

The Need of Professional Social Work in Overcoming Social Problems and Social Exclusion of Children in the Process of Education

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Abstract

School going children face numerous social problems such as peer violence, a social behavior, educational neglect, dropout from regular education, committed crimes, and social exclusion. Inevitably, these problems can have devastating effects on adequate social functioning and personal development of children and can hinder their future potentials and wellbeing. Findings presented in this article are generated from two separate researches related to social exclusion and social problems encountered by children in primary and secondary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia. In general, prevalent problems of children are related to bullying, addictions, and conflicts with caregivers and social surrounding, whereas, social exclusion is more prevalent among Roma children. Problems of such nature require appropriate professional assistance and support. The school teams for professional support of children are mainly composed of psychologist and pedagogues. Nonetheless, the above mentioned problems require involvement of other team members such as social workers and special educators. Equipping professional school teams with adequate staff is enabled by the Law on primary education, whereas the Law on secondary education requires additional amendments in order to ensure possibilities for employment of social worker in the secondary schools. Their main role is to provide professional assistance and support to children and their parents on how to utilize the available community services for mitigating prevailing socioeconomic difficulties and for improvement of learning capacities and results of children coping with different problems.

Keywords: social problems, social exclusion, school going children, social work

Introduction

Child and the right to education

Education is an issue that is at the center of public interest and is the result of the transitional processes which society passes through. The period of transformation of the socio-political and economic system imposed a need for changes in the field of education, as a result of which a number of reform activities were undertaken. After three decades of transitional processes in all spheres of human life, accompanied by changes in the values system, education remains a key area that faces a number of problems. The right of the child to primary education in the Republic of Northern Macedonia is regulated by the Law on Primary Education ("Official Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia" No. 103/2008, 33/2010, 116/2010, 156/2010, 18/2011, 42/2011, 51/2011, 6/2012, 100/2012, 24/2013, 41/2014, 116/2014, 135/2014, 10/2015, 98/2015 and 145/2015). In contemporary life, education is a fundamental human right. It is a prerequisite for the individual development of human capital, creates opportunities for getting out of the closed circle of poverty and at the same time provides creative potential for the development of society.

Primary education is free, compulsory and lasts for nine years (6-14 old years). It is organized in three educational periods, from first to third, from fourth to sixth, and from seventh to ninth grade. Education is offered in four languages in primary schools (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian) and three languages of instruction in secondary education (Macedonian, Albanian, and Turkish). Around 29% of primary schools and 34% of secondary schools are two/three lingual

schools. There are total of 347 primary schools with approximately 1.100 satellite schools. Literacy levels are high, 98.8% for male and 96.8% for female (2015) (State Statistical Office, 2019). The gross enrolment rates is 63%, and net enrolment rate is 91%. However, a number of children (mainly Roma children without personal identification number), are not reflected in this statistics as they are not registered in any official system. Thus, the actual enrolment rate is lower (Ministry of Education, 2018). In 2016/17 there were 194 classes within 45 special primary schools, with total of 809 pupils as well as 725 pupils with special educational needs included in regular classes in primary education (ibid.). There were total of 483 pupils, that repeated the class in school year 2017/18, of whom 218 female (State Statistical office, 2018).

Primary education is realized in a primary school that can be municipal or state. Funds are provided from the Budget of the Republic of Northern Macedonia through block grants and earmarked grants, as well as from own sources of income. The concept of primary education and education is determined by the Ministry of Education and Science. Educational work in the primary school is accomplished by: teachers, professional associates (pedagogue, psychologist, sociologist, social worker, special educator, and librarian) and educators. The school year, as a rule, starts on September 1 and ends on August 31 of the following year and lasts 180 school days. Teaching can be carried out in a shortened duration, but not less than 100 instruction days, upon received consent from the Ministry. Primary school is obliged to encompass pupils from the district of residence.

