one area are enrolled in first grade, by the end of the compulsory education level there are only one or two pupils left. There is a lack of institutional intervention to prevent dropouts, he added.

Meanwhile, Ms. Kabashi stated that the Administrative Instruction will provide for all the steps, from the timely enrollment of children in school until the end of their compulsory education, and that other supporting documents will be provided, such as school guides.

“MESTI has worked hard in terms of prevention of the dropout phenomenon. There is a protocol that schools use to track dropout cases and analyze the reasons for such dropouts, and then work for these children’s return to school,” Kabashi said.

She added that the same procedure applies to other vulnerable groups, such as pupils with disabilities enrolled in the first grade, but who in most cases do not complete the level of education because there is a lack of resources within schools to meet their additional needs. Furthermore, in most cases parents have low trust in schools and children’s opportunities to complete their education.

The lack of experts and professional collaborators who deal with rehabilitation part also has an impact, while Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities lack basic school supplies, like books or other essential items.

“For me, it is especially important to build trust in the parents, but also in schools, regarding the opportunities that the child has to complete a level of education”, Kabashi said.

According to her, in the education system, both for these communities and other vulnerable groups, there are many challenges already identified, but there is a general lack of human resources as an essential element to produce results. This has made teachers feel as if they are left to their own devices, because they have no support. Municipalities are more concerned with the levels and parties that can make education feasible, and it is often argued that there is a lack of budget, so we do not have the opportunity to implement the MESTI Strategic Plan, according to which at least 50% of vulnerable groups should complete their education. The cooperation between the Municipalities and the Ministry is not satisfactory, she said.

She mentioned that MESTI has drafted a legal framework which is more advanced than it should be, as the practices and culture related to education in the country leave much to be desired.

“Among Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, as well as among parents of children with special needs, there is a culture of distrust toward the fact that their children can be educated and can benefit from education,” Kabashi said.

Returning to the discussion about the prevention of school dropouts, Butic added that there are many schools, but also Municipalities, which do not have consolidated teams to perform this work, despite the relevant legal regulation which is very well drafted on paper . According to him, out of 10 piloted schools, 7 of them had established school dropout prevention teams, while 3 had no such teams at all. But even in the schools that have established these teams, they are operation in only two out of seven schools. On the other hand, these teams react only after the dropout occurs, rather than working on prevention.

Regarding the Administrative Instruction 12/2017 on the establishment and operation of learning centers for children of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities, approved four years ago, Butic said that there are about 80 such centers, which have helped pupils a lot. According to him, although these centers started off very well, they still have problems related to financial support, i.e. problems with securing funds and the staff that should work there. Learning centers are seen as promising institutions also for improving the quality of education. So far, there has been talk of inclusion in education, but now is the time to talk about quality in the education that children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities receive, Butic said.

Diversity and Inclusion Day was mentioned as one of the activities that the MESTI aims to turn into a traditional event in order to raise awareness but also to promote policies and strategies about diversity and inclusion. This day will be marked every year on April 26, and this year MESTI promoted a document that talks about the education of children with special needs in high schools, Kabashi said.

“Since upper secondary level is not compulsory education, very often schools do not make an effort to include these children and create conditions for their education, so we aim to achieve this now, especially in vocational schools,” Kabashi said.

Adding to the discussion, Butic said that MESTI has been asked to include chapters related to the cultures of the Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities in history textbooks, in the context of the diversity that is promoted everywhere.

Evaluation

The podcast discussion revealed that currently MESTI is in the process of drafting an Administrative Instruction on the enrollment of children in the first grade, which is expected to bring new perspectives regarding the first grade enrollment of children from vulnerable groups and Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. It will focus on identifying them so that they can enroll in school at the right time, especially for children with disabilities of various natures who often exceed the first grade enrollment age.

It was also highlighted that the main reason for reluctance to enroll in school to pursue an education and the inclination to drop out are due to the lack of information of parents and families, as well as their lack of awareness about the significance of education for their children. It was mentioned that the situation has not changed in years.

Since 2013 there is no positive movement in terms of participation in education of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities



whereby **85%** of children in these communities attend primary education

65% attend lower secondary education,

and only **30%** attend upper secondary education.

This situation has not been affected even by the provision of 500 scholarships per year, which MESTI distributes to children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities attending upper secondary education.

Unsatisfactory is also the situation of other vulnerable groups in education, such as pupils with disabilities enrolled in the first grade, but who in most cases do not complete the level of education because there is a lack of resources within schools to meet their additional needs. It was found that parents in most cases have low trust in schools and children's opportunities to complete their education.

Meanwhile, learning centers are seen as promising institutions for improving the quality of education, but Administrative Instruction 12/2017, that serves as the basis for their functioning, needs to be reviewed and restructured. So far there has been talk of inclusion in education, but now is the time to talk about quality in the education that children from Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities receive.



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KEC Facebook page:

<https://www.facebook.com/QendraperArsimeKosoves/videos/5478305605522283>



Official KEC YouTube channel:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tQaZDvTK4jk&t=6s>



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