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AD HOC COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON ROMA AND TRAVELLER¹ ISSUES (CAHROM)

**CAHROM THEMATIC VISIT ON
ENHANCING THE EFFECTIVE REALIZATION OF ROMA CHILDREN'S COMPULSORY SCHOOL EDUCATION
AND ADDED VALUE OF ENSURING ACCESS TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FOR ROMA YOUTH**

Chişinău and Vulcăneşti, Republic of Moldova, 24-26 April 2018

FINAL THEMATIC REPORT

**approved by the experts of the thematic group and endorsed by the CAHROM at its 16th plenary meeting
(Strasbourg, 16-19 October 2018)**

¹ The term "Roma and Travellers" is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term "Gens du voyage", as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. INTRODUCTION		page 3
1.1	Context of the thematic report and visit	page 3
1.2	Introduction to the situation in the Republic of Moldova, hosting country	page 7
1.3	European and international texts of reference	page 9
1.4	Composition of the thematic group of experts	page 9
1.5	Programme of the thematic visit and main issues addressed	page 10
II. SIZE, COMPOSITION, LANGUAGE, LIFESTYLE AND SITUATION OF THE GROUPS COVERED BY THE REPORT		page 10
III. COMPULSORY AND VOCATIONAL EDUCATION LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICES		page 10
IV. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNED, GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED AND ENVISAGED FOLLOW-UP		page 11
4.1	General conclusions on the topic	page 11
4.2	Specific conclusions of the thematic group of experts	page 14
4.3	Lessons learnt by the experts	page 14
4.4	Good practices identified	page 15
4.5	Envisaged short-term and mid-term follow-up	page 17
APPENDICES:		page 19
<i>Appendix 1:</i>	<i>Official invitation letter received from the Moldovan authorities</i>	
<i>Appendix 2:</i>	<i>Programme of the CAHROM thematic visit in the Republic of Moldova</i>	
<i>Appendix 3:</i>	<i>List of experts and participants in the thematic visit</i>	
<i>Appendix 4:</i>	<i>European and international standards and reference texts</i>	
<i>Appendix 5:</i>	<i>Size, composition, language, lifestyle and situation of the groups covered by the thematic visit</i>	
<i>Appendix 6:</i>	<i>Compulsory education including vocational - legislative and policy framework and practices in countries participating in the thematic visit</i>	
<i>Appendix 7:</i>	<i>UNICEF materials on project conducted in Vulcănești village</i>	
ADDENDUM:	<i>Experts' and participants' presentations and other relevant documents</i>	page 20

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Context of the thematic report and visit

The issue of the level of education among Roma communities in Europe has been a matter of serious concern and efforts, both at national and international levels for decades². Education has become a priority and one of the main areas of member states' interventions in the framework of all existing national Roma integration strategies, and the subject of high financial and organisational investments. Unfortunately, the results are still a far cry from satisfactory. Moreover, as many countries do not collect educational data-related to Roma pupils and youth, it is hard to gauge the progress made where actions have been taken in the field of education, but also to obtain such basic information as the level of enrolment of Roma children in compulsory schooling and their transition to secondary education. Ignoring the school compulsory education in case of Roma pupils is blatant proof of the systemic marginalisation of Roma across Europe.

Compulsory education is usually presented as the indispensable minimum requirement to acquire the necessary knowledge and skills for basic social inclusion, employment and active citizenship, while the prognosis of labour market specialists leave no illusions as to future job requirements: in the forthcoming 20 to 30 years at least half of today's existing jobs will disappear, and they are, unsurprisingly, mainly the low-skilled ones. The new types of jobs will be connected to high competencies, flexibility in the labour market and combined with lifelong learning: *65% of children entering primary school today will ultimately end up working in completely new job types that do not yet exist. In such a rapidly evolving employment landscape, the ability to anticipate and prepare for future skills requirements, job content and the aggregate effect on employment is increasingly critical for businesses, governments and individuals in order to fully seize the opportunities presented by these trends - and to mitigate undesirable outcomes*³. In the case of Roma children, discussions and efforts still focus on the issue of completing primary education. How will the younger generation of Roma secure job opportunities, especially given the fact that Roma constitute the youngest population in Europe?

According to the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) [Roma survey – data in focus. Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States](#)⁴ from 2011 many alarming facts are visible:

- On survey average: **17 % of Roma children were never in education** with the highest rates in Greece (44%), Portugal (32%), France and Romania (24%) and with the lowest rates in Hungary (3%), the Czech Republic and the Slovak Republic (1%).
- On survey average: **27 % of Roma children have not completed primary education** with the highest rates in France (44%), Spain (43%), Romania (35%), and Bulgaria (31%) and with the lowest rates in the Slovak Republic (17%) and the Czech Republic (10%).

