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Education for Minority Communities:

Municipal Staff Capacity and Knowledge Gaps

Report from the project

*Improving service delivery and minority rights awareness
at the municipal and civil society levels*

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1 Introduction

This report is the first of a series from the project: *Improving Service Delivery and Minority Rights Awareness at the Municipal and Civil Society Level*. The project seeks to provide support to local municipal authorities and civil society organisations to deliver education to students from minority communities. Specifically, the project aims to ensure that vulnerable community groups are effectively participating in, and benefiting from, primary and secondary education. Three municipalities have been chosen as case studies in this pilot project: Ferizaj/Uroševac, Peja/Peć and Prizren/Prizren, which have representative populations of minority communities. ECMI Kosovo is working with municipal officials and civil society groups over the period of a year, in order to ensure that minority communities are not left behind in the area of education.

This report assesses the educational needs of communities in the three municipalities, in the areas of primary and secondary education. Unfortunately, this report cannot provide a comprehensive base-line for the state of minority communities in the municipalities. This is due to a chronic lack of data, which is discussed further below. To remedy this, systematic information must be collected at all schools within each municipality. Instead, the report provides an evaluation of the capacity of municipal personnel and identifies knowledge gaps regarding community protection and rights, particularly in relation to education issues. Based on these findings, ECMI will offer recommendations to build and strengthen the capacity of municipal officials to better accommodate the needs of communities in education.

Supplementing this report is a separate analysis on the role civil society organisations involved in the delivery of services to minorities in these municipalities: *Education for Minority Communities – the Role of Community NGOs in Municipalities*. These two reports together describe the base-line from which future municipal action plans will be developed. On this foundation, municipalities will be able to implement strategic measures to improve the delivery of educational services and opportunities to communities in Kosovo.

1.1 Education in Municipalities

Currently, there are 38 municipalities in Kosovo. Each municipality is vested with competencies and responsibility by law. In some municipalities where the Serb community forms the majority population, enhanced competencies are also vested with the local government.¹ Municipalities are obligated to promote the co-existence and peace of their citizens, and must create appropriate conditions that enable members of communities to express, preserve, and develop their national, ethnic, religious and linguistic identities.² The principle of non-discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, language, religion and other status must be applied to all municipal policies and practices.³ This report focuses on three municipalities: Ferizaj/Uroševac, Peja/Peć and Prizren/Prizren. None of these municipalities have enhanced competencies but each has

¹ Law on Administrative Boundaries of Municipalities; and the *Law on Local Self-Government* (LLSG). Municipalities have their own and delegated competencies. North Mitrovicë/Mitrovica; Graçanicë/Gračanica; and Shtërpçë/Štrpce municipalities have varying degrees of enhanced competencies. All other municipalities with a Serb majority will have competencies in cultural affairs and participatory rights for the selection of local police station commanders.

² Article 4.3, LLSG

³ Article 4.2 LLSG

substantial populations of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities and other minority communities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technology (MEST) is responsible for the development of education as a whole, setting the curricula and providing a general system of certification for teachers. According to law, municipalities are responsible for the provision of primary and secondary education, including the registration and licensing of educational institutions, recruitment and training of teachers, educators and administrators, and the payment of salaries.⁴ Municipalities are responsible for the day-to-day teaching of students and the running and operation of schools. From the point of view of school-aged children and parents, municipal governments are the most immediate authority over education. Municipal governments must ensure that children resident in the municipality participate in education, irrespective of community membership. Although the municipal government can work with other government and non-government institutions to increase retention rates for minority students or otherwise improve access to education for them, the municipal government remains the primary institution responsible for the delivery of education to all children in their area.

At a Kosovo-wide level, MEST has acknowledged a shortfall in education services for RAE communities and has committed itself to the 'Strategy for Integration of Roma, Ashkali, Egyptian Communities in Education'. However, at municipal level, there has been no systematic approach to education for minority communities. In fact, interviews with municipal officials in the Ferizaj/Uroševac, Peja/Peć and Prizren/Prizren consistently showed that municipal officials simply did not recognise the disadvantages faced by minority communities with regards to education. There was a pervasive belief that there were no problems with minority communities' participation in education. The higher dropout rates among minority communities were not considered to be a problem: municipal officials expressed that lower levels of education for children from minority communities is natural and expected. It was not perceived to be a matter that needed to be addressed. Moreover, municipal officials held the view that any problems experienced by minority communities were to be dealt with by the Municipal Community Office or other minority-specific services (see section 1.2 below). Officials in the Municipal Education Department generally did not consider issues of education for minority communities to be their responsibility. Instead, they tended to refer all questions dealing with minority communities to the Municipal Community Office.

Municipal officials were unable to answer basic questions on the issue of minority education and rights. For example: what, if any, are the activities to promote community minority interests carried out by the municipal government? What problems are faced by RAE communities and other minority communities in the municipality? There was very poor awareness of minority rights or the specific challenges of minority education, and low levels of knowledge on what – if any – initiatives municipalities have taken to promote and protect minorities. They showed little interest or initiative in learning about minority communities and their needs. Municipal officials were also unable to provide reliable or accurate data on the enrolment of students. The general perception was that minority issues could be segregated from mainstream efforts to deliver schooling.

1.2 Municipal Community Office

In municipalities where minority communities form a substantial part of the population, the Municipal Community Office (MCO) exists as a specialised institution which focuses on the

⁴ Law on Municipal Education Article 4.1

rights of communities, including their right to education, and education in their own language at primary and secondary levels. The MCO exists to serve all minority communities in the municipality and complements the work of other local government institutions such as the Municipal Education Department. The MCO is not a substitute for other local government agencies, but works as a special focal point for minority issues across all areas of social and political life.

