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НАЦИОНАЛНА АГЕНЦИЈА
ЗА ЕВРОПСКИ ОБРАЗОВНИ
ПРОГРАМИ И МОБИЛНОСТ

STRATEGIC DOCUMENT FOR LONG TERM STRATEGIC TRANSNATIONAL PARTNERSHIP AMONG NGO'S AND EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS IN ADDRESSING OF CHALLENGES OF SOCIAL INCLUSION AND ESL OF ROMA STUDENTS IN REGIONS OF KOCHANI, SLIVEN AND LARISSA



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1. CHAPTER I -Present situation in educational sector of the 3 participating municipalities

1.1. Overview of the Educational System in Kochani, North Macedonia

1.1.1. Educational system in North Macedonia

Primary education in Republic of North Macedonia is mandatory and it continues for nine years. It is organized in three educational periods as follows: from first to third grade, from fourth to sixth grade and from seventh to ninth grade. The students are enrolled in first grade when they are at the age of five years and eight months.

Primary education lasts nine years and is mandatory and free for all students (aged 6-14 years). There are 347 primary schools in the country (around 1100 including satellite offices).

The level of literacy is high and accounts for 98.8% for men and 96.8% for women (2015). The gross coverage rate is 63%, and the net rate is 91%. These figures do not include students (mainly Roma) who are not registered at all in the system (without a personal identification number), and therefore the current coverage rate for the respective adult cohort is smaller.

Secondary education, which is also mandatory and free, is divided into four types: gymnasium, secondary vocational education, art education and education for students with special educational needs. At the end of the three-year vocational education, students take a final exam and have no right to enroll at a university. Students who complete a four-year vocational education can choose between a final exam and a state examination, depending on whether they want to continue their education or not, while students from the upper secondary schools obligatory state or school matriculation.



Among the 124 existing secondary schools, 108 are public and the remaining 16 are private. Of the secondary public schools, 23 are gymnasiums; 43 are professional; 33 also offer gymnasium and vocational education; 4 schools are for students with special educational needs; and 5 are art schools.

Besides the Law of primary education of Republic of North Macedonia that covers all main aspects of the educational system there are several other documents related to the educational system which address to specific areas.

As most general and important is the National strategy of education from 2018-2025 where we systematically plan the further steps for the educational improvement.

With the process of decentralization the schools are governed by the Municipalities and each municipality develops its own Program for support of education every year and this program is being adopted by the municipal council.

Related to this project activities and goals are also the “Strategy for development of Information Computer Technologies in the Republic of Macedonia 2015 – 2020” and “Strategy for environment conservation within the education of the Republic of Macedonia”.

“National strategy for life-long learning for 2014 – 2020 in the Republic of Macedonia”

As potential weaknesses in the educational curriculums in the STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) subjects related to the main topic of this project, is that Climate changes are not represented enough and their importance to the wellbeing of people is not emphasized enough. Practical experience and research is also missing.

1.1.2. Educational System in the region of Kochani

Kochani is a town in the eastern part of North Macedonia, It has a population of 38,092 and is the seat of the Kochani Municipality. The town spreads across the Northern side of the Kochani valley, along the banks of the Kochani river, where it leaves the mountain slopes and flows through the valley.

The ethnic structure of the population is following

- Macedonian: 90.3%



- Roma: 5.0%
- Turks: 3.0%
- Vlachs: 0.5%
- Serbs: 0.2%
- Other: 1.0%

From the religious point of view most of the population is Orthodox 96%, Muslims 3%, Catholic 0,3% and other 0,7 %.

In municipality of Kochani there are six primary schools, one of which is a musical school and there are two secondary schools.

The situation in the primary schools in the school year 2021/22 is as follows in the table below:

| Primary school | Number of students | Number of classes | Average number of students per class |
|------------------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| PS “Krstе P. Misirkov” | 209 | 19 | 11 |
| PS “St. Cyril and Methodius” | 955 | 48 | 20 |
| PS “Rade Kratovche” | 504 | 30 | 17 |
| PS “Malina Popivanova” | 485 | 33 | 15 |
| PS “Nikola Karev” | 480 | 37 | 13 |
| TOTAL | 2633 | 167 | 16 |

As for the Secondary schools in Municipality of Kochani, the situation in the school year 2021/22 is as follows:

| Secondary school | Number of students | Number of classes | Average number of students per class |
|----------------------|--------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------|
| SS “Ljupcho Santov” | 577 | 52 | 11 |
| SS “Gosho Vikentiev” | 640 | 35 | 18 |
| TOTAL | 1217 | 87 | 14 |



From August 5th, 2019 (National gazette 161 of Republic of North Macedonia), there are changes in the national Law for education that emphasize the inclusion of the children with special needs and working systematically with the gifted and talented children.