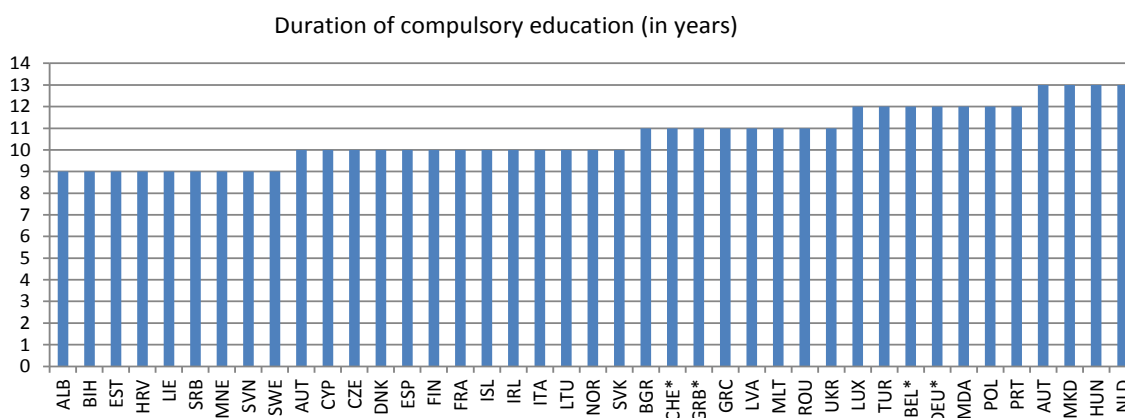
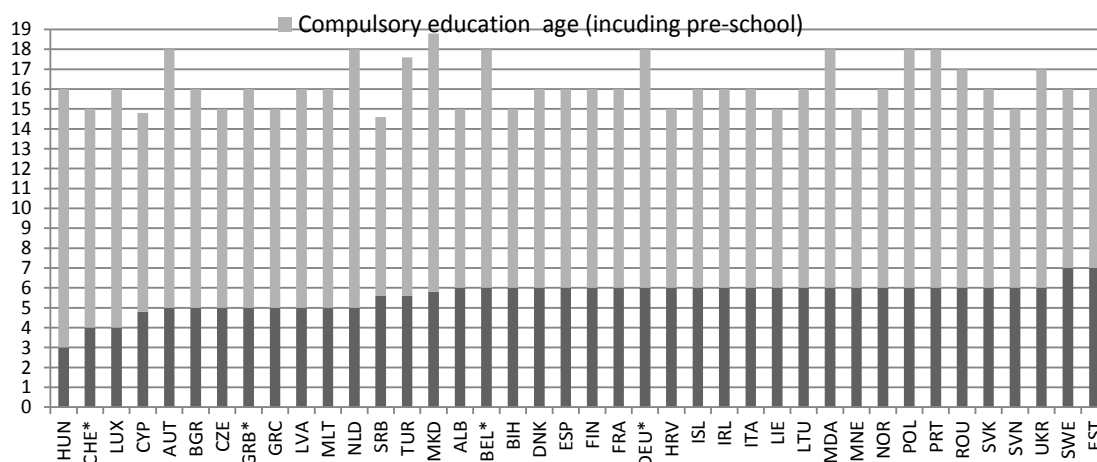
² From the list of CAHROM thematic reports and the countries involved in the thematic groups, one can easily deduce the main priorities and challenges. The most numerous thematic visits - 10 out of 30 in total in the period of 2012-2017 - were related to education: **on reducing school drop-outs and absenteeism of Roma pupils** (the Netherlands, 12-14 March 2012), **on inclusive education as opposed to special schools** (Czech Republic, 1-3 October 2012), **on inclusive education as opposed to special schools** (Slovak Republic, 3-5 October 2012), **on school drop-out and absenteeism of Roma girls** (Finland, 24-26 October 2012), **on inclusive pre-school education for Roma children** (Czech Republic, 19-21 November 2014), **on schooling of Roma migrant and Travellers children** (France, 5-7 October 2015), **on vocational training/education for Roma** (Poland, 26-28 November 2015), **on testing systems and diagnoses for Roma children with allegedly mild mental disabilities** (Hungary, 9-11 March 2016), **on Roma mediation with a focus on school mediators/assistants** (Lithuania, 25-27 April 2017) and **on the teaching of Roma history, including the Roma Holocaust, in textbooks and school curricula** (Slovak Republic, 7-9 November 2017). Endorsed thematic reports are available on: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/cahrom>

³ *The Future of Jobs. Employment, Skills and Workforce Strategy for the Fourth Industrial Revolution*, World Economic Forum, 2016, p. 3. http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_Future_of_Jobs.pdf

⁴ Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovak Republic and Spain.

- On survey average: **47 % of Roma children have completed primary education** with the highest rates in the Slovak Republic (67%), the Czech Republic (66%), and Hungary (63%) and the lowest rates in France (30%) and Greece (29%).
- On survey average: **10 % of Roma children and youth have completed secondary and higher education** with the highest rate in the Czech Republic and Poland (20%), the Slovak Republic (15%) and Hungary (13%) and with the lowest rates in France (4 %), Spain (3%), Greece (2%) and Portugal (1%).
- On survey average: **27 % finished school after the age of 16 or were still in education after the age of 16** with the highest rates in the Czech Republic (47%), Hungary (44%), Poland and the Slovak Republic (41%) and with the lowest rates in Spain (18%), Italy (16%), Portugal (10%) and Greece (4%).
- On survey average: **56% of Roma children leave school before the age of 16** with the highest rates in Bulgaria (67%), Spain (66%), and Italy (63%) and the lowest rates in Hungary (53%), the Czech Republic, Greece and Romania (52%), France (49%) and Poland (45%).

One of the basic problems seems to be the realisation of compulsory school education and its enforcement by states, according to law obligations vary from country to country: starting age of 3 to 7, ending age of 15 to almost 19 (graph 1) and duration of compulsory education between 9 to 13 years (graph 2)⁵:



*differences on local level, most common chosen here

⁵ Data for school year 2017/2018: *European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2017. Compulsory Education in Europe – 2017/18*. Eurydice Facts and Figures. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, p. 4
https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/fpfis/mwikis/eurydice/images/d/df/Compulsory_Education_2017_18.pdf

Graph 2 clearly shows that the duration of compulsory education differs: 9 years (in 9 countries), 10 years (13 countries), 11 years (in 8 countries), 12 years (in 7 countries) and 13 years (in 4 countries). However that fact has not impact on the opportunities, or rather the lack thereof, offered to Roma pupils to pursue quality education which can assure them access to the labour market, economic independence and integration. Moreover, the compulsory duration of school duty should, at least, offer them vocational skills should they, for any reason, not want or are not able to pursue their education to the tertiary level.

According to the *Midterm review of the EU Framework for National Roma Integration Strategies up to 2020*⁶: *Regarding progress in access to **education**, participation of Roma in early childhood education has improved since 2011 in most of countries from 47% in 2011 to 53% in 2016: Attendance of compulsory secondary education has also improved, from 86% to 90%; and secondary school drop-out rates have decreased from 87 % to 68 %, leading to an average increase of Roma staying in secondary school. However, the share of Roma students attending classes where “all classmates are Roma” has increased (from 10% to 15%).*

The reasons for schools drop-outs reported in the above mentioned FRA survey are:

- Of economic nature: high costs, need to work, etc. – on survey average: 37% with highest rate in Greece and Romania (55%);
- Of practical nature - restricted access due to: distance, lack of documents, illness, dismissal, failure, etc. - on survey average: 14%;
- Of personal nature: marriage, pregnancy⁷ – on survey average: 8% with highest rate in Poland (18%);
- Of the individual conviction that the achieved level of education is sufficient: on survey average: 28% with highest rate in Slovak Republic (41%), followed by Bulgaria (38 %), Czech Republic (36%), France (30%) and Hungary (29%).