Within the municipal budget, the MCOs have a dedicated budget line to be used for the benefit of the communities. The majority of the MCO budget is usually spent on infrastructure reconstruction in areas where minority communities, especially the RAE communities, live; for example, sewage and waste systems, water supply and roads. There are very little remaining resources to be allocated to projects such as health, education and employment. Some MCOs purchase textbooks for minority students most in need. However, MCOs have not taken a proactive approach to generate projects that target specific needs of communities. Thus far, MCOs have also failed to take advocate or lobby the municipal government to act in the interests of minority communities. In fact, there is little cooperation between MCO, Municipal Education Department and other stakeholders on issues of concern to minorities.

In addition, according to the Law on Local Self-Government, “in municipalities where minority communities constitute 10% or more of the population, the municipal organs, which act in the protection and progress of the rights and minority communities, except the committee for communities should also have a Deputy Chair of the Municipal Assembly”⁵ who deals primarily with community issues. All three municipalities studied have a Deputy Chairperson for communities. In Peja/Peć, Mr. Rustem Nurkovic is the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly for communities; in Ferizaj/Uroševac, Mr. Rexhep Bajrami from the Ashkali community, is the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly; In Prizren/Prizren, Mr. Ercan Spat from the Turk community is the Deputy Chairperson of the Municipal Assembly. Prizren/Prizren has also a second Deputy Chairperson, Mr. Cemalij Kurtiši from the Bosniak community.

2 Three Case Studies

The project used three municipalities - Ferizaj/Uroševac, Peja/Peć and Prizren/Prizren □ as case studies to investigate the delivery of educational services at primary and secondary levels to minority communities. All three municipalities have a majority Kosovo Albanian population, but the minority communities in each municipality vary in kind and number. However, none of the case study municipalities have a large Serb community. Instead, in each municipality, there is a substantial population of RAE communities. The relationship between RAE and other communities are relatively stable in all three municipalities.

The population data used in this report is from OSCE.⁶ Statistics on students were given by Municipal Education Department and NGOs active in each municipality.

This report is based primarily on data collected from a series of interviews conducted in Peja/Peć, Ferizaj/Uroševac and Prizren/Prizren between 19-30 January 2009. A range of stakeholders were interviewed, including municipal government officials, school directors, and teachers from primary and secondary schools. A full list of interviewees is attached as Annex [C]

⁵ Administrative Instructions on the Law on Local Self-Government, 22 October 2008

⁶ OSCE Kosovo, Municipal Profiles, Profile of Ferizaj/Uroševac, Profile of Peja/Peć and Profile of Prizren/Prizren. Available at: <<http://www.osce.org/kosovo/13982.html>>

to this report. The interviews were of a semi-structured form. They were conducted on previously prepared questionnaires; however, no representatives filled those out as the interview was conducted orally.

In total there are thirty-one (31) primary schools and six (6) secondary schools Ferizaj/Uroševac; twenty-nine (29) primary schools and five (5) secondary schools in Peja/Peć; and forty-four (44) primary schools and five (5) secondary schools in Prizren/Prizren. In each municipality, researchers visited one primary and one secondary school. The interviews with the school representatives started one-on-one with the director of the school and later on the teachers could join the interviews; with municipality representatives, the interviews were one-on-one with the LCO representatives. In Ferizaj/Uroševac municipality the interviews with the Chief of administration and Major started one-on-one, but later on other people were invited. The interviews with NGO representatives were mostly one-on-one with an NGO representative. If, however, more than one representative was present, the interview was conducted in a group. Unfortunately, although the entire research process was planned to be one-on-one interviews, on the spot it couldn't be controlled.

The interviewees were also asked to provide available statistical data in relation to minority community participation in education; for example: number of children in school, and proportions of minority community students. This report incorporates the data supplied by the interviewees.

From information provided by the teachers and school administrators, there is general agreement that the students from RAE communities have the poorest academic performance and the highest dropout rates at both primary and secondary levels. However, statistical data on retention and dropout rates for RAE communities is often non-existent. In four schools, RAE communities are not recognised as minority communities. Two reasons were given for this: some schools did not collect information on their students' community membership; and in other schools, students from RAE communities were enrolled as Albanians.

Among the RAE communities, students from the Roma community have the lowest attendance and retention rates at schools. In contravention to legal requirements,⁷ there is no education available in Romani at primary or secondary levels. Roma students thus face the challenge of receiving education in a second language, and must also integrate into a class in which the dominant language spoken by their peers is not Romani. The language barrier, in addition to other socio-economic factors, means that Roma students suffer from poor performance. In turn, this leads to a loss of confidence and motivation, thus increasing the rate of dropouts among Roma students.

Schools reported that there were no Roma teachers or teachers who spoke Romani available. This made it impossible to provide Roma students with education in their own language. There are also no remedial classes to assist Roma students in improving their Albanian skills.

Teachers and school administrators reported no problems with discrimination in schools. However, some NGOs have reported past incidents of prejudicial and discriminatory content in

⁷ *Law on the use of languages* Article 20: “[20.1] In areas inhabited by persons belonging to communities whose mother tongue is not an official language, the persons belonging to these communities have the right to receive instruction in their mother tongue in public school education”.

textbooks, especially against the Roma community.⁸ To date, there has been no comprehensive review or revision of textbooks to ensure that educational materials comply with minimum standards of non-discrimination.

2.1 Ferizaj/Uroševac

The population of Ferizaj/Uroševac is approximately 170,000, of which the vast majority are Kosovo Albanians. Minority communities that reside in the municipality include 3,758 Ashkali; 260 Roma; 230 Gorani; approximately 70 Serbs; 68 Bosniaks; 40 Turks and a few Egyptian families.

The Ferizaj/Uroševac MCO manages a budget of 30,000€ per year. The MCO officer interviewed was unfamiliar with the MEST Strategy for the Integration of RAE communities. The MCO provides some textbooks and scholarships for students from RAE communities. However, the MCO did not seem to be engaged in any other activity directed to the reduction of dropouts.

i Primary Education

The primary school visited in Ferizaj/Uroševac has a mixed population of majority and minority communities. In addition, there are two special classes for children with learning difficulties or other special needs.