1.2. Overview of the Educational System in Sliven, Bulgaria

1.2.1. Educational system in Bulgaria

The *Pre-school and School Education Act* (effective from 1.08.2016) provides the legal foundation for the overall education system in the country and establishes the right of citizens to continuously enhance their education and qualifications. The Act recognizes the right for education for all children; guarantees equal treatment regardless of their ethnic or social background and residential locality; ensures conditions and provides opportunities for further development and accomplishment of a high level of knowledge in the system of education.

Bulgarian education system has traditionally been organized within the public sector. However, a number of private schools exist at different levels of schooling. The education in Bulgaria is mainly supported by the state through the Ministry of Education and Science (MES). Financial autonomy is given to schools by financial decentralization and the so-called “delegated budgets”. The financial decentralization transfers rights and obligations that are related to the constitution and execution of a budget (delegated budgets). Schools have more operational rights in relation to budget constitution and expenditures, and execute their own independent policies.

Education and training of children starts in kindergartens. They may be public, municipal or private, depending on the type of their budget. Kindergartens are for children at the age between 3 and 6 (when they begin first grade). Pre-primary groups for children aged 5 and 6 are compulsory and may take place either in a kindergarten or in a primary school. School readiness is assessed at the end of pre-school education stage by comparing acquired learning outcomes with the learning outcomes described in the state standards. A Personal portfolio is issued at the end of pre-primary stage.



School education is free at pre-primary, primary and secondary level in the public sector. It is compulsory for children between the ages of 5 and 16 (0-8 grades). The levels of schooling in Bulgaria are:

- primary education (grades 1- 4 inclusive);
- pre secondary education (grades 5 – 7 inclusive)
- lower secondary education (grades 8 – 10 inclusive);
- upper secondary education (grades 10 – 12 inclusive).

Schools in Bulgaria are state, municipal, private or spiritual and as according to the type of training and teaching they provide – non-specialized and specialized. According to the stage or degree of education, non-specialized schools are:

- primary (I - IV grade inclusive);
- lower-secondary (I - VII grade inclusive);
- secondary (VIII - XII grade inclusive);
- combined (I - X grade inclusive);
- high school (I – XII inclusive).

The primary education starts normally when a child turns seven, but it is not uncommon for parents to consider their children able to start the 1st grade at the age of six. After finishing the fourth grade, students get a certificate for elementary education. To get a basic education diploma, students can go to a lower-secondary school or choose to attend a general secondary school.

In most schools, the school year begins on 15th of September and continues till 15th or 30th of June. Each school year has two terms. In most of the secondary schools, competitive exams for admission are required. Pupils can choose from a number of various types of schools, each offering a different focus (such as mathematics and sciences or foreign languages).

1.2.2. Educational System in the region of Sliven

- **Pre-school education**



Pre-school education is aimed at a certain age group of the population – children from 3 to 6 years of age. It is implemented in children’s establishments, which according to the current legislation (Law on Pre-school and School Education – 2015) are defined as kindergartens.

The number and capacity (number of places and number of groups) of a kindergarten is determined by the number of children within the age group of 3 to 6 years of age, as well as by the current regulations on the minimum number of children to form a children’s group.

In the school year of 2021/2022 in the region of Sliven there were a total of 60 kindergartens. The capacity of the kindergartens is in accordance with the number of children covered. Thus, there are a little

over 100 places per 100 children. The average occupancy of 1 group in the kindergarten is within the current standards. It varies from 20 to 23 children in one group over the years.

The location of kindergartens in the region of Sliven is as follows:

- In the city of Sliven – 14 kindergartens;
- In the villages from the municipality of Sliven – 14 kindergartens;
- In the municipality of Kotel – 6 kindergartens;
- In the municipality of Tvarditsa – 6 kindergartens;
- In the municipality of Nova Zagora – 20 kindergartens;
-

- School Education

The school educational system is represented by a network of two types of schools:

- General Education
- Vocational

During the school year 2021/2022, the school network in the Region of Sliven includes the following educational institutions.

