

## Case Study Report for MERI Network Tundzha Municipality, Bulgaria

### 1. Identification of good practice:

'From educational integration of Roma children to social inclusion of parents'

### 2. Area: education

### 3. Local context and key issues:

Tundzha municipality is located in Southeast planning region and is one of the



composing municipalities of Yambol District. It is stretching across a wide area of 1,220,613 acres, bringing together 44 settlements from rural type and has 24,155<sup>1</sup> inhabitants.

It is one of the few municipalities in Bulgaria, which have no administrative center, and its administration is located in District town of Yambol. Roma living in the

municipality of Tundzha, represent about 25% of the local population. No statistics are kept and there is no accurate data on their numbers, but local authorities point that they inhabit almost uniformly all 44 settlements that composed the municipality. Compact of their presence is registered in villages Veselinovo, Zavoi, Hadji Dimitrovo, Krumovo, Kukorevo, Boyadjik, Botevo.

According to local authorities for more than 50% of Roma population is under the age of 20 years and this percentage continues to increase. The remaining population of Tundzha municipality is composed of ethnic Bulgarians, mainly in pre-and retirement age. 'Future of Tundzha belongs to Roma community. From there comes the young population of the municipality'- said Mr. Stancho Stavrev -Vice - Mayor 'Culture, education, religion, health, social and youth activities'.

The problem is not that in the municipality of Tundzha Roma live. They have been here since someone can remember and although they add color to the local context, they are an integral part of the local population. Problems, however, are for local authorities it is clear that they arise from the presence of a large illiterate group, poor Roma living in some villages of the municipality.

'Our Roma are different. In some villages they live together with the Bulgarians, with which are in good relationships, have homes that look good, some work in the

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<sup>1</sup> NSI, Census of Population and Housing in Bulgaria, 2011

nearby Thermal power plant in Radnevo and formerly they were employed in agriculture or in factories in the nearby town of Yambol'- said the vice mayor and continues: 'these Roma today are facing difficulties experienced by other Bulgarians in the region-the lack of job is their main problem'. True emergency is the situation, however, in those villages in which Roma live in compact, isolated from the rest of the population, their homes are dilapidated shacks, they themselves earn their living from the dump. 'Life strategy of these people covered that to being able to survive from the waste, the other throw away ' - said Vice Mayor.

Most often, the families of those Roma families is missing family planning, which determines a higher number of children - four or more children in the family. A particularly thorny problem is non-attendance and dropouts from school of these Roma children because their parents prefer to include them in their working model for surviving.

#### *4. Background of good Practice*

In 2008, upon request from the Ministry of Education, the local government started a process to optimize the school network in the municipality. This means the closure of schools in most villages, reduction of school staff and organization of central schools. Under the project of the municipality by the National Program 'Optimization of the school network' are received 1.25 million levs, which were used to repair and improve the equipment in those eight central schools. To counter the discontent of the population from the closure of some schools in the municipality as a priority was set the improvement of the quality of education in central schools.

They made concrete steps in this direction and provided transportation for all students from rural areas with closed schools, established care programs and implemented full-day form of education, reveal extracurricular activities<sup>2</sup>, repaired school canteens in which children can have lunch. Most of the children, however, come from poor and marginalized (mostly Roma) families and for them the purchase of food from school canteen is impossible. Having this in mind, 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 proposed to introduce a free canteen for all students from the municipality of Tundzha. To reduce costs for hiring personal in canteens, they offered to enter into public-private partnership with the catering company that prepares and delivers food to schools. This proposal was approved by Decision of the Municipal Council in 2009 and it actually began a targeted program for prevention of dropout from the educational process. Funds for

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<sup>2</sup> According to the municipality currently 85% of students in Tundzha municipality are covered in 42 semi-boarding groups

free canteens for students in central schools are provided within the prescribed from the state uniform cost standard per student, in order to provide free lunch for students from the two elementary schools the municipality implemented project with the Bulgarian Red Cross and paid contributions from the municipal budget.