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at primary school in *Ferizaj/Uroševac* as a whole is as follows:

- 896 Ashkali (491 female and 405 male);
- 49 Roma (25 female and 24 male);
- 9 Gorani (5 female and 4 male);
- 1 Bosniak (female);
- No Egyptians, Turks or Serbs.

According to the school, and in contradiction to the statistics provided by the municipality, there are 2,110 pupils at the primary school, including pre-school children aged 5. There are 217 Ashkali pupils (100 girls and 117 boys), two of which are in the special classes. There are no Roma or Egyptian pupils. In the first semester of the 2008/9 academic year, 12 Ashkali pupils dropped out. Teachers interviewed gave poverty as the main cause: pupils from poor families do not have the resources for food, footwear, clothes, or school materials, and therefore cannot attend school regularly.

In response to the bad performance of some of the Ashkali students, three teachers are offering catch-up classes. The school also tries to involve the Ashkali parents in their children's education. Parental meetings and school boards are convened, but the school has not successfully encouraged parental participation. Ashkali parents have a lower rate of attendance at these functions than Kosovo Albanian parents, and show no interest in being a part of the school board. One reason is that often, parents of Ashkali pupils have not completed primary education

⁸ As stated by G. S. NGO from Prishtina/Priština: in a textbook for 8. grade writes that "Gypsies have killed people and burned houses and Albanian flag" As stated by O.O. NGO from Prizren: "a textbook with offensive content about Roma could be found in a textbook that was withdrawn three years ago on a demand by Romani community"

themselves, and do not understand the value of education. Poor families prioritise working and income-generating activities, rather than education.

According to teachers interviewed, there is no discrimination or segregation of Ashkali children from the rest of the student population. The teachers admitted overlooking and tolerating Ashkali pupils' absences, and grading Ashkali pupils more leniently and favourably in order to motivate them. These practices were perceived to be affirmative action for the benefit of Ashkali students and were thought to promote their integration with the rest of the school.

According to data supplied by the municipal government, 95% of Ashkali children are enrolled in primary school. The retention rate at primary education level is 85% but only 10% of students graduating primary school continue at secondary levels. For the pupils that are unable to complete primary school, and for those who stop their education once they graduate primary school, there is no government initiative or mechanism to reintegrate them back into the educational system.

ii Secondary Education

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at secondary school in Ferizaj/Uroševac is as follows:

37	Ashkali (8 female and 29 male);
8	Roma (3 female and 5 male);
6	Gorani (4 female and 2 male);
1	Bosniak (male);
There are no Turks or Serbs.	

The technical school "Pjetër Bogdani" which participated in this report provided no data on the ethnic breakdown of the student population. Information on RAE communities in secondary education is very poor as schools are not required to collect data relating to ethnicity during the enrolment process.

The school denied any negative discrimination toward students from RAE communities. However, it reported problems with dropouts among the RAE communities. Reasons given included weak communication between parents and the school, and a lack of parental interest in the education of their children. Poor performance of RAE students is perceived to reflect poor family conditions: poverty and lack of resources; parents who are under-educated and cannot offer support to their children's education.

There are no specific measures to increase awareness of human or minority rights in the school. The teachers also reported that they tolerated absenteeism from RAE pupils and attempted to motivate them with favourable marking and higher grades. However, according to the school representatives, these practices have negatively impacted on the motivation of RAE students. The school also reports that it implements affirmative action measures with two projects jointly conduct with NGOs and the Municipal Education Department. The first: accepting students from minority communities for enrolment who has not met the requirements for entry. Second: supporting 15 adult-age students to finish secondary education in an accelerated course in which two years curriculum is taught in one year.

2.2 Peja/Peć

The population of the municipality of Peja/Peć is also 170,000. There are several large minority communities in this municipality: a large Bosniak community of about 4,500 persons; some 1,000 Serbs, and approximately 5,000 members of RAE communities in total.

In comparison to the other municipalities that were involved in the project, the situation of RAE communities in Peja/Peć is significantly more difficult. One crucial problem is the lack of reliable statistics for the participation of RAE communities in education. There are discrepancies in the data provided by the MCO and the Municipal Education Department, and there is no system for collecting statistics. For example, according to MCO, 70% of Egyptian children attend primary school and continue to complete secondary education. The Romani representative of the MCO reported that 65% of Roma children enrolled in primary school, but only 20% enrol in secondary education. In contrast, according to statistics provided by Municipal Education Department, in the academic year 2008/9, only 15% of RAE students are enrolled in secondary schools.

The lack of accurate data is a major obstacle in forming coherent policy towards education of minority communities. There is no agreed system of data collection, no database, and no system of information sharing between the Committee on Communities or the Municipal Education Department. There is no system of information sharing or cooperation between the municipal government, communities or relevant NGOs.

In addition, the problem of insufficient data is exacerbated by the lack of exchange of information between representatives of communities within the Committee on Communities. Each representative only has knowledge of their specific community. In particular, despite the similarities of problems they face, there seems to be no coordination between Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian communities. There is little activity on the part of community representatives, and there are no measures in place to develop common goals and agendas that will strengthen the position of communities in the municipality.

i Primary Education

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at primary school in Peja/Peć is as follows:

520	Bosniaks (253 female and 267 male);
239	Egyptians (112 female and 127 male);
191	Roma (83 female and 108 male);
107	Ashkali (52 female and 55 male);
89	Serbs (38 female and 51 male).
1	Gorani (male);
1	Turk (male).

In the primary school "Xhemajl Kada", there are 1731 pupils enrolled in total. Of these, there are 168 RAE pupils and 12 Bosniak pupils. The Roma population in Peja/Peć speak Albanian and therefore do not suffer from a language barrier. In theory, this should increase the rate of retention among Roma students as the lack of language problems would encourage integration into the student population. However, 10-15% of Roma pupils dropout during primary school whereas the rate among Egyptian pupils is 2%. There was no explanation offered for the significantly higher dropout rate in the Roma community.

