

Case name: From Educational Integration of Roma Children to Social Inclusion of Parents', Municipality of Tundzha- Тунджа, Bulgaria

NOTE: This case was not developed within the Swiss – Bulgarian Cooperation Programme, but it is included in the programme as it could serve as a good model to be followed.

,wow factor'	<p>The case exhibits an extensive inclusive education practice for Roma in 8 schools and one kindergarten. Tundzha has an active mayor and a dedicated Deputy and the municipal administration is skilled and committed. The municipality was brave enough to introduce financial incentives in pre-school education, cover transport costs for all children from distant areas, develop additional incentives to motivate parents and finally, mobilize all possible financial resources available – EU funding, delegated budgets, REF grants, municipal funding and additional loan schemes.</p> <p>The municipality has partnered with several NGOs and also invites citizen participation to ensure direct democracy at the local level. The municipality has and applies its system for monitoring the progress of implementation of strategic policies.</p>
1. Subject/issue	<p>The municipality started investing in creating better conditions for the Roma as the Mayor and Deputy Mayor firmly believed that the future of Tundzha belongs to the Roma community, since that is where the young population of the municipality comes from.</p> <p>The municipality intervened in the sector of education, to address the thorny problems of attendance and school dropouts, and to create a larger impact of education on family planning and a productive workforce.</p>
2. Sector, Country	<p>Sector: Education, early childhood development, community services</p> <p>Country, Bulgaria</p> <p>Municipality of Tundja; rural areas</p>
3. Background, antecedent	<p>Municipal authorities in Tundzha discuss Roma issues with all stakeholders. Problems with Roma dropouts and appropriate measures are discussed by the municipal administration with principals and teachers, municipal councilors, rural mayors, representatives of civil society, and Roma community.</p> <p>Another example of integration of Roma into the mainstream programs of the municipality is demonstrated in the 'Public Dining' program combined with a canteen for all students in 42 villages. The municipality relies on its integrated and comprehensive approach to avoid opposition from any specific group, and to avoid negative stereotypes about the Roma. Rather, it focuses on the benefit for all from its local policies.</p> <p>Since 2009, the municipality of Tundzha introduced the practice of public advisory councils (PAC) to the mayor. The PAC meetings are open for the wider local community; virtually any interested person may attend meetings and express opinions and give advice or suggestions, including the Roma.</p> <p>The municipality also created Mayor's advice boards, in which the participation of local Roma is a must. Through these, the rural mayors</p>

	<p>understand the immediate needs and problems of the villages, provide information for decisions, and discuss proposals. Services pertaining to registration of migrant Roma, identifying of children for kindergartens, and information to families and teachers are provided through these boards.</p>
4. Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To allow Roma children to attend kindergartens (3-5) by cancelling fees and providing free lunches • To facilitate the attendance of preschool classes for Roma (6) by providing free transportation from villages to central schools of kindergartens with pre-school groups • To use 8 mediators/mentors to be the link between Roma parents and schools (teachers' aids) • To use 3 family centers (children 0-3) for work with parents on a variety of social issues supporting overall integration
5. Current Status	<p>In 2008, Tundja municipality started the process of government-led optimization of the school network process. This meant the closure of schools in most villages, reduction of school staff and setting up of central schools. The municipality received 1.25 million leva from the national program 'Optimization of the school network', which were used to repair and improve the equipment in 8 central schools. This improvement in the infrastructure of schools was introduced to counter the discontent of the population about the closure of some schools.</p> <p>The municipality provided transportation for all students from rural areas with closed schools, established care programs, implemented full-day education, with extracurricular activities, and repaired school canteens in which children can have lunch. Most of the children, however, came from poor and marginalized (mostly Roma) families, for whom the purchase of food from school canteens was not feasible. Hence, the mayor's team decided to provide free lunch for Roma students. To avoid dissatisfaction and objections from the rest of the population, the mayor later introduced a free canteen for all students. To reduce costs for hiring personnel in canteens, the municipality partnered with a private catering company that prepared and delivered food to schools. This became a targeted program for prevention of dropouts.</p> <p>Funds for free canteens for students in central schools are provided within the prescribed state per capita cost per student. However, in order to provide free lunch for the two elementary schools, the municipality implemented the canteen project with the Bulgarian Red Cross and paid contributions from the municipal budget.</p> <p>From the academic year 2010-2011, the municipality introduced compulsory preschool education for children below the age of 5, for early child development and for better preparation for grade I. To facilitate a mechanism for children from disadvantaged Roma families to attend preschool, the municipality agreed with the Ministry of Education to fund the transportation costs for kindergartens, in addition to the schools.</p> <p>A natural extension of the municipality's efforts to attract and retain Roma children in school was the introduction of 8 Roma educational mentors in 2011 under a project funded by the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Pupils from Ethnic Minorities, and the Roma Education Fund, Budapest. These educational mentors are from Roma origin and they assist teachers in supporting children in their self-study, but most of all their activities are directed to the involvement of parents and children in regular school attendance and participation in school life.</p> <p>The municipality also provisions different risk integrated services in several villages – a community centre for children and families in Kabyle village; 3 family centers for children from 0-3 years in villages Kabyle, Skalica and Tenevo; and 10 zones for social support, formed into central kindergartens.</p>