The steps taken do not stop here – for the team of the mayor and school management it is clear that it must be provided conditions for early childhood development, to have further good results in education. From the academic year 2010/2011 with a decision of the Municipal Council municipality introduced compulsory pre-school preparation for children aged 5 years old. That way another priority of the municipal education program is formed: to attract Roma children in preschool mandatory training in order to be better prepared when starting the first grade. By law all children of this age should be subject to compulsory pre-school education, but the state has no mechanism by which to facilitate disadvantaged families. For this purpose, the municipality agreed with the MoE to be paid also to the kindergartens targeted funding for transportation of preschool children, because so far such funding was paid to schools with a preschool class.

For its side, from 2011 the Municipal Council Tundzha eliminated fees for kindergarten for preschool children, because the municipal government made calculations and concluded that the best option is to have more children in the preparatory classes of kindergartens, for which they can receive more money through unified standards instead to receive an amount for a small group of regularly attending children and in practice unrecoverable fees from parents. To encourage the attendance in all kindergarten for all children from 2 to 4 years, the Municipal Council reduced fees for kindergarten by 50% <sup>3</sup> and provides additional funding from the municipal budget. A natural extension of the municipality's efforts to attract and retain in school Roma children from the most marginalized and poorest families are introduced in 2011 8 Roma educational mentors under project funded by the Centre for Educational Integration of Children and pupils from ethnic minorities and the Roma Education Fund- Budapest.

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 for regular school attendance and participation in school life. Yet this activity is not financially ensured for the next year, but the municipality and the schools are convinced of its effectiveness and are determined to attract funding for projects. This set of steps taken for early childhood development is completed by activities implemented under various projects financed under the

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<sup>3</sup> At the time of the study families pay only 14 lev monthly fee per child

Operational Programmes of the EU and from other donors. For children in different risk integrated services are provided in built in different villages Community center for children and families (in Kabyle village), three family centers for children from 0 to 3 years (in villages Kabyle, Skalica and Tenevo) and 10 zones for social support, formed into central kindergartens.

#### **4.1. *Existence of political will at local level***

Strong political will at local level to address the issue of Roma integration, especially for solving the problem of education of Roma in the municipality exists. This is evident from the many adopted local strategies- general and one specifically aimed at the integration of ethnic minorities<sup>4</sup>. Some of these municipal strategic and program documents were developed in response to the requirements of the state or other donors, others, however, were developed as a result of the identified needs of local authorities and the needs of Roma population and that why they are the guiding in the realization of the Local integration policy. For the most important among them is considered program of the Mayor for the Municipal Development. This program has a special section that reflects the ideas and vision of Mayor for integration of Roma from municipality of Tundzha<sup>5</sup>. Second in importance the mayor team places the Strategy for development of the educational system of the municipality of Tundzha 2009- 2015.<sup>6</sup> There the municipal leadership vision for solving the problem of Roma education is clearly stated - identified are specific needs of Roma children in education and defined clearly are objectives and measures to ensure equal access and quality education for children from risk Roma groups and communities<sup>7</sup>. In fact, in this strategy are priorities the objectives of the Municipal Program for integration of ethnic minorities in the municipality of Tundzha to achieve quality education for Roma children. Thirdly, at the request of the municipal authorities, all schools in the municipality have developed educational programs that embodied goals, objectives and measures aimed specifically at attracting and keeping Roma children in education system.

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<sup>4</sup> With Decision N 361 from Minutes N 26/28.08.2009 under 12th point on the agenda of the Municipal Council the Municipal Program for integration of ethnic minorities in the municipality of Tundzha, 2009- 2015 was adopted. Main priority in it is improving access and quality of education of Roma children, but at the time of study either an annual plan of activities to strategy is accepted.

<sup>5</sup> The program of the mayor was not available during our visit, we could not find it on the website of the municipality, but it was mentioned by the team interviewed representatives of the mayor.