9 Primary schools (1st – 4th grade)

41 Primary schools (1st – 7th grade)

9 Secondary schools (SU) (1st -12th grade)

3 Profile oriented schools



8 Vocational schools

1 Resource center for support of disabled children

2 Special schools

1 National school for folk music

1 National school for art and design

1 Prison school

1 Sport school

- **Regional Department of Education – Sliven – the regional authority, territorial structure of the Ministry of Education and Science responsible for the education in the region**

Regional Department of Education - Sliven (RDE-Sliven) is a territorial administration to the Ministry of Education and Science for management and methodical support of the system of pre-school and school education. Regional Department of Education - Sliven is a legal entity and a secondary budget authorizing institution. The organization of the activities in the organisation are carried out in accordance with the provisions of the Regulations on the Structure and Functions of the Regional Departments of Education and according to the Rules of Internal Order. It is managed and represented by a Head. The implementation of the activities are carried out by two departments:

- General Administration - Department of Administrative and legal, financial, business and information services;
- Specialized Administration - Department of organizational-methodological activities and control.

Staff number is 21, including the Head. The Regional Department of Education - Sliven operates according to an annual plan approved by the Minister of Education and Science.

The Mission: Regional Department of Education - Sliven creates conditions for the implementation of the state educational policy in the territory of the district of Sliven, managing and controlling the system of pre-school and school education on the territory of the district.

The Vision: Regional Department of Education - Sliven is an active party in the implementation of state policy in secondary education and in the coordination of regional and municipal

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authorities, the school network, business and civil society for lifelong learning and the development of a knowledge-based economy.

Main priorities in the activities of Regional Department of Education - Sliven:

1. Effective organization, methodological support and management of the educational system in the district of Sliven for the implementation of the state education policy in accordance with the Law on Pre-school and School Education and the State Educational Standards.
2. Implementation activities of the Collaboration Mechanism of the Institutions for the Enrollment and Inclusion of Compulsory Preschool and School Age Children and Students in the Educational System; their keeping in educational institutions; to provoke students' interest in learning, to continuously improve their skills and to enhance their educational outcomes;
3. Methodological support and control over Bulgarian language learning activities for children whose mother tongue is not Bulgarian; as well as for literacy, mastering the norms of the literary Bulgarian language and increasing the level of functional literacy of the students;
4. Supporting the practical orientation of training, key competencies acquisition activities and result orientation; the use of innovation in the educational process and the active sharing of good practices;
5. Supporting the development of vocational education in line with the development of the economy in the region and the needs of the business;
6. Activities for the implementation of inclusive education policy and support for the personal development of each child and student;
7. Supporting the initiatives and activities of educational institutions related to active partnerships with parents to educate children and students in values and virtues, intolerant of aggression and intolerance, respect for rights and compliance with rules and obligations.
8. Active participation in national and international educational projects.

The institution is responsible for the education in the area. Early school leaving is one of the main problems in the schools in the region of Sliven. It organises periodically control on this



topic, experts from Regional Department of education check the number of students attending schools, analyse the situation and search different ways to manage with drop outs.

1.3. Overview of the Educational System in Larisa, Greece

1.3.1 Educational system in Greece

Eleven-year elementary education in Greece is compulsory and free for all children at the age of four to fifteen years. This refers to all children with permanent residence in Greece, irrespective of their citizenship.

At the age of 4 the children can attend nursery (is not obligatory), in order to develop their social skills and to facilitate the working parents with their morning schedule.

There are three segments of elementary education. Compulsory elementary education conducted in regular elementary schools. Also, is conducted in special institutions for students with developmental difficulties (in some cases, when we are dealing with students with special needs there is schools that is specifically for them, although they can attend classes in regular schools with the support of a teacher. Last, but not least, music education in elementary music schools, and elementary education of adults conducted in regular schools and specialized institutions. Elementary music education is also conducted in certain regular elementary, gymnasium and lyceum schools, as a separate educational program.

Secondary education is provided for everyone, after completing primary schooling, under equal conditions and based on individual capability, the opportunity to acquire knowledge and the competence needed to enter the labor market and to undertake further education at higher education institutions. The secondary education in Greece is obligatory.

