

Violence Against Children in CROATIA

Relevant extracts from an NGO alternative report presented to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child

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Centre for Social Policy Initiatives – English

[www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Croatia_ngo_report\(E\).doc](http://www.crin.org/docs/resources/treaties/crc.37/Croatia_ngo_report(E).doc)

[...]

The area of education is in Croatia a very sensitive issue, since the complete educational system, ranging from school syllabus, school management and financing is very centralised, and the teaching method and organisation is dominated by the frontal and directive method including control and punishment.

[...]

The children in Vukovar, actually separated because of their ethnic background, and because of a general social division that does not encourage out-of-institutional social contacts between Croats and Serbs, these children lack the chance to meet, learn and to socialise with the peers of other ethnic origin also in schools. Although the school is not the only socialisation agent, it is for a longer period of childhood and youth the fundamental formative agent, and therefore it is a justified assumption that the school could play an important role in the process of social reconstruction and the recovery of the social life in Vukovar. The experience of other countries (i.e. Israel, USA, North Ireland, Macedonia) reflect that schools and education are fields that the efforts of authorities and professional are focused on to overcome social conflicts of different ethnic, religious, or national groups and to establish more favourable social conditions for children that have to learn how to live together with others.

[...]

The research “Attitudes of children, parents and teachers in Vukovar concerning the education of minority groups“ was conducted in October 2001 on a sample of 718 pupils from primary and secondary schools in Vukovaru, 953 parents and 113 teachers that teach in schools in Croatian and Serbian language. First of all the attitudes of children, parents and teachers of Croatian and Serbian nationality towards separated and integrated education of children in Vukovar in regard to several aspects: the value of education for the life of individuals, attitudes towards the integration of education and general social integration of children of Croatian and Serbian nationality, attitudes towards religious education in schools, and their attitudes towards multi-culturality. The results of the analysis of these attitudes present the following:

1. Pupils, parents and teachers regardless of their ethnic origin consider education as a very important and highly positioned life value. All participants also clearly support the respect for differences. But by the analyses of all other attitudes it is possible to conclude the following:
2. Separated education of children has left the deepest impact on them; and unlike their parents and teachers, the children express a great readiness for the discrimination of members of the other group. This clearly demonstrates that the segregated mode of education by which children cannot come into contact in their most natural surrounding – in schools – has far fetching consequences for the process of social reconstruction and integrated intercultural life. Herewith are the chances and equal opportunities for minority group children decreased.
3. Although the parents of children attending education in the Serbian language and letters also think that separated schools are the most desirable solution, it is important to stress that other offered options are also acceptable for them, options that guarantee the preservation of their native language and culture.

4. Teachers in the education held in Croatia and Serbian language demonstrate very different attitude towards forms of education of minorities. Psychologically the assumption is justified that at the bottom of these differences are not only different attitudes towards the preservation of the minority cultures, but also the fear that a number of teachers will loose their jobs if the education will be organised in a different manner.

The results of this research demonstrate that the segregated educational system prevents a successful integration of children, members of the minority group, in the society of the majority group and this influences their psychological health: feeling of self-respect, acceptance and successfulness, as well as their possibility for good vertical mobility and adoption of a safe and complementary dual identity.

[...]

The Roma population as a social group is exposed to all forms of marginalisation. To which extent, it is hard to present with certainty. This field is not systematically monitored (except for a couple of smaller sociological researches about the marginal position of Roma people in the society).

According to the existing data their problems are as follows: the issue of their housing and living standard, high unemployment rate, high percentage of illiteracy and small number of children included in the educational system.

A large number of Roma population lives in the suburbs of towns and cities, without the basic medical, sanitary, hygienic and housing minimum. According to the 1991 data there were 3 367 Roma people living in bigger cities and, and 3 328 in the other settlements. Their economic status is a result of their educational, qualificational and professional insufficiencies for a job. The majority of the members of the Roma community are employed only occasionally or they are unemployed. Their source of income is not consistent. Very often they have several sources of income (if they have an income). To a large extent they are beneficiaries of social welfare assistance.

The Roma children of the kindergarten age are rarely included in this kind of education. [...] Roma children of the school age attend school in the Croatian language with the other children, but only 10% of Roma children really finish primary schools. [...] There are no official data concerning the number of Roma children included in the regular educational system⁴. According to some statistical data we can come to the conclusion that only 50% of the Roma children attend primary school, and from that number only some 50% finishes primary school (which means that only some 25% of the total number of Roma children finishes primary school). The secondary education is continued only by 10% of Roma children (which represents only 2,5% of the total number of Roma children). Only 50% finishes secondary education (which represents 1,25% of the total number of Roma children). Only 1% from this number continues their education at the universities (representing 0,01% of the total number)⁵. [...] Although the teachers declared that they have the same relation towards all children the CHC activists have noted a case of physical violence by a teacher towards a Roma child. In April 2002, 57 Roma children from the Medimurje County, have filed a complaint against the Ministry of Education and Sports, local authorities of the Medimurje County and 4 primary schools, for segregation in the Medimurje schools. The legal advice was received by a local lawyer, who was engaged by the CHC and the European Roma Centre. Since the complaint was rejected by the Municipality Court, the case was transferred to the Constitutional Court of the Rep. of Croatia. In case of failure, it has been planned to file a complaint at the European Court for Human Rights⁷.

[...]

Problems that children separated from their parents or guardians that are foreigners in Croatia are as follows: [...]

The high fluctuation of this group – from running away to disappearance of a large number of these children only a couple of days after they have been accommodated might imply that their existence is endangered or that there is a high possibility of them being trafficked.

[...]

In Croatia a number of different projects have been initiated to prevent violence among children (bullying) but very few have started on the democratisation of the relationship between children – teachers - parents, and children are further subjected to the violence of a hidden curriculum and the

⁴ Total number of pupils in primary schools is approx. 1.380, and in secondary 200 (from Chapter I: Political replies, p. 322, www.vlada.hr)

⁵ See: Report for Croatia in "Save the Children Report", p. 124

⁷ Roma Rights, Quarterly Journal of the European Roma Rights Center, No 1-2, 2003, p. 83

authoritative behaviour of teachers, as well as to the punishment of parents due to poor school achievements. In 2002, before the UN Special Session for Children - the UNICEF office for Croatia in the framework of the campaign «Say Yes for Children» made a survey and the children stressed as their biggest problem physical punishment. The newspaper headlines were «The children of Croatia declared to UNICEF that they are being physically punished".

[...]

Children with special needs attend since 1980 regular and special schools, and in 2000/ 2001 approx. two thirds (7.500) attended regular primary school programs, and a third of them attended special school programs (3936). In relation with the total number of school children there are 3% of children with special needs, which means that there is still a large number of undiscovered children (the figures in the world are that there are some 10% of children with special needs), that stay at home without adequate education or they are still undiscovered in schools without satisfactory treatment, and this result in school drop-out or other forms of behavioural disorders.

[...]

The area of EDUCATION, LITERACY AND CULTURE is the most unbalanced area in the State Report. The State Report lacks information about the education of minorities as well as the education of children with special needs. The Complementary Report is addressing the educational component of human rights and child rights, and the legal framework – Amendments on the Law on Education. As children with developmental disabilities are included in the educational process according to special programs, the Complementary Report is introducing this component as well.

[...]