This primary school has taken the unique step of appointing a teacher to serve as coordinator for pupils from minority communities. The role of the teacher is to counter any discrimination or segregation. Another initiative taken by the school is weekend classes for illiterate RAE children

between the ages of 8 and 13 who are not enrolled in the school. Pupils officially enrolled but who have fallen behind due to irregular attendance can also attend the weekend classes in order to catch up. These classes are run by the school, in partnership with local NGOs and an Italian donor organisation. The classes are aimed at maximising the opportunities for RAE children to enrol and to increase retention rates.

Teachers reported that there are no incidents of discrimination against students from minority backgrounds. It was reported that teachers were more tolerant of absenteeism of pupils from minority communities, and awarded higher and more favourable grades to pupils from RAE communities. These were perceived by teachers as affirmative action practices which encouraged retention of RAE pupils and stimulated their learning.

The MCO also reported that there are no cases of discrimination or segregation of the RAE communities. It reported that affirmative action was in place because examination requirements are often waived for students from RAE communities for entrance to secondary schools and/or university.

ii Secondary Education

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at secondary school in Peja/Peć is as follows:

199	Bosniaks (101 female and 98 male);
66	Serbs (36 female and 30 male);
49	Egyptians (10 female and 39 male);
24	Ashkali (7 female and 17 male);
6	Gorani (4 female and 2 male);
6	Roma (1 female and 5 male);
2	Turks (2 female, no male).

The gymnasium "Bedri Pejani" provided no data on the enrolment of minority communities. However, considerable initiatives were shown towards developing a healthy multicultural environment by offering classes on human rights and civic education to its students. These aim to raise awareness of human and minority rights in schools.

2.3 Prizren/Prizren

There are 240,000 residents in Prizren municipality. It is home to large communities of minorities, including 22,000 Bosniaks; 9000 Turks; 5,300 RAE members and a small population of 166 Serbs.⁹

One issue in the municipality is the language in which education is delivered. In Prizren, education at primary and secondary level is available in Bosnian and Turkish. Nevertheless, textbooks in Bosnian and Turkish are incomplete. Instead, students use materials from Bosnia and Turkey, and do not follow the Kosovo curricula. In addition, there are no subjects taught in Romani, even though there is a substantial Roma presence. Municipal officials and school administrators claim that they are unable to offer education in Romani because of the lack of appropriately qualified teachers. However, the municipality has not undertaken any steps to attract Romani-speakers into the teaching profession nor offer any other kind of training which may rectify the problem.

Municipal officials, representatives of NGOs as well as teachers agree that the leading cause of dropouts from minority communities is poverty. Yet, the municipal officials claimed that poverty was not a problem unique to minority communities as a substantial portion of the general population suffers from insufficient resources and income. The municipal officials seemed unable to understand the unique vulnerabilities of minority communities, particularly the RAE communities which are reported to suffer the highest levels of human poverty.

One initiative implemented in Prizren is a joint project between the Municipal Education Department and NGOs serving RAE communities that has established 26 scholarships for RAE students. Another project is that mixed pre-schooling institutions have been established, so that children from all community groups can integrate at an early age thus improving the ability of students from minority communities to integrate into the education system.

i Primary Education

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at primary school in Prizren/Prizren is as follows:

2,573 Bosniaks (1,286 female and 1287male);

1,161 Turks (584 female and 577 male);

375 Roma (183 female and 192 male);

242 Ashkali (118 female and 124 male);

95 Egyptians

No data was available on the Serb or Gorani communities.

The primary school "Abdyl Frashëri" visited in Prizren/Prizren had a total enrolment of 2957 pupils. There were 60 Bosniak and 40 Turkish students who are being instructed in their own languages. However, the school reported that it had no RAE pupils and explained that this may have been due to the fact that pupils from RAE communities identified as Albanians. However, NGOs in Prizren reported that there are 70-80 pupils from RAE communities in the school. There is no accurate data on this issue.

⁹ According to LG, there are 5,300 RAE community members, according to Romani NGOs in Prizren only Romani community is approximately 6,500.

There is also no clear data on the rate of retention in primary schools. However, there is some anecdotal evidence from NGOs that girls are mostly likely to drop out of education after grade four. This is a direct violation of compulsory education. However, the municipality has not taken any measures to prevent dropout or address this issue.

ii Secondary Education

According to data provided by the Municipal Education Department, the number of students from minority communities enrolled at secondary school in Prizren/Prizren is as follows:

1,042 Bosniaks (337 female and 705 male);

854 Turks (279 female and 575 male);

21 Roma (7 female and 14 male);

4 Ashkali (2 female and 2 male);

No data was available on the Serb, Gorani or Egyptian communities.

The vocational secondary school in Prizren has plans to start implementing the MEST strategy or RAE integration in the year 2009/10. There is no programme for the promotion of minority rights at the school, however GTZ projects are developed, which give professional guidance, including training for teachers on career counselling. Trained career counsellors work through informing, counselling and professionally orientating students in their third and fourth grade of secondary school. The Director "Gani Çavdarbasha" secondary school in Prizren/Prizren, is the coordinator of the GTZ project.

3 Education for Minority Communities

3.1 General findings

The case studies of Ferizaj/Uroševac, Peja/Peć and Prizren/Prizren reveal several problems which are common to all three municipalities and exist across both primary and secondary education levels. In part, some of these problems may be attributed to the ongoing decentralisation process in Kosovo, in which many municipalities have yet to assume its fully administrative and budgetary responsibilities. However, the findings suggest that the problems are more endemic to municipal governments who are insensitive to the needs of minority communities.

i. Chronic lack of data and information

In all three municipalities, it was extremely difficult – if not nearly impossible – to gather accurate statistic data on the levels of enrolment and retention. Often, where data was available, conflicting information would be provided by different sources. The Municipal Education Department would have one set of numbers, community representatives would have different information, while each school collected its own information. The problem is particularly acute at secondary level, where schools are not obliged to collect data on the community membership of its students. Even the most basic data is extremely difficult to ascertain accurately. There seems to be no reliable information on the number of school-aged children in any given municipality; no accurate figures of enrolment of students and their community membership; and retention rates are generally estimates which, again, are often contradictory.