Secondary education is provided by secondary schools and other legal persons and includes various types and forms of instruction, education, qualification and training that are carried out according to the provisions of the Primary and Secondary School Education Act. Secondary school institutions are: secondary schools student's dormitories. Secondary school programs are as follows:

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- gymnasiums;
- art schools
- Athletic gymnasiums
- standard and experimental gymnasiums
- music schools schools.
- Church gymnasiums

Gymnasiums prepare the students, from the age of 12 until the age of 15, for further education at higher education institutions. In art schools, the students acquire knowledge, develop skills, abilities and creativity in different artistic fields.

According to Lyceums in Greece, their attendance is not obligatory, the students attend them from 15 to 18 years old and then, if they achieve a high score in national exams, they enter the university. It has the same categories as the Gymnasiums, with the addition of Vocational Education Institution, which prepares the students to enter the labor market in very specific fields of education.

In general, 1.774.854 million students attended the Greek educational system in 2021 (according to official data), with 786.014 attending primary and preschool education and 554.499 attending secondary education. 434.391 attending higher education.

1.3.2. Education in Tyrnavos

Concerning the wider area of Larissa (the city and the surrounding cities and villages), there are 276 kindergartens and primary schools in total. To be more specific, there are 160 kindergartens and 116 primary schools.

The city of Tyrnavos (approx. 10.000 citizens) has 7 kindergartens and 5 primary schools within its territory.

Kindergarten education is daily, approximately 6 hour per day and the studies are focusing to the development of the social skills of the toddlers, some educational activities, good manners, developing the sense of respect to each other etc.



Children with disabilities and children of national minorities are integrated into groups, and assistance with working with provides a psychologist.

Within the regular primary program, children attend English and German language learning programs conducted by educated teachers with a program verified by the Ministry of Science and Education. Children who wish to attend a religious education program of Catholic catechism led by our educators with a completed canonical mandate verified by the competent ministry.

The pre-school program for the elderly children is part of a regular program, and the shorter pre-school program for non-kindergarten children is held in the afternoon. Parents have the opportunity to start with a child's adaptive playroom before enrolling in a kindergarten so that the child can easily adapt and the parent knows about the way they work. The children are attending primary school from the age of 6 until the age of 12, 6 school years in total.

Children with disabilities and children of national minorities are integrated into groups, and assistance with working with provides a psychologist.

Tyrnavos primary schools are public institutions of general education of children and youth. School performs the educational and training activities. Primary education in Greece is regulated by Law of education in primary and secondary schools and therefore primary school Greece implemented mandatory and regular primary education. In addition, performs the lessons of Mathematics, greek literature, arts, music, religious lessons, English language and gymnastics. In addition, during the school year, lessons of choir, dance groups, sport activities and provision of first aid are taking place.

Moreover, the total number of students in a classroom is 25-27 and in any case not below the 15.

The rating system of the school performance of the students is being enable from the third grade until the last year of the primary education, in the majority of the provided lessons. In the first and second grade the learning progress of the students is being transferred from their teacher to their parents through a personal small talk, once per three months.



2. CHAPTER II - Potential of cooperation among educational institutions and civil organisations and support from local authorities in Early School Leaving issues

Early school leaving is an issue relevant in all EU countries and it has attracted attention of a lot of researchers as well as policy makers and educators. There is a real risk of long-term socio-economic disadvantage for an early school leaver. For many, leaving school early will lead to narrower employment opportunities and an increased likelihood of poverty and unemployment. Also teenagers who leave school early have an increased risk of early pregnancy, drug abuse, criminal activities and psychological problems. Many young people who have left school early feel that they are viewed as ‘wasters’ or ‘losers’ by the community at large. A negative stereotyping toward early school leavers exists and creates a stigma.

Early school leaving is the proportion of young people between 18 and 24 that have not completed high secondary education and have not attended any kind of education or training activities for the last four weeks. A priority objective of educational policies is encouraging young people to continue their education and training beyond the mandatory stages for its positive effects on the individual development and social progress and for easing their access to the labour market.

To prevent early school leaving schools need to develop a systemic approach that includes simultaneous activities on multiple levels: work with teachers and counselling service, work with parents and work with pupils. “Dropping out” is linked to the feeling of being powerless, of senselessness and extreme lack of motivation. The engine that helps to increase motivation and find the meaning is fuelled by relevant stimuli in a safe and significant relationship.

EU countries have committed to reducing the average share of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020. This is a headline target in the Europe 2020 strategy and one of the five benchmarks of the strategic framework for European cooperation and training.



