Workshops for Teachers and Local Civil Society Representatives:
“Building Sensitivity to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Schools”
12 – 13 – 14 July 2010

On 12-14 July 2010 the European Centre for Minority Issues Kosovo (ECMI Kosovo) conducted workshops on education for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) communities in three municipalities: Prizren, Gjakovë/Đakovica and Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. The workshops are part of a pilot project supported by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) on ‘Building Sensitivity to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Schools,’ which aims to increase sensitivity to the rights, interests and needs of RAE communities within the school learning environment. Recognising the differences among these communities and their local circumstances, the project utilises a grassroots approach that engages local teachers, school directors, civil society organisations and parents to build understanding and cooperation. The target municipalities were accordingly chosen for their representation of each of these communities, with a majority of Roma in Prizren, Egyptians in Gjakovë/Đakovica and Ashkali in Fushë Kosovë\Kosovo Polje, although not exclusively.

These workshops, the first of three activities within the project, have been designed in collaboration with civil society representatives of the RAE communities within the respective municipalities, who led the presentations and discussion. In attendance were representatives from the Municipal Directorates of Education (MDE), Municipal Community Offices (MCO), school directors, civil society representatives from RAE communities, and teachers of RAE children in primary and secondary education. The meetings were chaired by ECMI Project Manager Kelley Thompson, who provided an overview on RAE education at the start of each workshop with a presentation on Education Standards, Rights, Strategies and best practice related to RAE education. Thereafter the course of each workshop was determined by inputs from civil society, making each workshop unique.

**Prizren**

The workshop was held on 12 July 2010 at Restaurant ‘Beska’ in Prizren. The programme was designed and organised in cooperation with three civil society representatives: Brahim Krusha from ‘Iniciativa 6’, Kujtim Pacaku from ‘Romani Baxt’ and Nexhip Menekshe from ‘Durmis Aslano’. School directors and teachers from three schools, ‘Mati Logoreci’, ‘Ibrahim Fehmiu’ and ‘Haziz Tolaj’ participated, as well as representatives from the MDE and MCO. During the workshop, two presentations were given by civil society representatives and a documentary was shown, followed by questions and a discussion. Based on the input and initiative of civil society representatives, the following topics were presented:

- Managing Classrooms with Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Pupils, covering how to place, involve and integrate the children of RAE communities.
- Prejudice, which covered how prejudice impacts the RAE communities. During this presentation, teachers were asked to evaluate a situation without all the details and then to re-evaluate it in the light of additional information, demonstrating how assumptions can be made about the RAE communities. The exercise sparked a strong debate among teachers.

ECMI Kosovo would like to thank the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) High Commissioner on National Minorities (HCNM) for their support for this event as part the project “Building Sensitivity to Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Schools”. For further details see www.ecmikosovo.org.
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- Return of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Pupils to Schools, shown through segments of a documentary from a campaign in 2007. The goal of the campaign was to raise awareness among parents and children of the importance of education, and to help children that have dropped out to return to schools.

Following the presentations participants formed three working groups, moderated by civil society representatives, on the following topics: promotion of tolerance and integration in schools, means of preventing and addressing drop-out rates, and cooperation with civil society. Based on the outcomes of these discussions, participants discussed proactive measures that municipal officials, school directors, teachers and civil society could take to improve the education of RAE children. These included: continued work with parents to promote the education of their children, support for on-time registration to prevent segregation, actively encouraging participation by RAE children in classes to build up self-esteem, identifying and eliminating indirect discrimination, and visiting families to support registration and attendance. Significantly, it was concluded that these measures would require communication and cooperation among all stakeholders.

**Gjakovë/Đakovica**

The workshop was held on 12 July 2010 at Restaurant ‘Hani’ in Gjakovë/Đakovica. The programme was designed and organised in cooperation with two civil society representatives: Lamir Rogova and Muharrem Prizreni from ‘Faari Vranjik’ and supported by Bashkim Kurti from the MCO. School directors and teachers from three schools, ‘Emin Duraku’, ‘Mustafa Bakija’ and ‘Zekeria Rexha’, participated. Based on the input and initiative of civil society representatives, the workshop was organised around a single presentation that facilitated debate throughout the event.

Within the debate, key issues included: positive discrimination, promotion of tolerance and integration in schools, and means to prevent and address the issue of drop-outs. The debate between participants was lively and well informed, and it became clear that they had advanced knowledge of the challenges facing the communities, but did not have a clear understanding of positive discrimination, referencing inaccurate examples. Participants felt that one of the main problems in Gjakovë/Đakovica was that most RAE children were choosing to register at the same school, which had come to be known as ‘the RAE school’, resulting in informal segregation. It was agreed that there should be better cooperation between municipal officials, school directors and civil society to promote integration by registering RAE children in the areas in which they live. The final session aimed to apply the approaches to cooperation discussed to the practical challenges faced by RAE communities. Civil society representatives discussed an upcoming project to provide extra classes to community members, and the subsequent need for close cooperation with teachers and school directors. Other initiatives were also discussed, notably to raise awareness among parents of RAE children of the importance of education and on-time registration. These issues will be considered further during the next two project activities.
**Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje**

The workshop was held on 14 July 2010 at Restaurant ‘Ana Benz’ in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje. The programme was designed and organised in cooperation with three community representatives: Muharem Aslanni from ‘Health for All’, Rahmon Stollaku from ‘Balkans Sunflowers’ and Medina Mustafa, a student. School directors and teachers from three schools, ‘Selman Riza’, ‘Mihal Grameno’ and a secondary school, ‘Hivzi Sylejmani’, participated. Based on the input and initiative of the civil society representatives, the following topics were presented:

- **The Education Component of the Strategy for the Integration of RAE Communities (RAE Strategy),** which aimed to raise awareness about the strategy and its implementation, and provide an overview of RAE communities in Fushë Kosovë/Kosovo Polje.
- **School Drop-Outs among RAE Communities,** which included an explanation of the term ‘drop-out’, analysis of the reasons for high drop-out rates among RAE communities, and an overview of RAE education rights in Kosovo.
- **Inclusion of RAE Children in the Kosovo Educational System,** which covered methods for enhancing inclusion of RAE children in schools, notably through greater interaction in classrooms which would create stronger links between pupils from different communities and raise awareness among parents.

Following the presentations participants formed three working groups, moderated by civil society representatives, on the following topics: promotion of tolerance and integration in schools, means for preventing and addressing drop-out rates, and positive discrimination. The discussion centred on the challenges that face schools with RAE pupils. One of the main problems identified by civil society was the lack of an adequate budget to implement the RAE Strategy, especially within the municipality, which will seriously impact its effectiveness. It was requested that the Municipal Education Director, civil society and other stakeholders advocate for sufficient funding for the Strategy and its Action Plan. Teachers raised the issue of positive discrimination, claiming that in their experience such policies had had a positive impact on RAE children and were one of the most effective ways of preventing drop-outs, in the short-term. However, they recognised that they did not constitute a viable long-term solution, and highlighted the importance of having positive role models for RAE children.

Following these workshops, ECMI Kosovo will be organising two further events per municipality. The first will be a visit by teachers to RAE families at the start of the coming school year, to raise awareness of RAE education issues among both teachers and parents, and to support enrolment. The second will be a workshop with teachers and parents to promote communication and cooperation. Civil society will remain central to the design and conduct of these events. Throughout the project, ECMI Kosovo will also be producing an Informational Brochure for each municipality, based on the information presented in the workshops and the outcomes of discussion, to be distributed in schools in October.