There is neither a system nor standards of data collection. It is not clear where statistics are sourced by municipal governments. Moreover, where two communities may speak the same language (for example, Roma and Albanians in some municipalities) there is confusion as to the student's community membership. Additionally, for the purposes of data collection, very few schools also distinguish between Serb and Gorani communities. There also appears to be no tracking of attendance: it is unclear when a student is deemed to have dropped out of school. Thus retention figures are extremely unreliable.

There appears to be no system of verifying or sharing information between schools, community representatives (including NGOs) and municipal government. In municipalities where there are multiple minority communities, there is no cooperation or sharing of information between communities. Community representatives tend to focus only on their own respective groups, rather than attempt to forge productive alliances across community boundaries.

This severe lack of accurate and reliable data may be related to the more general lack of reliable population information and socio-demographic data. There has been no reliable recent Kosovo-wide census and population figures are often estimates from the last valid census in 1981.¹⁰ However, it remains possible for schools to keep accurate and informative enrolment records, and for municipalities to collect and centralise relevant information. There is currently no

¹⁰ The census data from 1991 are not reliable, as the census was not properly implemented in two municipalities in central Serbia and was boycotted by the Kosovar Albanian population. The 2002 census in Serbia did not cover Kosovo.

protocol or standards for the collection of student data, as such what little information that is collected cannot be compared across municipalities and is only of very limited use.

ii. Misunderstanding of discrimination

None of the municipalities reported any problems with discrimination against students from minority communities. However, all three municipalities reported retention problems among minority communities, particularly in the RAE communities. In most cases, poverty has been identified as the leading cause of dropouts: the lack of basic resources for students to attend school. The second main reason offered by teachers and municipal officials for dropouts focuses on the role of the parents. There is a general perception that parents from RAE communities are unable or unwilling to support the education of their children. These parents are perceived to be more likely under-educated, and thus uninterested or under-value the benefits of education for their children.

There is a contradiction between the claim that there is no discrimination and the socio-economic factors offered as explanations for poor retention rates among minority communities. There is no recognition that socio-economic factors may be related to the status of a community as minorities. The perception that poverty is a Kosovo-wide problem that affects all communities (majority and minority) diminishes the problems faced by minority communities. There is general lack of knowledge of the conditions of RAE communities, which suffers the highest rate of poverty among communities in Kosovo. For most RAE families facing financial constraints, costs associated with school are often prohibitive: uniforms or other clothing, school materials such as stationary and transport.

iii. Misunderstanding of affirmative action

There is a widespread perception among teachers, school administrators, municipal officials and representatives of communities that affirmative action for the benefit of minority communities involves the following practices:

- a. Giving more favourable grades to students from RAE communities, above what would be awarded to students from other communities.
- b. Lowering requirements (for tests or entrance exams to secondary schools) for students from minority communities.
- c. Overlooking absenteeism of students from minority communities.

The aim of these practices is to improve retention rates of students from minority communities. The preferential grading is intended to give positive feedback to students about their school performance and to encourage them to continue with their education. Similarly, the lower entry requirements to secondary schools or in exams are intended to compensate for the high levels of dropout rates. By overlooking absenteeism, schools are trying to reduce expulsions of minority community students on the grounds of non-attendance.

Despite the fact that these practices are intended to benefit minority communities, they are extremely misguided and contribute to the marginalisation of students from these communities. The inflation of grades leads to a lack of accurate and honest feedback to students about their work, which in turn contributes to complacency and a lack of self-knowledge for the students. The lack of rigorous academic standards does not encourage learning and undermines the system of assessment. It misleads students, and diminishes the competitiveness of students from minority communities. Similarly, the inconsistent and ad hoc lowering of requirements for

students from minority communities also undermines any notion of fairness or equal opportunity. More worryingly, there seems to be a general complacency among teachers and educators that students from minority communities are simply not expected to perform as well as their peers from majority communities. Other than a few remedial classes at the very basic level, there is no attempt to improve the academic performance of students from minority communities. The prevailing attitude among teachers and educators seems to be resignation. Poor performance from students from minority communities are simply tolerated, and inadequate efforts are made to remedy the situation.

Similarly, the practice of overlooking absenteeism among students from minority communities only artificially increases retention figures. It contributes to a lack of knowledge about the underlying root-causes of dropout rates. By ignoring student absenteeism, schools are missing opportunities to identify students at risk of dropping out and for early intervention. Again, there appears to be a culture of complacency and acceptance that students from minority communities are more likely to dropout. There is no coherent attempt to understand the causes behind student dropout rates.

Moreover, making allowances for students on the basis of ethnicity or community membership only encourages segregation of those students from the mainstream student body. The erosion of standards also implicitly popularises the perception that students from minority communities are unable to perform as well as their peers. It is detrimental to the self-confidence of these students, and conceals substantive issues in equality and discrimination which may be productively addressed.

iv. Lack of textbooks and materials in minority languages

In the three municipalities, students from Bosniak and Turkish communities can receive their education at both primary and secondary levels in their own language. However, both Municipal Education Department and schools reported that MEST has only issued a few textbooks in Bosniak and Turkish. Instead, for a majority of subjects, students are relying on materials produced in Bosnia and Turkey. Consequently, the students from Bosniak and Turkish communities can only be taught an incomplete Kosovo curriculum.