Based on those results the obstacles in enrolment of Roma children in education system can be defined as those connected to a system and/or infrastructure: lack of documents, distance and lack of public transportation, connected costs (textbooks, school starter kit, etc.) and to an individual perception within the Roma families (motivation, need/will to engage children in contributing to household incomes, subjective sense of school environment openness and safety – especially important in case of Roma girls, etc.

In light of this information it is worthy to mention a few attempts to limit the school drop-out rates.

In June 2017, Bulgaria introduced a vast survey on school drop-outs and the continuation of education after completing primary school. Findings from that search are as follows:

- 130,000 children do not attend school in Bulgaria, the majority of them are Roma children;
- **students dropping out after completing primary education are the largest group of drop-outs:** 6.33% of students (2,763 out of 42,221) who graduated from primary school are not enrolled in secondary or high schools (compared to 3-4% in previous years);

⁶ Material sent by Non-discrimination and Roma coordination Unit, Directorate-General Justice and Consumers to Member States in March 2018 for the meeting of National Roma Contact Point, 16 March 2018, Brussels.

⁷ According to Eurostat, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary and Slovakia are the countries with the highest proportion of births of [teenage mums](#), respectively: 12.3%, 11,9%, 9% and 8,4%. As it relates to Greece and the Netherlands, EU countries participated in the visit, the rate of teenage birth giving is: 3.2% (Greece) and 1,3 % (Netherlands). In 2015 the highest number of birth given by [girls aged 10-14](#) was in Romania - 351, followed by Bulgaria - 138 and France -117; in case of Greece - 30 and the Netherlands – 0.

- **the presence / absence of a secondary school in the respective locality is a statistically significant factor affecting enrolment in secondary education:** the percentage of non-enrolled primary school pupils who are the only ones living in their respective location is almost doubled: 8.97% compared to 5.03% of the primary school graduates in the cities;
- drop-out students are not evenly distributed across schools and regions, and there is an over-concentration in certain municipalities and schools.

As a follow up, the inter-institutional mechanism for returning children back to school was established with representatives of all related state agencies and NGOs at the national and local levels (11,602 specialists organised in 1,103 teams): teachers, parents, police officers, social workers, health mediators, etc. Those teams visited homes of children not attending school and spoke to the parents. As a result, many of the children returned to school. However, according to information from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education, many of them attended school for several months but ended up not returning. Nonetheless, it shows that constant and recurring pressure can be effective up to a certain point.

Spain also worked on collecting data on schooling. According to the [Executive Summary: Roma Students in Secondary Education in Spain. A Comparative Study](#), 64% of Roma youth fail to complete their compulsory secondary education studies (ESO) compared to 13% for the population as a whole. Moreover, the illiteracy rate of the Roma community stood at 8.7% in 2011 compared to 2.19% for the whole of Spain. By age 16 the Roma enrolment rate declines to 55%, far below the 93.5% for the rest of the population. In 2007, only 2.6% of the Roma population had gone on to higher education compared to 22% of the population as a whole. (...) at age 15-16 the vast majority of Roma who remain in school are enrolled in middle level vocational training or an Initial Professional Qualification Programme (PCPI). The situation is even worse in the case of Roma girls and young women. (...) As for the level of education achieved by Roma youth aged 16 to 19, 62.7% have completed primary school, 24.8% have earned their ESO diploma and only 7.4% completed non-compulsory secondary education (high school or intermediate-level vocational training). At these ages, the difference with the general population is quite significant; for that same age bracket, 47% of the general population earned their ESO diploma and 24.7% finished non-compulsory secondary education. (...) As regards the youngest age bracket (between 15 and 19), 43.3% of the Roma population neither studies or works, 30.4 percentage points above the national rate (which stands at 12.8%). In the next age bracket considered (20 to 24) the gap with the national indicator narrows: 48.5% of Roma youth are not engaged in any sort of training or labour activity compared to 27.4% of the general population. For both age groups, the percentage of Roma women who neither study nor work is higher than Roma men with differences ranging from 6.7 percentage points for the youngest bracket to 8.8 for the 20 to 24 year old group⁸.

One of the Spanish NRIS objectives is to raise the number of students completing ESO. In 2007 the figures were 78.1% for boys and 71.7% for girls - the goal by 2020 is to reach 90% range for boys and girls. The Fundación Secretariado Gitano launched in 2009 the [Promociona Programme](#), financed by the European Social Fund, with the ultimate goal to reduce early school leaving, to help young Roma to achieve higher academic standards at the end of primary education, to complete the compulsory secondary level of education and to continue middle and/or higher studies and vocational training in order to improve access to the labour market for Roma youth. Figures of the above mentioned *Promociona programme* for the 2014/2015 school year show that stable

⁸ Fundación Secretariado Gitano, *Executive Summary: Roma Students in Secondary Education in Spain. A Comparative Study*, p.7, p. 14, see: Addendum.

investment and pressure for schooling bring results: out of 1 276 students from 373 schools enrolled into the programme - 75% of the boys and 89.5% of the girls (a total of 82.25 %) earned their secondary school, and 87.8% of the boys and 75.3% of the girls (a total of 81.55%) programme participants continuing post-compulsory studies.

One of the recommended tools as (relatively) efficient for the education of Roma pupils, especially in relation to school enrolment and for the creation of Roma role models, are **Roma school mediators**. Of a total of 6,082 Roma mediators working in CoE members states⁹ 2,368 work as Roma school mediators (39 %), and in the countries which participated in the thematic visit, the number of mediators working specifically as *school mediators* is as follows:

- Republic of Moldova: 0¹⁰ (est. number of Roma population: 107,100)
- Bosnia and Herzegovina: 14 (est. number of Roma population: 58,000)
- Greece: 42¹¹ (est. number of Roma population: 110,007¹²)
- Hungary: 192¹³ (est. number of Roma population: 750,000)
- The Netherlands: 0 (est. number of Roma population: 40,000)
- Poland: 92¹⁴ (est. number of Roma population: 25,000)
- Slovak Republic: 1,287¹⁵ (est. number of Roma population: 490,000)
- Ukraine: 2¹⁶ (est. number of Roma population: 260,000).
-