<sup>6</sup> With Decision №370 from Minutes №27/30.09.2009 of the municipal council of Tundzha is adopted The Strategy for development of the educational system in the municipality of Tundzha (2009 – 2015).

<sup>7</sup> The Strategy for development of the educational system in the municipality of Tundzha (2009 – 2015) goal I „Equal access to education” measures 1 and 3 are directed specifically against the dropouts of students and keeping them in school, Integration of children for whom Bulgarian language is not native- See page 12 of the Strategy.

The political will of municipal authorities of Tundzha to resolve the issue of education of Roma children is evidenced by the numerous decisions adopted by the Municipal Council, with which not only the elaborated strategic documents, but also the subsequent steps taken to attract in school children become sustainable local practice.

#### ***4.2. Inclusion of Roma in the main programs for providing services***

Municipal authorities in Tundzha believes that hot for Roma issues should be discussed focused within the team of the mayor and in municipal council and with all stakeholders. Problems with dropouts from Roma origin and the measures taken to overcome them are discussed by the municipal administration with principals and teachers, with municipal councilors and rural mayors, representatives of civil society and in the Roma community. The measures taken, however, are always part of general programs and strategies aimed which aimed to achieve the overall objectives of the municipality for ensuring the prosperity and welfare of the local community. As an example of integration of Roma into mainstream programs and projects of the municipality may be indicated social service 'Public Dining', which is funded through the municipal budget and the MLSP, available is in 42 villages and is combined with the introduction of canteens for all students. Another example is the implementation of project under OP HRD 'Traveling Social van', which provided integrated services and has been focusing on parents and children from marginalized communities. The solution for integration into general programs, but through focused measures, activities and projects for Roma community is dictated by the desire to avoid confrontation primarily of various ethnic groups and further stigmatization of Roma community. Municipal authorities are aware that in addition to drastically lower socio-economic status of Roma, ' the public form and promote negative stereotypes towards this ethnic group'<sup>8</sup>. So they rely on integrated, comprehensive and consistent measures for all vulnerable groups, explicitly seek vulnerable Roma also to benefit from ongoing local policies.

#### ***4.3. Planning and availability of funds for Roma programs***

Another important aspect of educational practice of the municipality of Tundzha is the adoption of annual plans of activities to the Strategy for development of the educational system of the municipality of Tundzha 2009- 2015 <sup>9</sup>. Planned activities are provided both financially and with human resources. Financial sources

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<sup>8</sup> This finding was made by municipal authorities in the Municipal Programme for Integration of ethnic minorities in the municipality of Tundzha, Yambol District / 2009-2015 / - see. Page 1 of the Program.

<sup>9</sup> With Decision №54 from Minutes №5/26.01.2012 of the Tundzha Municipal council is adopted Action Plan for implementation of the strategy for development of educational system un Tundzha municipality in 2012.

of annual plans to the municipal education strategy are the municipal budget, the unified standards for student, projects under the operational programs of the EU and other donors. Particularly good approach for funds provision for planned activities is the application of projects from schools themselves. To encourage schools to develop and implement projects that secured primarily extracurricular activities, Municipal Council set aside funds each year from the municipal budget, with which on one hand if necessary finance projects, and from the other- granted interest-free loans to school that won project in order to be able to meet difficulties caused by delays in payments and reimbursement of allocated funds. As for human resources, it is obvious that for the priority Education, the policy of the municipality is to provide team, including both experts and employees empowered to take decisions. According the Structure Rules of the municipal administration – Tundzha <sup>10</sup> responsibilities towards implementation of the educational goals and priorities of the municipality are vested to one of the deputy mayors in charge of sectors ‘Education’ and Directorate ‘Finance, Budget and social activities’ <sup>11</sup>, to which following departments are formed ‘Education and pre-school preparation’ and ‘Culture and humanitarian activities’ those experts are committed to the implementation of annual educational plans. Good approach is the commitment to the implementation of annual plans of the school management and teachers themselves who develop their own projects or partner municipal ones.