Therefore, even when minority communities can be educated in their own language, the education is incomplete due to the lack of materials and curricula in their own language. This places students from minority communities at a significant disadvantage as compared to their Albanian-speaking peers. In particular, students from minority communities tend to perform poorer in secondary and tertiary entrance exams.

v. Lack of education in Romani

Currently, no education in Romani is available to Roma students. There is a complete lack of qualified teachers who can teach in Romani. This is a major factor in the poor retention rates and academic performance of Roma students. Although this is a problem at all levels, it is particularly acute at primary school where additional barriers often result in the long-term exclusion of Roma children from education.

The lack of Romani-speaking educators also marginalises families of Roma students, making it more difficult for schools to communicate with parents. This may contribute to the perception that parents from Roma communities do not understand or value formal education. Their apparent lack of interest in their children's education may in fact be a symptom of their own

exclusion from the formal system. Parents who only speak Romani would have significant difficulties in access school information, or understanding school rules and requirements.

In the three municipalities that participated in the research, Roma students have the highest rate of dropouts among the RAE community and in general. The lack of Romani speakers in the education system is a major obstacle to the retention and integration of Roma students. Both the students and their parents are excluded from the educational system by the language barrier. The introduction of Romani educators and Romani materials into the curricula will significantly improve the inclusion of Roma students.

vi. Lack of remedial language classes

Schools consistently reported the lack or poor availability of education for students from minority communities in their own language. (See discussions in subsections iv and v above.) Students from minority communities are often left to struggle with their studies in Albanian language.

None of the schools that participated in the research had implemented any initiatives to assist the students to learn Albanian. While Albanian language teaching does not replace the need to provide education to students in their own language, it will enhance the ability of students from minority communities to participate in education and promote integration of students outside of the classroom.

vii. Lack of attention to girls' education

All three municipalities reported higher dropout rates for girls, particularly girls from minority communities. More specifically, within the RAE communities, retention and literacy rates are lower for girls from the Roma community. Teachers reported that girls are often dropout of school to marry or to help parents with household duties and caretaking of siblings. However, teachers and school administrators did not seem to recognise this as a specific problem. Education of girls' is seen as a part of the larger problem of education – for both majority and minority communities. Similar to the way in which poverty is seen as a Kosovo-wide problem, female education is not perceived as an issue specific for communities. This is true despite the evidence that girls from minority communities have the lowest rates of school retention and literacy.

viii. Lack of involvement of parents

Schools in all three municipalities reported that parents from RAE communities are uninvolved in the education of their children. Across the municipalities, there are only two parents from RAE communities on the School Board. This is often attributed to the lack of interest in education, or lack of support for education. However, no steps have been taken to rectify the situation. No attempt has been made to identify the causes. One reason may be that parents from minority communities may also face language barriers when communicating with schools and teachers. In general, local government and schools have a poor understanding of these issues.

3.2 Issues in primary education

The above mentioned problems are particularly acute at primary level, where opportunities are missed to ensure that students remain in education. Dropouts from primary schooling often lead

to long-term exclusion from further education, which in turn can lead to marginalisation of minority communities from employment opportunities, social and political participation.

There is a wide-based consensus on the role of poverty in dropouts among minority communities. Many teachers, administrators and municipal officials cited socio-economic factors for the poor retention rates of students. Irregular attendance at school is attributed to the lack of resources to pay for associated costs such as transport, clothing and school materials. Absenteeism contributes to poor academic performance of the students, which in turn leads to dropouts as the students become discouraged, disinterested, and suffer a lack of confidence.

There is a lack of creativity in attempt to resolve these specific socio-economic problems. Although there is some limited attempt to provide remedial and catch-up classes for students, schools have not taken any initiatives to address the underlying issue of costs of education.

3.3 Issues in secondary education

In order to compensate for high dropout rates among students from minority communities and encourage continuing education at secondary level, teachers reported that entrance requirements were often lowered for students from minority communities. This dispensing of entrance requirements seem to be done on an *ad hoc* basis and each municipality has its own approach to this issue. Therefore two levels of inconsistencies are created: between students from majority and minority communities; and between minority communities across different municipalities. Therefore, the chances of secondary education for a student from minority community vary depending on the municipality of his or her residence.

The lowering of entrance requirements for students from communities reinforces the prejudiced perception that these students are less capable and expected to perform poorly. Again, similar to the attitudes in primary schools, it reflects the complacent attitude of educators and municipal officials which accepts the poor academic performance of students from minority communities as a fact to be accommodated, rather than putting effort into improving the performance of these students. Moreover, admitting students with lower entrance marks perpetuates the problem of poor academic performance. Students from minority communities are not given the opportunity to catch-up with their, rather their poor performance is simply tolerated and overlooked. This is evidenced by elevated levels of dropouts in the first and second years of high school.

4 Recommendations

4.1 To municipal government

The municipal government is responsible for the day-to-day provision of primary and secondary education. The Municipal Education Department must take leadership role while the MCO must lobby and advocate for the interests of minority students. Although the municipal government may work with non-government organisations and other stakeholders, it must take ownership for the problem of improving education for students from minority communities. Municipal officials across the sectors must be sensitive to the needs of communities. The following actions are recommended.

i. Municipal database for student information

A database for centralised collection and recording of statistics at both primary and secondary level must be designed. The municipal government must take leadership in this project to ensure that there is sufficient data to analyse in order to understand attendance and retention rates, causes of dropouts and the composition of the student population. Without general population figures from a census, municipalities can take the initiative to gather statistic information for education from ground-up.

ii. Protocol for collection of student information

Municipal governments must design protocols for the collection of student information so that standardised data can be collected from all schools. Municipalities across Kosovo should agree on a format for so that for each student, a standard set of information can be collected. There must be a minimal level of consistency, and the data may be compared across the municipalities. For example, the following information should be collected for each student:

- a. Name
- b. Gender
- c. Date of birth
- d. Address
- e. Community membership
- f. Language spoken at home / primary language
- g. Number of children in the family
- h. Family income bracket
- i. Previous education history / schools
- j. Attendance record

The information collected by the schools then can be input into the database, and centralised by the local government in order to gain broader knowledge of how education is delivered and received across the municipality.