2.1. Good practices among educational institutions and civil organisations and support from local authorities in Sliven (Bulgaria) and their potential to be implemented in the education process of targeted regions

Following this line, educational institutions in Sliven get involved in strategic partnerships in the field of school education program "Erasmus +".

The main objectives of schools in the region are to assess the current policies to prevent early school leaving of students and keep them in the classrooms, to share experience and good practices between partners, to organize training activities for professionals in this field and improve their professional competences in order to reach the European dimensions in the education systems of participating countries. School teams intend to tackle early school leaving as a challenge in the context of the European dimension of education to enhance equity and inclusion, to reflect upon the obtained information as regards the issue of early school leaving to put forward realistic proposals of intervention and value the efficacy of actions in all levels of intervention. Teachers suggest improvement proposals for preventing early school leaving, to enhance and improve professional competences with the aim of consolidating the European dimension in the educational systems of the participating countries and to contribute to promote the European values in accordance with article 2 of the European Union Treaty.

Strategic objectives for managing ESL are stated as follows:

- Check absenteeism rates in schools.
- Report absenteeism rates in intervention geographical areas.
- Identify and classify absenteeism cases in the different school stages and courses.
- Get absentees' features related to age, sex, poor academic progress and incidence rate.
- Know the absentees' socio-familiar environment.
- Report and describe interventions and evolution of absentees.
- Report problems associated to types and incidence according to age intervals, sex, school stage, course and families situations.
- Foster reflection and intervention proposals once half the cases have been detected:
Design of strategies to tackle absenteeism and decrease absenteeism in schools
- Value the importance of a welcome plan as an instrument to tackle absenteeism.



- Propose co-operation plans between schools and enterprises. (Vocational Training)
- Establish interadministrative (Regional, Local) collaboration plans.

Managing the the problem of ESL could be divided into 5 steps:

- **Step I:** Diagnosys and elaboration of instruments, tools and guide.
- **Step II:** Catalogue of indicators and descriptors, and definition of intervention procedures.
- **Step III:** Agents' training, application of protocols and reporting of processes.
- **Step IV:** Picking up of results and materials, and early assessment of actions.
- **Step V:** Assessment, evaluation and dissemination of successful practises.

In the first phase of the project a school survey has been held among schools from the region of Sliven. 67 schools participated in the survey. The questions included aimed to identify the type of school, the educational level that the school offers, the socio-economic status of the students' families, nationality and belonging to ethnic minorities.

Questions in the survey aimed to establish the number of students with attendance less than a month for the last three years, the number of students with disciplinary sanctions, the number of cases of harassment, violence, bullying at school, bullying in internet, cases of aggression between students and cases of aggression towards teachers and support staff. Respondent schools pointed out the number of pupils who repeated classes concerning the last three school years, the number of dropouts and the number of students with a large number of absences for the same period.

Analysis of surveys was made and results were summarized.

School principals from different municipalities in Sliven prepared and shared presentations on the topic: "Effective measures to prevent students from dropping out".

School principals from Sliven determined the causes of premature failure of students as socio-economic, educational and family or ethnocultural. They believe that dropping out of school is not only a social but also pedagogical problem. The reasons are complex. The roots of the phenomenon are both in the family environment and motivation for school work and in the pedagogical staff.

The teaching staff of "Nayden Gerov" Primary School in Gavrailovo is ready to face any

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challenges in order to attract and keep the students at school. The measures that they offer and consider effective to reduce the number of premature dropouts are:

- to improve the quality of education
- to better the access to education
- to provide a positive learning environment, to improve facilities for studying
- to engage parents and increase their participation in school life
- to support students' personal development
- to conduct various interesting activities for students
- to help students at risk not to drop out because of financial reasons
- to offer additional classes for students with difficulties in the learning process
- to participate in projects and national programs
- to organize games and competitions among students
- to stimulate classes with the smallest number of absences for each term
- to share and exchange good practices with other similar schools
- to increase the qualification of teachers

The teaching staff has revised risk factors and developed and implemented an own school program for reducing the absences in class. The school strategy for prevention of dropouts includes taking good care of students, using both individual approach and group work, providing excellent educational environment and useful consulting on various subjects, overcoming deficiencies in the education system and organizing various trainings for teachers to help them identify and deal with dropout students, efficient dialogue with families and including students in extracurricular activities according to their skills and interests.