#### ***4.4. Method of management, ensuring participation***

Since 2009 the municipality of Tundzha introduced the practice of public advisory councils (PAC) to the mayor. One of these councils deals with social issues, which includes issues of education. In this Council participated Roma also. An important point is that the PAC meetings are open not only for members but also for the wider local community; virtually any interested person may attend meetings and express opinions and give advice or suggestions. Towards meetings of PAC is high interest from the local population and they are often visited, this prejudice the recommendations given by the people to be taken into consideration by the Municipal Council in making one or another decision because public support is important.

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<sup>10</sup> Structure Rules of municipal administration Tundzha is available at:

:\Users\Liliq\AppData\Local\Microsoft\Windows\Temporary Internet Files\Content.IE5\7W2KZL2X\rules\_admin.pdf

<sup>11</sup> From Structure Rules of municipal Administration - Tundzha: ‘Directorate ‘Finance, budget and social activities: art.17. Monitor compliance with and enforcement of legal requirements in education, 18. Keep records and develop a project for the network and the structure of educational and childcare institutions in the municipality; 19. Elaborate proposals for improving the material and technical base of schools and kindergartens and community centres;

Another practice in the municipality is to every village mayor or deputy mayor to create the Mayor's advice boards, in which the attraction of local Roma is a must. Through these boards rural mayors understand immediate needs and problems of people from the villages provide information for decisions that concern them and discuss any proposals. So mayors understand about all new comers within the villages, which in turn is crucial for their registration- mayors of villages actively seek out those Roma migrated on village territory and invite them to register, identify children that must go in kindergarten and school then require parents to enroll their children in school. Mayors provide information to teachers, who visit families and so children do not remain outside the school system.

In the municipality of Tundzha is not committed policy for inclusion of Roma in the electoral lists of the leading political parties, but there is one representative of the community, a municipal councilor. At this stage there is no appointed Roma in municipal administration.

#### *4.5. Transparency and publicity of management procedures*

Very important point is to attract public support for measures in education and integration of Roma children is a system of measures introduced to ensure transparency and publicity of management decisions. In the municipality of Tundzha, these measures include:

- Organization of public hearings in the villages, on which the mayor informs the local population for some achievements of individual projects, or reports on funds expended under them, shares plans and ideas, listens to people who share the satisfaction, criticize or give recommendations for improvement of services;
- Regular publication on the website of the municipality of information relating to various projects; of Municipal Council decisions and orders of the mayor; of rules and procedures under which citizens may lodge complaints or access information;
- Regular press conferences and press releases from the mayor and his administration, which determines the great number of publications in local and regional media <sup>12</sup>;
- particularly in education sphere, the mayor introduced the practice not only to discuss the annual education plans with the directors of schools and kindergartens,

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<sup>12</sup> During our visit the mayor's team provided us folder with copies of publications.

but for joint programming of activities and envisaged resources. Discussions are held with parents, so as to ensure not only transparency but also shared responsibility and increases the commitment of the whole school community.

#### *4.6. Reporting of local government*

The mayor report annually to the municipal council, meetings are open to individuals who are able to speak and give their views on these reports. Apart from this, the mayor held meetings in the villages where reports activities and shares plans for next year. Special attention is paid to the presence of Roma on these meetings in the villages.

#### *4.7. Main results and impacts of good practice*

- Minimized dropouts of Roma school children- almost 100% of Roma children complete primary education<sup>13</sup>;
- 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;
- Greatly increased number of Roma children attending kindergarten;
- Increased responsibility of parents- influenced parents through children, change in lifestyle of some of the families<sup>14</sup> ;
- Improved Community Leadership - increased activity of Roma leaders and enhanced cooperation between them and local authorities;

#### *4.8. Key factors for achievement of positive results*

According to us there are two factors that influenced positively upon results:

A) *Factors of an objective nature:*

- Existence of national legislation and policy documents and *programs that can be applied locally*- Law school, Strategy for educational integration of children and pupils from ethnic minorities, Framework program for the

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<sup>13</sup> This led yet to slightly increased number of Roma children in secondary education, although those who have a will are more. The reason for not increasing dramatically the number of Roma youths in secondary education, according to local authorities is the lack of secondary schools in the municipality of Tundzha. Now students have to travel every day to the district town of Yambol, or to pay accommodation and living there, which is impossible for many families. The municipality has analyzed the need for secondary education and is considering to open two secondary schools, with which will address the need.