iii. Baseline study

As a first step to establish the database and protocol for data collection, each municipality should conduct a comprehensive base-line review of schools. Without base-line study, it will be impossible to measure retention rates and academic performance of students over time. A comprehensive baseline study involving all schools in each municipality will also help to test its system of data collection.

iv. Reduce associated costs of education

Poverty is one of the major contributing factors to dropout rates, particularly among RAE communities. Municipalities should explore options to reduce the associated costs of education and initiatives to ensure that children remain in school. For example, some of the following projects may be considered:

- a. Free school bus or other transport
- b. Free breakfast provided at the school
- c. An option of reduced cost of uniforms or clothing (recycled clothing)
- d. Textbook library

v. Providing academic assistance to students from minority communities

Instead of accepting the poor academic performance from minority studies, the municipal government should allocate resources to provide additional classes or help for students from minority communities. Two types of classes may be held:

- a. Remedial classes for specific subjects.
- b. Language classes for students for whom education in their own language is not available.

These classes should aim to improve the academic performance of students from minority communities. Municipal government cannot be complacent about poor academic performance or simply tolerate it. Municipal government must take an active lead in improving the quality of education delivered to students.

vi. Implement project to train Romani speakers as teachers

The total lack of education in Romani severely hampers the participation of the Roma community in the education system. Municipalities, in cooperation with MEST, must take initiative to train Romani speakers as teachers.

vii. Introduce Romani teaching assistants

Any attempt to train Romani speakers as teachers will be a long term goal. In the short term, in order to improve the quality of education to Roma students, municipal government must employ bilingual Romani-Albanian speakers who are not qualified as teachers but who shows a willingness to attend teacher training can be employed as teaching assistants in classrooms with a high percentage of Roma students (Romani TAs). These Romani TAs can assist Roma students in following an education in Albanian, and also act as a point of contact between Roma parents and schools.

viii. Increase education in minority languages

In the municipalities studied, some education is already available in minority languages (Bosniak and Turkish). However, curricula in these languages are often incomplete and students use materials from other countries. In cooperation with MEST, municipal governments should advocate for the issue of full materials in community languages for the teaching of the Kosovo curriculum.

ix. Improve cooperation between municipal government and MCO

Although the municipal government should not transfer its responsibilities in education to the MCO, should cooperate with MCO to identify the needs of minority communities. As a liaison

point for matters of concern to minority communities, the MCO can generate ideas for the municipal government and identify any cross-sectoral issues that impact education. MCO and the municipal government must establish a system of communication and information-sharing in order to work together efficiently. MCO and the Municipal Education Department must also share data and share resources in order to address challenges faced by minority communities. For example, initiatives to reduce costs of education may be jointly funded from the MCO line budget and by the Municipal Education Department.

x. Increase capacity and understanding of minority issues

The general level of understanding of minority issues is low among municipal officials. Local government officials, particularly those working in the education sector, should attend training on minority issues. Education for minority communities should not be perceived as an additional issue, but as a part of mainstreaming the delivery of quality education to all students.

xi. Proactive approach of the MCO

The MCO must be proactive in its advocacy and promotion of community interests. Representatives from different communities should forge alliances in order to seek solutions to common problems: for example, increasing retention rates for girls after primary school; and poverty that prevent students from attending regularly.

xii. System of reporting and communication with schools

The municipal government must ensure that there is a system of reporting and communication with the schools. The municipality must update its database regularly and ensure that accurate information is obtained from schools. Moreover, schools should be able to raise issues with the municipal government, and alert the municipality to any general trends in retention or dropout rates. Moreover, the schools and local government can collaborate fruitful on issues such as remedial and language classes for minority communities.

xiii. Cooperation with other stakeholders

The municipal government should seek information and support of non-government organisations, many of which are based in minority communities. By using the expertise of community members themselves, the municipal government will be able to work more efficiently in reducing the barriers to education.

4.2 To educators and schools

Teachers are at the vanguard of education for minority communities and as such, it is extremely important that they are sensitive to the challenges facing minority students. Teachers must be alert to risk factors that contribute to dropout rates and be able to provide adequate support for minority students.

i. Teachers to be trained on minority issues

Teachers seem unable to identify particular challenges for minority communities. Teachers must undertake general training on minority and human rights. More specifically, teachers should be

trained to identify students who are at-risk of dropping out and to provide support to students who may be struggling with the assigned work.

ii. Collection of student information in accordance with protocol

In accordance with the protocol established by municipalities, schools must collect accurate student information at enrolment and monitor their attendance. Schools must ensure that information is always current and updated, and that the information is shared with municipality on a regular basis.

iii. Early alert system for absenteeism

Rather than overlooking or tolerating absenteeism from minority students, schools must be alert to a pupil's irregular attendance. Roll-call must be kept so that absence is recorded, and a system must be in place so that the school may identify students at-risk of dropping out. Instead of expelling students, schools must be able to identify causes for absenteeism and provide appropriate intervention.

iv. Regular meetings with the municipal government

Schools must have an open channel of communication with the municipal government, particularly to the Municipal Education Department. The mutual exchange of information is extremely important to ensure that a coherent approach to improving education for minority communities is taken.

v. Providing academic assistance to minority communities

In conjunction the local government, schools should provide assistance to students from communities to improve their academic performance rather than lowering standards for them. Schools should identify needs in their particular student body, and provide additional academic assistance to students in need.

vi. Improve communication with parents of minority students

The perception that RAE communities are uninterested in the education of their children may be attributed to the lack of communication between school and parents, particularly where there might be a language barrier. Schools should ensure regular communication with parents, and ensure that information is available in minority languages.

5 Conclusion

To increase the retention rates of minority students and improve the quality of education delivered at all levels, the municipal government and educators must work together to implement creative solutions. Several key outcomes must be achieved in each municipality:

- Accurate and reliable data collected and documented, including information on students' community membership, enrolment and attendance rates.
- Detailed identification and understanding of socio-economic factors for non-attendance and absenteeism.
- Increased awareness of challenges facing students from minority communities.
- Increased provision of education in minority languages.
- Shift in attitude towards the poor academic performance and provision of remedial and catch-up opportunities for minority students.