1.2 Introduction to the situation in the Republic of Moldova – hosting country

According to the UNDP report 2007: [Roma in the Republic of Moldova](#) 21 % of adult Roma are illiterate (compared to 2% of non-Roma) that means that one fifth of the Roma population is excluded from social and economic life. Apart from the group of illiterate Roma, only three out of ten Roma have primary education, and another three out of ten have secondary education/gymnasium level (including incomplete or vocational education). The Education Index is one third lower for Roma (0.641) than for non-Roma (0.910) and is the most important difference between Roma and non-Roma in Moldova, as compared with other components of Human Development Index. *This suggests that closing the education gap could effectively contribute to the human development of Roma and bring them closer, in terms of human development, to the majority population*¹⁷. 43 % of Roma children age 7-15 do not attend school; primary education (7-11) covers less than 70% Roma pupils, and secondary (12-15) less than 50%. Persons with college and higher (academic) education are estimated as 4% of Roma. Reasons for school drops outs are similar to those presented by FRA, mentioned above: economic (34%) , no need for further education (14%), the need to bring income to the household (85%), marriage (8%), illness (7%), distance (5%), discrimination (2%), nonetheless it must be noticed here, that

⁹ Data collected for the purpose of CAHROM thematic visit on **Roma mediation (with a focus on school mediators/assistants)**, held in Vilnius, Lithuania, on 25-27 April 2017, and updated in November 2017 during 14th CAHROM plenary, see report from the visit <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/cahrom>

¹⁰ Roma community mediators have been institutionalised in the Republic of Moldova. However, they are not labelled as school mediators and work mainly as health and social mediators. The total number of Roma Community Mediators hired by local governments varies from year to year (2013 - 15 mediators hired in 2013, 48 in 2014, 15 in 2015, 9 in 2016).

¹¹ In Greece there are in total 127 Roma mediators. They do not have a particular "specialization" like "school mediators" or "health mediators". They are working in all areas, accordingly to local needs. However, 42 of them are working in practice in school environment.

¹² Data collected by Greek authorities on the basis of mapping of the Roma settlement, conducted by the Special Secretariat on Roma Social inclusion.

¹³ Another 119 work as Roma employment mediators in Hungary.

¹⁴ Another 20 work as Roma health mediators in Poland.

¹⁵ Another 229 work as Roma health mediators, another 860 as Roma employment mediators and another 533 as community mediators in the Slovak Republic.

¹⁶ Another 19 work as Roma health mediators in Ukraine.

¹⁷ *Roma in the Republic of Moldova*, UNDP Moldova, 2007, p.62.

when it comes to answers to detailed questions approx. 1/3 of Roma respondents refused the answer or answered “I do not know”. [Study on the situation of Romani women and girls in the Republic of Moldova](#) , UNDP Moldova in co-operation with UN Women and OHCHR, 2014, excerpt data concerning the differences between Roma girls and boys: only 52% of Roma girls and 55% Roma boys are involved into primary education, only 14% of Roma girls and 17% Roma boys are involved into secondary professional education, only 63% of adult (16+) Roma women are literate¹⁸.

A comprehensive UNICEF report: [Roma children and Their Access to Services. Participatory Assessment of Barriers. Qualitative Sociological Survey](#) gives a decent overview of the educational situation of Roma children in the Republic of Moldova, with a focus on barriers in access to education: *Schooling is perceived by Roma as a tool in which children learn to read and write, with their school education usually ending at primary classes. Cases of further education in the secondary school or university are an exception. Enrolment of girls and boys is uneven, and is higher among boys. Education is not highly valued for the Roma, even if some Roma people realize the benefits of education. People who manage to go beyond the Roma’s normal “educational limit” are frequently rejected by Roma. A parent of a Roma family is a passive actor of the education process. Attendance of preschool institutions by Roma children is not accepted nor promoted in their community. Non-schooling of Roma is due to a number of reasons, both objective and subjective. The main causes of dropout at an early age are migration and early marriages. (...) The survey answers showed that family and money are the fundamental values of the Roma community. (...) The most frequent reason for the schooling of children was acquisition of basic writing and reading skills. (...) Some young Roma people and non-Roma parents believe that education can protect children from non-standard and antisocial behaviour (...) In most cases, vulnerable Roma families face difficulties in providing children with school supplies. (...) Rent payment for books or purchases of exercise books and supplies are an obstacle to the child’s schooling. (...) The survey showed low preparation levels of Roma children for school. Compared with their peers, Roma lack the age-specific knowledge. (...) Failure to attend a preschool institution affects the following enrolment in school. Some teachers mentioned the poor development of motor skills, poor memory training of some children, lack of awareness of the collective behaviour rules, etc. (...) The schooling in Roma communities involves a different approach than schooling in non-Roma communities, where parents show a high interest in enrolling their children in schools. (...) In Soroca, at the beginning of each school year, since 2007, an official count of school-age children is conducted in order to identify the number of children present at that time in the town and to persuade parents to educate their children. (...) Another issue was the transfer of responsibility and task of schooling of Roma children from one authority to another. (...) community actors pointed out that Roma leaders themselves, including the community mediator, do not provide a strong example to the Roma people in schooling their children. Girls that were educated in these families continued the tradition of dropping out of school after the age of 12 to 14. In the same context, it was noted that the involvement and effort of Roma leaders in the schooling of Roma children are lower compared to other community actors. (...) Another feature of the Roma’s lifestyle that impacts school attendance is the perception of Roma children’s wishes as a supreme value: if the child does not wish to go to school/kindergarten, the parent does not insist (...).*

*One positive factor that influenced the education of Roma children at all levels is the inclusion of Roma issues on the agenda of various national and international organizations that organize activities with parents and teachers for the inclusion of Roma children in schools*¹⁹.

¹⁸ Study on the situation of Romani women and girls in the Republic of Moldova, UN Women, UNDP, OHCHR, 2014, p. 30.

¹⁹ All the quotations in this paragraph, marked in italics, come from: UNICEF, 2016, Participatory Assessment of Barriers Hampering the Access of Roma Children and their Families to Services, Chisinau, UNICEF Moldova Office, pages: 31-69.

This survey tabled, according to all responses, several measure of school enrolment that can be both, pull factor or barrier, depending on circumstances: infrastructure and equipment of the institution, parents' interest in education, quality of training, attitude of teachers and interaction with peers.