The school offers an individual form of education for students over the age of 16 which is suitable for reintegration in the educational system after early school leaving.

One of the main factors for managing with absenteeism is project work. Better school facilities and various materials for classes of interests have been provided by the project for full - day education of the Ministry of Education and Science. Participation in this project gives students the chance to use educational games and activities which help them to acquire new skills and better competencies.



The school is included in a municipal project for reducing the number of dropouts and students at risk in the region of Sliven. Reintegration of dropout students in the region and preventing them from experiencing it again is achieved by involving all parties interested. Identifying the dropouts, analysis and description of the target group, diagnosing the reasons for early school leaving, associating the time of dropout and the age of students, motivating the dropout students and their parents, creating an adaptive system at school and including students in activities for intercultural education and providing conditions for their successful achievements are the strategic objectives of the project.

Teachers admit it is their own responsibility to make the school more attractive and to keep the students in the classrooms. Part of the school strategy is to have good partnership and cooperation with parents, social institutions and institutions responsible for education in the region, local authorities and NGOs.

“Bratya Miladinovi” Primary school is the biggest school in the region of Sliven with 1555 students of Roma and Turkish origin. The majority of students come from families with low social status and cultural backwardness. Parents have no permanent job and rely mainly on social benefits. Students have bad living condition. In most of the families education is not a value.

Teachers working in the school have high professionalism and dedication in the educational activity. They work with permanent enthusiasm and provide a relaxing and creative atmosphere. They respect good cooperation among colleagues, students, parents and local community. According to them the school is an interesting and wonderful book, in which all the children are authors and characters and they would not allow any of the characters to dropout.

A successful practice in the school is putting parents in action, turning them into loyal friends, ready to break the tradition and avoid early marriages.

“Bratya Miladinovi” Primary school participates in different National Programmes and projects. Some of them are: „Success”, “With care for each student”, „School without absences”, “With different culture - united in life”, “Side by side to the general future” etc.

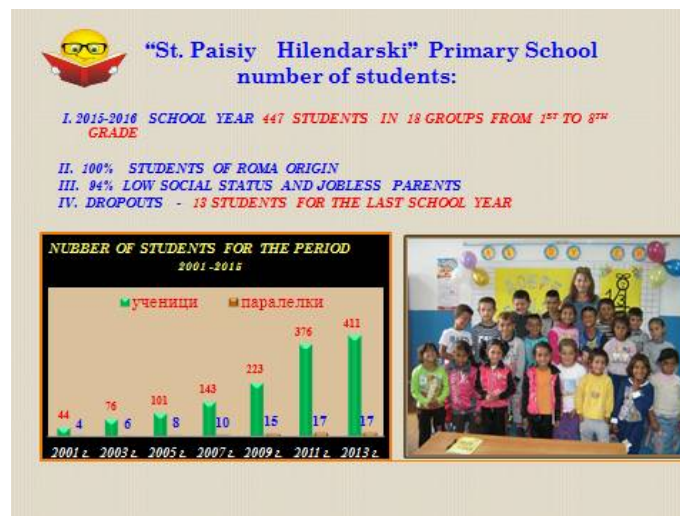
Various forms of extracurricular activities are an other successful measure to avoid early school leaving. They make school life interesting and attractive for the students. Special attention



is paid to talented children. Public appearance and meetings with institutions give them the opportunity to get recognition in society. Assessments of the achievements like diplomas, medals and cups are good motivation for the students.

Main objective of the teaching staff is to make students feel accepted, significant with their success and able to study, to create, to express themselves and to earn awards.

In the presentation of “St. St Cyril and Methodius“ Primary school the use of interactive e-lessons was mentioned as a successful measure to prevent early school leaving. Teachers shared good practices for using web-based electronic systems for training like ENVISION - educational software that provides active participation of each student in the learning process or the educational presentation software MozaBook.



A successful example for attracting students and keeping them in the classrooms is “St. Paisiy Hilendarski” Primary school in the village of Sotirya. For the last seven years, thanks to the good management and the motivated and innovative teachers staff the number of students in the school has increased from 44 students in 2001/2002 to 447 students in 2015/ 2016 school year. Creating an attractive school environment was the first step to be done in the school.

Being tolerant, using rich variety of teaching methods and including students in various extracurricular activities like Roma dances, Russian songs, art clubs and sport activities is the main strategy of the pedagogical specialists.