These outputs will be fundamental to the improvement of education for minority communities, and will ensure that there are long-term and sustainable changes to the way in which minority students receive their education.

Annex A Questionnaires for municipal official

The following questions were asked to municipal officials in a questionnaire:

- Statistics (municipality & local government social and organizational card)
- Do you have a person responsible for minority issues in your municipality? What are his/her responsibilities?
- Does a database on minorities exist?
- What are local government's current activities on minority rights?
- What are local government current activities on minority education?
- What are the main problems faced with RAE communities and other minorities in relation to education?
- What does the local government do to increase awareness on minority rights?
- What does the local government do to increase awareness on minority education?
- Capacity assessment – what trainings are attended by employees who are dealing with minorities and education issues?
- Capacity assessment – according to you, what kind of trainings should employees dealing with minorities and education issues need follow?
- Are you familiar with the "Decade of Roma Inclusion"?

Annex B Questionnaires for educators and school administrators

The following questions were asked to school representatives:

- Statistics (general, minorities, RAE, boys-girls)
- Dropouts (reasons, girls, boys)
- Are there any language assistants in the classrooms?
- Are you familiar with the strategy on education of MEST?
- Have they implemented the MEST strategy on education?
- How do the school/teachers prevent discrimination and segregation in the educational system?
- What does the school do to increase awareness on minority rights?
- What does the school do to increase awareness on minority education?
- What do the teachers do to increase awareness on minority rights in the classroom?
- What does the school do to increase awareness on minority education in the classroom?
- Is there professional counselling or career guidance made available in your school?
- Please give information on capacity assessment (trainings attended; training needs)
- What are the causes of low school enrolment rates among RAE? Why do Romani parents not send their children to school?
- What can be done to ensure that all RAE complete primary education?
- Why do so few Roma finish secondary school? What can be done to encourage RAE to complete secondary education?
- What can be done to encourage Romani parents to send their children to school?
- Why do fewer RAE girls than RAE boys finish school?
- What can be done to promote the education for RAE girls?

Annex C List of Interviewees

Ferizaj/Uroševac

1. Bajrush Xhemaili President of the Municipality of Ferizaj/Uroševac
2. Xhabir Morina Chief of Administration and staff
3. Sulejman Butyqi Chief of Municipal Education Department
4. Hyzri Huseini Director of the Municipal Office for Communities
5. Shaban Rexhepi Director of "Ahmet Hoxha" Primary School
6. Rabie Aliu Teacher at "Ahmet Hoxha" Primary School
7. Minavere Qiraku Teacher at "Ahmet Hoxha" Primary School
8. Gjylnaze Sadiku Teacher at "Ahmet Hoxha" Primary School
9. Vlora Metushi Psychologist at "Ahmet Hoxha" Primary School
10. Isuf Çalaj Director of "Pjetër Bogdani" Secondary School of Technique
11. Imri Musliu Teacher at "Pjetër Bogdani" Secondary School of Technique
12. Fadil Sejdiu Teacher at "Pjetër Bogdani" Secondary School of Technique
13. Sabri Hasani Teacher at "Pjetër Bogdani" Secondary School of Technique

Peja/Peć

14. Ali Berisha President of the Municipality of Peja/Peć
15. Naim Sahiti Chief of Administration and staff
16. Ilir Kelmendi Chief of Municipal Education Department
17. Sabahudin Tirikovic Director of Municipal Office for Communities
18. Gani Toska Romani representative of the Municipal Office for Communities
19. Nimon Alija Director at "Xhemajl Kada" Primary School
20. Mevlyde Plava Teacher at "Xhemajl Kada" Primary School
21. Nilifere Granqolli Teacher at "Xhemajl Kada" Primary School
22. Valbona Gashi Teacher at "Xhemajl Kada" Primary School
23. Mevlude Murtezi Associate of "Xhemajl Kada" Primary school
24. Ali Kelmendi Deputy Director of "Bedri Pejani" Gymnasium
25. Ibrahim Shalunovic Teacher at "Bedri Pejani" Gymnasium
26. Qamil Agovic Teacher at "Bedri Pejani" Gymnasium
27. Jusuf Zeka Teacher at "Bedri Pejani" Gymnasium

Prizren/Prizren

28. Ramadan Muja President of the Municipality

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| 29. Naser Buzhala | Chief of Administration and staff |
| 30. Florim Metaj | Director of Municipal Education Department |
| 31. Alija Ajradin | Chief of the Municipal Office for Communities |
| 32. Haki Gajraku | Director of "Abdyl Frashëri" Primary School |
| 33. Anita Alija | Teacher at "Abdyl Frashëri" Primary School |
| 34. Sadije Jakupi | Teacher at "Abdyl Frashëri" Primary School |
| 35. Besa Gjaha | Teacher at "Abdyl Frashëri" Primary School |
| 36. Xhelal Susuri | Director at "Gani Çavdarbasha" Secondary School of Technique |
| 37. Avni Qovanaj | Teacher at "Gani Çavdarbasha" Secondary School of Technique |
| 38. Emrija Xhaferi | Teacher at "Gani Çavdarbasha" Secondary School of Technique |
| 39. Abdylhadi Kantarxhi | Teacher at "Gani Çavdarbasha" Secondary School of Technique |

Annex D List of Schools Visited

“Ahmet Hoxha” Primary School, Ferizaj/Uroševac:

“Pjetër Bogdani” Secondary School of Technique, Ferizaj/Uroševac

“Xhemajl Kada” Primary school, Peja/Peć

“Bedri Pejani” Gymnasium, Peja/Peć

“Abdyl Frashëri” Primary School, Prizren/Prizren

“Gani Çavdarbasha” Secondary School of Technique, Prizren/Prizren