By leaving the primary school, the child acquires the status of a pupil. When registering the child at school, the parent is obliged to submit a receipt for the mandatory vaccine for the child. The parent is obliged to enable his child to fulfill the obligation for compulsory primary education. For each absence of the pupil from the instruction, he/she is obliged to inform the class master about the reasons for the absence. The pupil may be absent from the teaching if his absence was announced by the parent in advance in the school, but not more than five days in the school year. The school principal upon a written request of the parents for justified reasons may allow the pupil longer absence from the instruction, but not more than 30 days. Primary school is obliged to inform the authorized municipal inspector of the municipality about the children who are not enrolled, that is, the pupils who do not visit the elementary school unjustly for more than 30 days. As a rule, the pupil from the first until the fifth grade cannot repeat the grade. The pupil who has failed to master the teaching contents by the end of the school year, as a consequence of a longer absence from teaching due to illness, resettlement and other justified reasons, may, in accordance with the parent, remain in the same grade for which the decision is made by the school's school council. The departmental teacher, or the class master, is obliged to inform the parent about the success of the pupil at least twice in every semester.

Physical and psychological harassment of the pupil is prohibited. The following pedagogical measures are applied to the pupil who does not fulfill the obligations and violates the rules of the educational work: reprimand, oral warning, written warning, transfer of the pupil to another class and transfer the pupil to another primary school.

The Law on Primary Education also has provisions concerning the counseling of parents. Namely, the parent or guardian is referred to counseling if the pupil: during the school year, has a negative grade for three or more subjects; has done more than ten unjustified or 100 justified absences; is undisciplined; insulted the teacher; participates in fights or other forms of violence; shows an associative or antisocial behavior; behaves immorally or unethically; and in a short period of time, the pupil has a significant decline in its educational achievements. If parents were called to school about the pupil's antisocial behavior, that is, the immoral or unethical behavior of the pupil, the expert opinion from the pedagogical service is required before the invitation is sent. The consultation is done in groups according to the weekly and monthly plan. The number of parents in the groups cannot be greater than 20. The counseling is conducted in two terms for 60 minutes. At the counseling of the parent or the guardian, the pedagogue or the psychologist is obliged to act in accordance with the Parents' Advisory Program, which is adopted by the Minister on the proposal of the Pedagogical Service. If the parent or guardian does not appear at the counseling and after the third invitation, the Center for Social Work is notified.

Also, secondary education is compulsory and free, lasts for three or four years, and is divided into four streams: general secondary education (gymnasium), secondary vocational education, art schools, and education for pupils with special educational needs. Students with attained 3-year vocational education can take a final exam, without a right for university entrance. Graduates of the 4-year secondary education are allowed to choose between the final exams and state or school matriculation depending on whether they wish to continue education, while the gymnasium graduates have to take state or school matriculation exams. There are 124 secondary schools, 108 are public and 16 are private. Out of the secondary public schools, 23 are general education schools, 43 are vocational schools, 33 offer both general and vocational education,

4 schools are for pupils with special educational needs and 5 are art schools. In the school year of 2017/2018 there were total of 71458 pupils of whom 34059 female and 37399 male (State Statistical Office, 2019).

Prevailing problems that pupils face in the educational process

In circumstances of high rates of unemployment and poverty, faced by the families in the Republic of Northern Macedonia, and which produce numerous other related social problems whose consequences are reflected on children (peer and domestic violence, addiction diseases, etc), the role of social workers in schools to deal with these social problems and mitigate the consequences of them is irreplaceable. Of particular importance is the contribution that social workers can give in the domain of social prevention, ie the timely prevention of the emergence of social problems, which not only reflect on the success of pupils, but also endanger their opportunities for development and adequate social inclusion. For pupils with special educational needs, the role of the social worker in securing social inclusion through professional work with pupils, teachers, the family and the social network of these pupils is crucial.

In this context, the importance and role of social workers as part of the professional services in primary and secondary schools are indisputable. For the engagement of social workers in educational institutions, there is a legal basis in the Law on Primary Education (Official Gazette 103/08), which in Article 77 foresees the educational work in the elementary school to be performed by the professional associates: pedagogue, psychologist, sociologist, social worker, special educator and librarian. The Law on Secondary Education of 2002 (Official Gazette 52/02) stipulates in Article 70 that the educational work in the secondary education should be carried out by the professional associates: pedagogue, psychologist, special educator, sociologist, social worker, laboratory technician, librarian, etc.). However, with the amendments and supplements from 2004 (Official Gazette 67/04), the expert associate - social worker was unjustifiably deleted from the legal provisions for the composition of the professional service in the secondary schools.