Pull factors are as follows: trained parents and relatives, free food, practical and extracurricular activities.

Apparently barriers in regards to Roma children involvement into schooling system are: traditions and lifestyle (e.g. involvement of girls in household and/or care for other younger children or the risk that they may be "stolen", involvement of boys in income generating activities, including begging), migration (however, according to some experts and parents, children's migration with their parents has some positive effects as it protects children from common risks associated with lack of parental supervision, like drugs abuse, etc.), non-attendance of preschool institutions (enrolment of a child in a kindergarten is a disgrace to the Roma family and is perceived as that family is unable to support their child, and mother is usually labelled a "bad mother"), language barriers, poor living conditions (including the lack of season-specific clothing and footwear), adverse weather conditions, flawed documentation of Roma, complicated curriculum, schedule of classes, lack of school transport, mixed classes (in sense of pupils' age) and, finally, unfounded blaming. The rationale behind those factors, grassroots examples and conclusions are explained in details in above mentioned report.

According to specialists, whenever we are speaking about social integration there are two main and interrelated platforms of integration: education and labour market. As long as Roma are not present at schools - as a consequence - they are not present in labour market. Thus, the integration remains only a postulate.

1.3 European and international texts of reference

See Appendix 4.

1.4 Composition of the thematic group of experts

Experts participating in the visit represented a wide range of entities dealing with Roma issues and/or education at different levels: institutions responsible for national minorities and/or persons responsible for implementation of the Roma inclusion strategies. The list of the experts participating in the thematic group is listed below and their contacts details can be found in Appendix 3.

Experts from the REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA, requesting/hosting country

Mr Nicolae RADIȚA

CAHROM member, National Centre of Roma

Ms Olga PETUHOVA

CAHROM substitute, Bureau of Inter-Ethnic Relations,

Experts from BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA, GREECE, HUNGARY, THE NETHERLANDS, POLAND, UKRAINE, partner countries

Ms Aida DŽAFEROVIĆ

Ministry of Civil Affairs, **BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

Ms Eleni KALLINIKOU

CAHROM member, Expert within the Special Secretariat on Roma Social Inclusion, Ministry of Labour, Social Insurance and Social Solidarity, **GREECE**

Mr Iván SÖRÖS	Head of Department for Children's Chances, Ministry of Human Resources, State Secretariat for Social Inclusion, HUNGARY (excused for the thematic visit)
Mr Ed HUIJBERS	School attendance officer, Municipality of Veldhoven, THE NETHERLANDS
Ms Alina RESPONDEK	Foundation for the Development of the Education System, POLAND
Ms Natalia TKACHENKO	Head of the Division for International Cooperation of National Minorities Issues, Department for Religious Affairs and Nationalities, Ministry of Culture of Ukraine, UKRAINE

1.5 Programme of the thematic visit and main issues addressed

The agenda (see Appendix 2) included meetings and discussions with several relevant ministries and State agencies (State Chancellery, Ministry of External Affairs and European Integration, Ministry of Education, Culture and Research, Ministry of Health, Labour and Social Protection, Ministry of Internal Affairs, Coordinating Council of Audio-visual and Bureau of Interethnic Relations). During the first day representatives from UNICEF Moldova presented the programme they carried out in partnership with the Youth Resource Centre DACIA (NGO) in Vulcănești village – location of the field visit on the next day (*Promotion of increased participation of Roma children in education*; see Appendix 7). Vulcănești is inhabited by approx. 1,500 people with a 90 % Roma community and is characterized by the lowest rate of school attendance. The field visit was conducted with a view to having direct contact with Roma representatives and local and regional school authorities. The details of the educational situation in Vulcănești are described in the above mentioned Appendix). A debriefing session between the experts of the thematic group was organised in the morning of the third day.

The agenda followed the guidelines developed by the CAHROM and allowed the possibility for partner countries to introduce their experience and exchange views with local interlocutors.

Some of the main issues addressed during the thematic visit included: the need for pre-school education (and the reluctance from some parents), the need to properly equip Roma pupils with basic tools, including textbooks and starter kits, transportation, meals, etc., seasonal migration of Roma families which severely influences school attendance, Roma school mediators system, problem of lack of ID papers, lack of knowledge of the official language among some Roma children, lack of basic data, including the number of Roma children enrolled in the school system (estimates vary between 100 and 5,000!), early marriages – phenomenon still valid within Moldovan Roma communities, etc.

II. SIZE, COMPOSITION, LANGUAGE, LIFESTYLE AND SITUATION OF THE GROUPS COVERED BY THE REPORT

Following the decision taken by the CAHROM at its 12th meeting in November 2016, information about the size, composition, language and situation of the groups covered by the thematic report is no longer included in the core of the document but figures (see Appendix 5).

III. LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY FRAMEWORK AND PRACTICES

See Appendix 6.

IV. CONCLUSIONS, LESSONS LEARNED, GOOD PRACTICES IDENTIFIED AND ENVISAGED FOLLOW-UP

4.1 General conclusions on the topic

School duty is a legal obligation and thus must be enforced by the state for all its citizens, including ethnic Roma citizens

The experts unanimously concluded that a strong message to all CoE member States that schooling is a legal obligation and thus, must be enforced by the States for all its citizens, including Roma citizens. In this regard the question of possible penalties applied for not fulfilling the period of compulsory education duty was discussed and perceived as a possible and potentially effective measure to pressure Roma parents to send their children to school. The case of Drosero Roma settlement in Xanthi (Eastern Thrace), where Roma parents were imposed fine for not sending their children to school, led to a large number of registrations of Roma children into school which is a positive example in this regard. Furthermore, the lack of enforcement of legal obligations is further evidence of the marginalisation and treatment of Roma as “second class” citizens in practice. Education should be at the core of any action taken within national strategies or sectorial action plans on education. The implementation of Roma strategies/action plans should be supported by adequate legislation and institutional mechanisms, including qualified staff, a sustainable budget, etc. that enable effective enforcement.

Poverty is not the single reason for school drops-out

Secondly, poverty is a fact but not the only reason for school absenteeism of Roma pupils and this argument should not be overused while speaking about Roma, neither by the authorities nor by the Roma themselves and should not be used as an “easy excuse” or justification for school drops-out. Nonetheless, poverty still remains an obstacle for schooling as it is related to other phenomena like poor housing conditions, migration, and so on which consequently affects school duty.