<sup>14</sup> An interesting case told us the teachers interviewed for the effects of the free canteens among Roma children and families. Initially, many children do not want to come and eat in school canteens. They were worried because they do not know how to use individual table and cutlery, and many from them have not even eat cooked food, but only purchased products from the store. With the assistance of teachers this problem was overcome, but by the time the teachers were surprised to find that under the pressure of children, many families begin to change their food habits- purchase tables, dishes and utensils, began serving homemade food. Also under pressure from their children, many Roma cooperate and were included in the municipal project for removal of waste from the Roma District.

Integration of Roma, National Plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion, National Programme for school network optimization and others.

- Some demographic indicators in the municipality of Tundzha, outlining that the future workforce comes from the Roma community.
- Partnership of municipality with a range of national and international NGOs, which led to:
  - ✓ manner of action of the municipality, based on citizen participation and direct democracy at the local level;
  - ✓ establishment of local civil society, acting in dialogue with local authority and partnership. Particularly important for the municipality are the 11 youth NGOs united in 2009 in the Municipal Youth Council 'Tundzha'. Many young people from Roma community are also active members and activists of the Council;
  - ✓ enhanced skills of the local administration for project planning, which naturally leads to a high percentage of projects implemented effectively- in 2010 the municipality was on 8<sup>th</sup> place in the country among all 264 Bulgarian municipalities according actually disbursed funds from European funds. The municipality has and applies its system for monitoring the progress of implementation of strategic documents.

#### *B) Factors of the subjective nature*

- People in the mayor's staff at management level who understand the problems of the Roma community their will to solve problems and way they seek for this.
- With the implementation of the objectives for educational integration of Roma children is entrusted whole team of municipal officials. An important point is that these officers are for a longer period of time in the mayor's team, who is consistently re-elected to office in recent years, which in turn led to a systematic and consistent actions. Furthermore, the municipality has a program for training and capacity building of employees.

### **5. Comment for applicability beyond the local context**

Considering the factors that determined the successful practice, it could be applied in other municipalities with more impoverished Roma population, especially in rural regions where contact between local authorities and the population can be done more easily and more directly

## 6. Key findings, lessons learned and policy recommendations

The most important conclusion of this practice is that it would not be successful if the team of the mayor *does not realized* the importance to invest in education of Roma children being future active workforce of the municipality. That triggers their motivation to take their own local policy for Roma integration.

Learned lesson is *that when policies are local and in response to local needs and necessities, they are more efficient and effective*. Local strategies in response to the national ones, are formal and dead. They give birth to no real local initiatives and actions.

Also, learned lesson is that local authorities need assistance to understand that *Roma integration is not impossible*. With these words greeted us the vice-mayor of Tundzha, who stressed that 'Roma integration, while is in your mind is difficult, but once you start it is now easier'. And to begin, you must create team of specialists and give them clear and sufficient powers and resources to implement local policies. It is not enough simply to expect one person, either Roma or not, politically appointed under a mandate from the mayor, without sufficient authority and resources to deal with Roma integration at local level.

### Recommendations:

- National policies should create prerequisites, frameworks and incentives at the local level to identify the specific needs of local Roma with the Roma themselves, to plan adequate to their needs activities to be implemented with full transparency and involvement of Roma and other citizens in them.
- Now local authorities have no discretion to direct centralized subsidies where necessarily. Municipalities have the right to participate in the formulation of delegated activities financed from the state budget.

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