“Dobri Chintulov” High School of Maths and Natural Sciences in Sliven is a good example for a school without dropouts. Some of the measures for preventing absenteeism and early school leaving that are undertaken in the school are:

- permanent monitoring of the number of absences and the reasons for them.
- availability of school system for informing the school management.
- restrictions in the cases of large number of excused absences and penalties for unexcused absences.
- including students in groups for extracurricular activities. (stage performances, shows, concerts, public celebrations and holidays, class competitions, ecological campaigns, charity campaigns, sport activities, groups for first aid in cooperation with the Youth Red Cross organization in the city, joint initiatives and work with representatives of business.
- Psychological support for students and families. Group and individual work with students who have problems.

It was discussed and concluded among partners that the greatest number of dropouts in the three countries comes from Vocational schools. For example the Vocational High School of Mechanical Techniques in Sliven has 26 dropouts for the last three school years.

Among positive aspects in the school activities to prevent dropping out and risky behavior of students are interactive teaching methods, use of ICT, e-lessons and multimedia presentations, improving the conditions for educational process and enhancing the material and technical base - modernized workshops, innovative equipped auto service, computer labs etc., participation of students in regional and national competitions in professions and achieving high awards there.

The initiative "Read with me" held in the school has the purpose to promote and improve literacy skills of students.

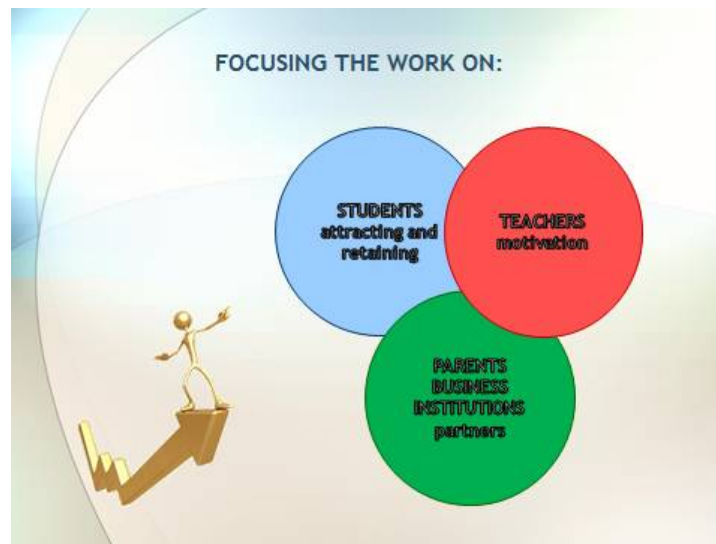
The student club "Young revivals" gives knowledge about the history of our nation and aims to create a sense of national pride and selfconfidence.

Students in the school are given the opportunity to exhibit their gifts and talents in different extracurricular activities like clubs of interests, sport competitions and celebrations.



Planting the schoolyard is an initiative organized by the school management in order to prevent risky behavior among students.

Project work is a priority. Participation in the national program "With care for each student," provides training to talented students and gives them the chance to participate in school competitions like Technical drawing for example. The National program "School without absences", measure "Without absence" provides aids for students and purchasing transport cards for punished students. The school helps students from socially disadvantaged families with scholarships in order to prevent them from dropping out. Return of early school leavers to the formal system of education and training is achieved through the use of various forms of education: extramural and individual.



The program of meeting included visits to different types of schools and institutions in Sliven, Nova Zagora, Kotel and Sotirya. The partners visited primary schools, secondary schools, vocational schools, kindergartens and a Center for Early Childhood Development in Kotel.

The Center for Early Childhood Development in Kotel was built by UNICEF Bulgaria, with the assistance of the municipality of Kotel and the support of IKEA Bulgaria, that provided the funds for the renovation and equipment of the building. The center aims to broaden the access of 3-4 year old children to educational activities, which would then successfully prepare them for



the compulsory preschool trainings. Apart from that, the center works with parents for their active participation and support of early childhood development.

The center conducts various sorts of group activities which help children be more prepared for their preschool education. The work with children is organized in a way that ensure active participation of the parents as well. Adults can be provided with training for parental skills, better care of the children and support for their educational needs. Healthy food is also provided for the period in which the children are engaged with activities in the center. It is very interesting and entertaining to observe and participate in an educational activity with children and parents together.