Lack of ID papers can negatively influence access to education services. Progress in several countries achieved in this regards should be followed by other countries.

A remaining obstacle is the lack of ID papers, including birth certificates, which is an issue in the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (and in some other European countries) as in practice it closes access to public services, including education. However, positive actions in this regards have been taken by other countries (Romania or Montenegro) and have resulted in gradually solving this problem.

Lack of data on education hinder monitoring of schooling and educational situation of Roma

The lack of data on education was mentioned many times, this issue is raised by different experts during every visit, regardless of the visit’s topic. A tool which could improve the systemic approach to data collection is a mapping of Roma settlements, illustrating different areas of interventions, including education.

Local level crucial for enforcement of school duty regardless of ethnicity

The local level is crucial for the effective implementation of Strategies or Action Plans, adapted to the local needs. They should be characterized by a holistic and dynamic approach, tailored to the local situation. At the local level co-operation is needed between key stakeholders: schools and Roma school mediators, department/person within the local authorities responsible for education, social workers, police officers, etc. Those local “teams” should pay attention also to Roma parents who are often not supporting their children or even not sending them to school. The link between compulsory school duty completion and child benefits should be considered.

Greece is good example since the Social Solidarity Income (SSI) – a welfare programme targeting low income households - is linked with a children’s school attendance; since November, 1st, 2018, the SSI database is digitally inter-connected with the school database *myschool*. Parents are obliged to secure their children’s attendance to school in order to benefit from SSI. A similar solution is considered in Poland.

In the Netherlands, municipalities are responsible for enforcing the law and employ school attendance officers to ensure compliance with the Law. Parents bear primary responsibility for complying with the Compulsory Education Act, i.e. for enrolling their children into school and for ensuring their daily presence at school. When children, Roma or otherwise, are persistently absent, the school attendance officer takes action – if necessary legal – to ensure they go to school. As a last resort, the attendance officer can report the case to the Public Prosecutor; judicial proceedings can lead to a fine or even a custodial sentence on the parents. Fines to Roma parents remain usually unpaid; they are not a suitable answer as they increase family debt and poverty. This is why, in Veldhoven, the fine was replaced by a work penalty (parents who do not send children to school must work on a Saturday). The Dutch model to link family benefits with community work could also be envisaged.

Promotion of Roma role models within the Roma communities and the majority

Roma role models should not only be promoted with the majority in order to change stereotypes, but first and foremost - amongst the Roma community to change their mind-set towards their children’s education – as formal education is not a high priority in Roma culture. Apart from objective reasons (like poverty, inadequate housing etc.) there are also internally motivated reasons for the reluctance towards pre-school education, completion of school duty and continuation into higher education. Roma parents are very often passive actors in the educational process of their children. This issue must be addressed by educational authorities.

Good examples of role models can be Roma school assistants/mediators. States in which the institution of Roma school assistants/mediators does not yet exist, should consider it, and pay special attention to keep the positions of community assistant/mediators separate from school assistants/mediators. School mediators, apart from being facilitators for school, also act as a bridge with Roma parents and can influence their attitude towards continuing school and can fight against negative phenomena within the community, such as early marriages which in practice terminate the education process, especially among Roma girls. The role of trans-generational exchanges among Roma women and girls can also contribute to the process of education. Awareness raising for Roma parents – as responsible for the education of their children and for the completion of school duty, starting with compulsory pre-school education and finishing at the age of 15-19 (depending on country, see: graph 1. in introductory part) – is needed.

Teacher training and multi-disciplinary teams

Furthermore, the lack of training of some teachers to work with pupils of different cultural backgrounds can influence the involvement and attendance of Roma pupils and the attitude of the Roma parents towards the majority society, school institutions and education duty. Teacher training should encompass, among others, information on Roma culture and traditions, a human rights component, the cultural diversity of different groups, the rights relating to the protection of national minorities, etc.

The presented Dutch approach of multi-disciplinary teams, described below under “good practices” can be an efficient tool for monitoring the educational situation of individual Roma pupil and at the same time – for tutoring and mentoring Roma youth.

After-class activities for Roma children

The system of after-class activities exists in many countries. Its goal is to level out specific shortages of Roma pupils as they often cannot be helped within their family environment in this regard. It should be enriched with informal education activities concerning career counselling, especially in case of Roma youth. Vocational advisers speaking about how vocational training can build a good bridge towards employment, related economic independence and the ability to provide for the family and offer Roma youth better knowledge about the labour market and job prospects.

High drop-outs rates at secondary education level although partly compulsory

The thematic visit was dominated by the issue of compulsory education since the data presented showed that on the level of secondary education, including vocational schools, the presence of Roma students is rather symbolic and perceived as not compulsory in practice. This attitude is shared by both the Roma community and very often the authorities. The lack of discussion on vocational education within the context of Roma is thus the diagnosis of an (alarming) situation. Secondary education, which is partly compulsory, is in practice not enforced at all.

Lack of professional skills and the need for “second chance” programmes for Roma youth

The lack of education automatically leads to a lack of any professional skills and a lack of access to the labour market. Therefore a system of “second chance” schools – combining literacy and vocational skills - should be considered and promoted among Roma, in particular for those who dropped out and who would like to return to school and acquire either a higher education or professional skills. Here, the possibilities of the EU European Social Funds and *Erasmus+* can be used (and were used in several countries). The experts agreed that more synergy is needed between Roma-related issues and the use of EU funds at the national level, especially in relation to Roma teenagers that are neither in education nor in employment (NEET). According to the European Commission report on implementation of National Strategies of Roma Inclusion – since 2011 the number of Roma NEET increased from 56 % to 63 % in 2016 – and it affects mainly Roma youth, who makes up the largest part of Roma communities. As those funds enable also trans-border cooperation – the exchange of experiences and sharing of good practices is possible.

In this regard it is very important to focus on presenting to the Roma pupils the possibilities offered by a vocational education, in relation with access to the local labour market and relatively early economic independence which is in line with early marriages and early childbirth, occurring in some Roma communities. It is also in line with the Roma tradition of “family business” and should be promoted by guidance counsellors and career advisers at an early stage. It should be also connected with training on self-employment and entrepreneurship. Also worth considering and to be included in the training, if it exists, is the possibility of micro-credits for Roma women and Roma youth to start their own businesses.