	<p>The municipality also implements the project ‘Travelling Social Van’ under OP HRD, which provides integrated services and focuses on parents and children from marginalized communities.</p>
<p>6. Key-Stakeholders and their Roles / Responsibilities</p>	<p>Municipality of Tundja – major lead role</p> <p>Kindergartens and schools – active players incorporating mediators’ work</p> <p>3 community centers – additional services for families</p> <p>REF, Budapest – provides grants and expertise</p> <p>Bulgarian Red Cross – contributions for the canteen programme (free food)</p> <p>MES – channels EU funds to the municipality</p> <p>Sustainability:</p>
<p>7. Capacity building and Sustainability</p>	<p>REF, Budapest provided knowhow on mediation</p> <p>Sustainability: The Tundja municipality made use of all available financial resources for supporting Roma children’s integration into kindergarten, preschool and primary school enrolment and attendance. Currently, schools can continue with this integration work through delegated budgets (special targeted government transfers allocated to either schools or municipalities based on need and proved competence). The leadership of the municipality (mayors, deputy mayors) as well as committed kindergarten and school directors have combined their good efforts to deal with the difficult inclusion issue – this human and political factor have undoubtedly contributed to the success of their actions.</p> <p>The municipal council sets aside funds each year from the municipal budgets to (i) finance projects, if necessary, and (ii) grant interest-free loans to schools that have secured EU funding to be able to meet the difficulties caused by the delays in payments and reimbursement of allocated funds. The municipality also ensures adequate human resources, both employees and experts in their schools.</p> <p>For the implementation of educational integration of Roma children, a whole team of municipal officials is appointed. These officers are appointed for a longer period of time in the mayor's team, who is consistently re-elected to office in recent years, which in turn leads to systematic and consistent actions for the program’s sustainability. Furthermore, the municipality has a program for training and capacity building for its employees.</p>
<p>8. Institutionalization (if any)</p>	<p>The above case was initiated and managed by the committed municipal team which partnered well with kindergartens and schools and used smartly their municipal budget, EU resources, national programmes and additional grants.</p>

9. Interfaces / Need for coordination with other key issues	Need to seek more financial support from central authorities to replicate this programme in more villages and communities
10. Recommendations / important issue	The need to provide additional financial incentives for Roma children to attend pre-school and primary school is felt in many localities in Bulgaria. However, the decision to allocate targeted funds (delegated budgets) is in the hands of the central government and the availability of such funds to local institutions is not a given, despite the need. The process is competitive, rather than based on financial need – and political factors can play a role in the decision-making process. This places the sustainability of good services and programmes under question.
11. Why is this a good practice? Reflection and learning	<p>Results:</p> <p>The municipality’s interventions have yielded the following positive results:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The dropout rate of Roma children has minimized – almost 100% of Roma children complete primary education ▪ Students from the poorest and most marginalized families are attracted to and consistently involved in school life ▪ Full coverage of Roma children in preparatory classes and kindergartens is provided ▪ Increased responsibility of parents, who were influenced through their children to change their lifestyle (as noted in some of the families)¹ ▪ Improved community leadership – increased activity of Roma leaders and enhanced cooperation between them and local authorities <p>Key learning points:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimating the Roma workforce potential is a must for developing local policies for Roma integration. • Commitment and motivation of the mayor and the municipal council is fundamental. • When policies are local and they correspond to local needs, they are more efficient and effective. Local strategies must be developed in response to the national ones, since the latter are formal and non-functional. They give birth to no real local initiatives and actions. • In the words of the vice-mayor of Tundzha, <i>‘Roma integration, in your mind is difficult, but once you start, it gets easier’</i>. A team of specialists with sufficient powers and resources are the needed essentials to implement local integration policies.
12. Contact and website/link	Contacts: Georgi Stoyanov (Mayor): contact@tundja.net

¹ An interesting case revealed the effects of the free canteens among Roma children and families. Initially, many children did not want to come and eat in school canteens. They were worried because they did not know how to use cutlery, and many of them have not even eaten cooked food, but only purchased products from the store. With the assistance of teachers this problem was overcome. Also, the teachers were surprised to find that under the pressure of children, many families began to change their food habits – they purchased tables, dishes and utensils, and began serving homemade food. Also under pressure from their children, many Roma cooperated and were included in the municipal project for removal of waste from the Roma District.