"Elitsa" kindergarten in Sliven we watched a game-cognitive practical situation with children titled "Neverending Story". It was a realization of pedagogical skills and innovative ideas of educators to organize stimulating creative environment in which children have conditions for deployment of their linguistic expertise, imagination and creativity. Educational and practical tasks were thematically designed and the content of the situation was structured so that it included children from different age groups. Children faced the challenge to develop speech skills in a new fantasy setting. The artistic potential of famous folk tales was used as the basis for the realization of educational objective to stimulate the creative imagination of children and their curiosity. In the practical part of the situation teachers gave the children the opportunity to produce dolls from familiar tales using available materials. Parents also were involved in practical activities as partners of children and teachers in the joint workshop.

Performing a situation built on the storyline of a fairy tale encourages the imagination of children and puts them in the position of key actors and writers of fantasy stories. Teachers combine verbal, visual and interactive gaming methods of interaction. They import kids in the situated enchanting environment using stories and characters close to their experience and gradually bring them into the fairy world. The meeting of children with fairy characters provoke them to offer non-standard answers and express creative proposals.

Priority in our work is supporting schools in the regions to address the dropout of students, promote the development of joint studies and research on the issue, development and exchange of innovative best practices, support and continuous implementation of measures to prevent dropping out.

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Reducing early school leaving is one of the main common goals agreed by the education ministries of European Union countries, with Member States committing to reduce the proportion of early school leavers to less than 10% by 2020 (this figure stood at 13.9% in 2010).

The reasons for early school leaving are diverse and therefore also difficult to tackle: anything from personal or family problems to learning difficulties or a precarious socio-economic situation can have an impact. The infrastructure of the education system and the environment in individual schools are also considerable factors.

All European countries/regions have policies and measures in place that can help reduce early school leaving. These measures are divided into preventive, interventional and compensatory measures. Preventive measures aim to tackle the root problems of the issue, including, for example, improving access to and the quality of early childhood education and care, reducing grade retention or establishing systems of positive discrimination. Interventional measures are designed to combat any emerging difficulties experienced by students, and include individual support, support for low achievers, language support, networking with parents, etc. Compensatory measures offer those who have left education and training prematurely new opportunities to obtain qualifications.

2.2 Financing the activities

The activities described in this strategy will be financed with the budgets of the municipalities or with funds ensured by different projects and programs.



3. ACTION PLAN

| No | Action | Main goal | Description of action | Target groups | Resources | Timeframe | Budget |
|----|---|---|--|--|---|-----------|--------------------|
| 1 | Social Inclusion of students with special needs | Increasing opportunities of students with special needs and supporting the school staff for implementation of suitable educational methods | Development of educational concept based on the expertise specially created for students with special needs | Teachers and Children in pre-schools on the age of 5 - 6 years old | Applying for projects – national funds and EU funds (Erasmus + program) | 2022-2027 | 100,000-150,000EUR |
| 2. | Supporting the Roma students with additional mentoring support | Increasing inclusion of Roma students within educational system with focus on students with academic underachievement's | Ensuring additional support by mentors who will work with Roma students individually in understanding of the school lessons | Roma Children in primary schools on the age of 7-10 years old | Applying for projects – national funds and EU funds (Erasmus + program) | 2022-2027 | 100,000-150,000EUR |
| 3 | Introduction of the Roma traditions and culture in non-formal educational activities | Promotion of the cultural differences of the Roma population | Development of the educational concept to introduce the Roma traditions and culture in the primary school non formal education | Teachers and Roma Children in primary schools on the age of 7 - 8 years old or children in the primary schools | Applying for projects – national funds and EU funds (Erasmus + program) | 2022-2027 | 100,000-150,000EUR |
| 4 | Supporting the Roma students with educational ICT equipment | Enable Roma students to face the challenges in over passing the new ICT based educational methods | Providing ICT educational equipment and necessary mentoring support | Teachers and Roma students | Applying for projects – national funds and EU funds (Erasmus + program) | 2022-2027 | 100,000-150,000EUR |
| 5 | Introduction of the ICT based educational concepts for students with educational difficulties | Increasing of the students interest by using of the state of the art technology based educational concept for facing of the obesity challenge | Development in implementation of the ICT based educational approaches (VR and AR educational software) in tackling of the challenge of the increased number of the students with academic underachievement | Teachers, students from primary schools (10 - 13 years old) | Applying for projects – national funds and EU funds (Erasmus + program) | 2022-2027 | 100,000-150,000EUR |