Job counselling at the early educational stage and cooperation with local entrepreneurs

Job information and counselling at an early educational stage is especially relevant in the case of Roma pupils. Paid internships for Roma youth would also be an effective tool to attract them – co-operation with local entrepreneurs should be established and a system of incentives for them prepared (part or full subsidy by the state, tax exemptions, etc.). Such systems operate in Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Netherlands, Greece and Germany.

4.2 Specific conclusions of the thematic group of experts

Field visit

The experts appreciated the visit however the results were far from expected: the Roma parents’ lack of interest for education was visible given the rather low number of Roma pupils present at school; there were no parents at the meeting organised by the school (partly due to the fact that UNICEF organised a conference in Chişinău on the Vulcăneşti project on the same day, and partly because of migration, but those present in the village were not interested in exchange). Discussions with Roma adults revealed that they ignored the fact that education is a legal obligation. Both educational authorities and school staff seemed to be helpless to deal with this phenomenon even though UNICEF is present in this locality and supports the school in question since late 2016. The school building was renovated to some extent but is still far from offering decent conditions (the toilets are outhouses with no doors, and no running water etc.). The option of transferring pupils from the school in Vulcăneşti to the one in Cioareşti (neighbouring village) is being considered but it was clear that there is no definite position. Although roads and basic infrastructure in Vulcăneşti are lacking there were a lot of luxury villas and no “poor” houses. This led experts to the conclusion that, at least in case of this village, poverty is definitely not the reason of school drop-out and despite efforts – the sentiment of impunity and lack of responsibility is obvious. In fact, during the discussions it was mentioned that the poorer parents in the community generally send their children to school but the rich families do not. Clearly, legally binding compulsory education is not enforced in case of Roma although there is a system of adequate (and gradual) sanctions.

4.3 Lessons learned by the experts

During the exchange and discussions on national practices it became clear that there is no single solution or universal approach. There is a visible need to diversify teaching strategies applied to Roma children’s (inclusive) education. The approach should be both, nationally and locally tailored and adapted to the local needs and dynamics.

According to the Dutch expert with regard to the Republic of Moldova – parents should be clearly held responsible for their children’s education and completion of compulsory school duty without exception. His view is shared by other experts, namely the Greek and Polish. Referring to the situation in the city of Veldhoven - researching the possibility of using Roma mediators should be considered.

The Ukrainian expert underlined that Roma education should not be dealt with by only one agency and must be addressed in a comprehensive manner. Providing effective education to Roma is directly linked to the provision of housing, documents, employment, and so on.

The constructive and effective approach to solving the problem is interrelated and should be addressed by all relevant "players": central – the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Culture, the Migration Service, the National Police, the Ministry of Social Policy, and local authorities, teachers, parents, NGOs, etc. The cooperation among schools is crucial; parents and Roma mediators should play an active role in this process. The state should intervene at the earliest possible stage to ensure the successful transition of Roma children from one educational level to another with a focus on secondary and vocational level.

Considering the issue of compulsory education in the light of the experts’ presentations, exchange, discussions and field visit, they have formulated one rudimentary question that should be considered seriously and responsibly by state authorities: **If Roma parents are not treated like all other parents, with the same rights and obligations, what are we teaching the Roma children? If their parents are outside the law, how can respect of the law and responsibility be instilled in these children? These values are essential to help them have a better future, and equal treatment is the best way towards inclusion.**

4.4 Good practices identified

In the Republic of Moldova

- Strong commitment of the Government of the Republic of Moldova for the implementation of the Roma Action Plan 2016-2020,
- Support from Roma NGOs for the Action Plan and their high and effective involvement in solving problems related to facilitation of Roma access to education,
- Mobile registration and medical teams,
- Instructions and respective Action Plan for Prevention and Reduction of Drop-out and Absenteeism in general schools approved by Order Nr. 559 of 12 June 2015 of the Ministry of Education, Culture and Research,
- Establishment of resource centres for inclusive education in 31 educational institutions all over the country,
- Example of election of two Roma women as local councillors at the local council level,
- UNICEF project in Vulcănești - the goal was to improve the school enrolment of Roma children in the village through (provision of computers, books, play room, after-school classes and second chance schooling for children who have not finished compulsory education to take the 9th grade graduation exams, activities with parents, separately for mothers and fathers, work with teachers and bringing new teachers into the school. See details: Appendix 7), while local authorities, in cooperation with Roma NGO, made some renovation of the school building (a new roof, heating system, new windows).

The following good practices have been identified by the Moldovan authorities from the partner countries:

- School attendance officer applying a multidisciplinary approach in their activity (the Netherlands),
- Computerized schooling record for each child (the Netherlands),
- Financial motivation for teachers to train on and apply inclusive teaching methods (Hungary),
- Practice of “second chance” schools offered to Roma children (Greece),
- Roma educational assistants (Poland, Greece),
- Integration dayrooms run both by schools and Roma NGOs (Poland).

In Bulgaria (which did not participate in the thematic group/visit)

- **National survey on school drop-outs** - Bulgaria introduced (2017) a vast national survey on school drop-outs and on the continuation of education after the completion of primary school in order to diagnose the scale and reasons of high school drop outs rates. More details on the preliminary results of the survey are included in the introductory part of this report.

In Greece:

- The Second Chance Schools programme in Greece,
- The existence of the legislative framework, as Greece is currently ready for the implementation of actions/projects,
- The establishment of Multi-centres (*Polikentra*) within Roma Branches of the Community Centres that provide a wide range of services that respond to the needs of support of education, social care and other relevant supporting services,
- The inclusion of teachers to the staff of Roma Branches of the Community Centres.

In Hungary

- the operation of child-care warning system, social workers or child-care professionals in schools and kindergarten where needed, are being employed from January 2016 as a PILOT and extended in 2018.

In Poland

- **Educational data collection system**²⁰ – the System of Educational Information (SIO), according to legal provisions, allows to collect data on pupils of national and ethnic minorities, at all education levels (pre-school – primary – secondary, integrated and special schools), for whom schools provide additional classes (namely national/ethnic minority mother tongue languages , geography and history of country of origin)²¹. In case of Roma pupils, the above-mentioned additional classes are not available, so this legal opportunity encompasses a wide range of activities, related to the “specific educational needs of Roma pupils”, such as: engaging Roma school assistants and support teachers, offering additional support classes, excursions, purchase of textbooks and school supplies, etc. These activities and support are adjusted to the locally identified needs of Roma pupils.
- **Education. Practical guide for Roma parents** (2012, in Polish and in 2 Roma dialects) on education concerning benefits of pre-school education and education in integrated schools²² :

²⁰ See Addendum for education-related data for Roma pupils in Poland.

²¹ It means that this data does not show the total number of pupils in the education system, but the ones for who parents wish to have additional activities to maintain their cultural identity.

²² <http://mniejszosci.narodowe.mswia.gov.pl/mne/romowie/edukacja-dzieci-romskic/7573,Podreczniki-i-publikacje.html>

In the Netherlands

- **Multi-disciplinary teams, electronic data, multi-problem Roma family approach** (in the municipalities of Veldhoven, Nieuwegein and Ede). The basic multi-disciplinary team which uses an integrated approach consists of: a policy maker (integral safety), an integral safety officer, a school attendance officer (integral safety) and two specialized social workers. They have knowledge of Roma communities and individual families and work with Roma families on a daily basis. They supervise multi-problem families and react according to their needs; they consult on a weekly basis and can react immediately if necessary. Every family has a restricted electronic file containing information that allows assessing progress, including on the educational situation of children. On a case-by-case basis, some other experts can be invited for consultations (e.g. experts on debt aid, work and income consultants, staff from the housing commission, staff from the registration office, tax authorities, district supervisor, council for child protection, health service, etc.) – according to the individual needs. The focus of the multi-disciplinary teams is as follows: physical environment, care and well-being, income and education, crime and law enforcement, resilience.
- **Activities for young mothers** – the programme (closed) of information sessions to all young mothers on skills concerning their new duties, etc.

4.5 Envisaged follow-up

At the level of CAHROM

- The experts' recommendation for Roma mapping, shortly following the thematic visit in the Republic of Moldova, was already addressed during the 15th CAHROM plenary session, held on 22-25 May 2018 in Athens, Greece, and existing examples were presented (by Greece, the Slovak Republic, Hungary and "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"). The Committee decided to continue discussing mapping and data collection and proposed it as a topic for one of the forthcoming CAHROM thematic visits (2019 or 2020) – Georgia, Hungary, the Republic of Moldova, Poland, Portugal, Spain, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Ukraine confirmed their interest to participate in such a thematic group;
- A request was addressed to the CAHROM Bulgarian member to highlight the results of the Bulgarian survey conducted on the reasons for drops-out at the secondary education level. Such a presentation took place at the 16th CAHROM plenary meeting (Strasbourg, 16-19 October 2018).

By the Republic of Moldova

- Authorities are preparing the establishment of multidisciplinary teams similar to those existing in the Netherlands, to be put in practice at the national level for all children, including Roma; Roma community mediators are envisaged to be a part of those Teams;
- Intensification of measures aimed at informing and strengthening awareness among Roma parents of the need to enrol children in educational institutions;
- Effective application of measures, including punitive measures, provided for in the legislation to Roma parents neglecting their duty to educate their children;
- Recruitment of all 48 Roma community mediators in 44 settlements populated predominantly by Roma people.

By Bosnia and Herzegovina

- Continuation the harmonization of legislation that facilitates the registration of all citizens in BiH, with special emphasis on the Roma;
- Ensuring a higher level of coordination with relevant educational authorities and institutions in charge of social protection by working on an inter-sectoral approach for the purpose of better monitoring and additional financing of Roma educational needs;
- Increasing the coverage of Roma children by pre-school education and provide funds for this purpose;
- Increasing the inclusion of Roma children in primary education and prevent school drop-outs;
- Developing measures to attract more Roma in vocational education and training;
- Providing a sustainable system of scholarships for Roma students;
- Providing financial and legal opportunities to engage Roma mediators/assistants;
- Ensuring systematic data collection and monitoring the realization of Roma education needs.

By Greece

- Developing synergies with European programmes, cooperation and consultation (e.g. ERASMUS +) in general;
- Drafting of an Action Plan for Education Issues upon consultation with all competent authorities;
- Pilot project of Task Forces composed of Roma mediators and Roma scientists visiting school units with Roma students in order to animate them to complete their studies;
- Submission of proposals to EU programmes against school drop-out.

Hungary

- The 2018-2020 Action Plan for the Hungarian Social Inclusion Strategy is under preparation (in the phase of consultancy);
- The implementation of the measures of the National Hungarian Social Inclusion Strategy and the national strategy of preventing early school leaving are being monitored continuously.

The Netherlands

- Next steps to be worked out with relevant Dutch authorities, including the Dutch CAHROM member.

Poland

- The paper on the compulsory education of Roma children and the drop-out rate in secondary education, based on existing data and findings of that particular visit, was prepared and sent to the Ministry of Interior and Administration, as well as to the Ministry of Education as a follow up of the thematic visit and as material for further steps to be taken in this field.

Ukraine

- The electronic educational data collection enabling the assessment of pupils' progress and of the actions taken will be considered;
- The concept of so-called "Night and Sunday schools" for those pupils that have not completed primary education;
- An awareness-raising campaign among the Roma people is needed in order to create the desire for socialization and integration into society, including high-quality vocational education.

APPENDICES:

Appendix 1: Official invitation letter received from the Moldovan authorities



Appendix 1 Official invitation letter.pdf

Appendix 2: Programme of the CAHROM thematic visit in the Republic of Moldova



Final agenda.docx

Appendix 3: List of experts and participants in the thematic visit



LIST OF EXPERTS.doc

Appendix 4: European and international standards and reference texts



Appendix 4 INT STANDARDS AND REI

Appendix 5: Size, composition, language, lifestyle and situation of the groups covered by the report



Appendix 5 SITUATION OF ROMA

Appendix 6: Compulsory education including vocational education: legislative and policy framework and practices in countries participating in the visit



Appendix 6 LEGISLATIVE AND PO

Appendix 7: UNICEF materials on project conducted in Vulcănești village



Appendix 7 UNICEF project in Vulcanesti.c

ADDENDUM: Experts' and participants' presentations and other relevant documents

Republic of Moldova



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Greece



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Hungary



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The Netherlands



Veldhoven
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