Research conducted by Dimitrijoska, Bornarova and Ilievski in 2017 had a sample of 1037 pupils was included in the research. It is a stratified representative sample by nationality. The survey was conducted in 4 primary and 4 secondary schools on the territory of the City of Skopje, where in the primary schools the survey was conducted only with the pupils from the higher grades (eighth and ninth) due to the content of the questions.

The results show that there is a difference according to the gender of the respondents regarding the most dominant problems that pupils face. The most visible is the difference regarding regular attendance, with 14% of male choosing it as a problem, compared to just under 9% of female. Although male pupils in large percentage have a problem with disagreement with teachers (24%) female pupils have similar percentage (22%). A similar difference occurs in the problem of learning and achievement, that is, 29% of male and almost 28% female pupils pointed out this problem. What is noted is that disagreement with classmates is a more "female" problem. Namely, 22% of the pupils answered this question, as opposed to almost 15% male pupils.

The survey shows that primary and secondary school pupils face significant problems of varying nature for which they need help and support. Among the problems of day-to-day functioning in the school, the most pronounced are those related to achievement and learning, emphasized by 363 pupils or 35% of the total number of pupils, followed by disagreements with teachers pointed out by 296 pupils (28.5%) and disagreements with classmates by 227 pupils (21.8%). Of the stated problems, the smallest numbers of pupils perceive the problem as unacceptability in the school environment (71 or 6.8% of the total number of pupils included in the research). These findings point to the need for expert assistance and support for resolving conflicts in teacher-pupil relations, as well as in pupil-to-pupil relationships, for which crisis interventions that are applied in social work are particularly appropriate.

One should not underestimate the material difficulties that pupils face, reflecting the general situation in the state associated with a low standard of living. The pupils point out the lack of tangible assets to meet more of their needs. The most significant shortage of tangible assets is recorded for covering the costs of extra-curricular activities, indicated by 30% of the surveyed pupils. They are followed by the lack of funds for excursions represented by 26%, as well as the lack of funds for school equipment and gear with 18%. In fact, pupils justly, as the greatest material difficulties, point out those who need significant financial means, which pupils provide paying for privately.

Of particular interest in the research was gaining the knowledge about presenting more serious social problems in the life of pupils, for whose overcoming social work is necessary. The results obtained on this issue are alarming. As many as 233 pupils or 22.5% of pupils in the research had physical conflicts with their classmate during schooling. This point out peer violence as the most common problem in schools, followed by conflicts with the parents stated by 141 pupils (13.6%), which

points to the necessity of interventions for improving the pupil-pupils relationship. What certainly attracts attention and signals the need for urgent action is the prevalence of alcohol abuse problems (96 pupils or 9.2%), gambling (in 85 pupils or 8.2%), theft (75 pupils or 7.2%), as well as drug consumption (in 62 or 6% of surveyed pupils).

No less worrying is the presence of social problems in the families of pupils who indisputably reflect on their social development and maturity, but also on educational achievements. Pupils as the most common problem in the families in which they live pointed out the problem of unemployment of a family member (192 pupils or 18.5% of the surveyed pupils), which corresponds to the representation of this social problem at the national level. Poverty expressed through a lack of livelihood is a second major social problem present in families, pointed out by 141 pupils or 13.6% of the total number of pupils. Conflicts between parents were pointed out in 126 cases (12.1%), pointing to the need for expert assistance to improve relations in dysfunctional families. One should not underestimate the following social problems that, although are highlighted in less than 10% of pupils, are still among the more serious and more complex to overcome: poor housing conditions, addictions in other family members, presence of crime in an adult member in the family or a gambling problem.

Pupils were also asked to answer the question whether they needed expert support in solving the social problems they face. Despite the fact that high percent of pupils' had low trust in professional services, as well as insufficient information about the nature, place and role of social work in educational institutions, a large number of pupils gave a positive answer to this question. Namely, 21% of the surveyed pupils stressed that they need professional help and support in cases when they face some social problem.

Regarding the use of the social network as support, pupils often talk to family members or peers when they face a problem. Namely, 52.4% of the respondents stated that they always refer to support from the family, and 30.5% of the respondents said that they always call for support and conversation with their peers. It should be noted that 36.7% of the pupils answered that they never required support to teachers, and a high 66.7% of the pupils answered that they never required support or talk with the professional service expert. Such knowledge is disappointing because they indicate the mistrust that the pupils have in the teachers and the professional team when they need to share problems with them. The obtained results indicate that teachers and the professional team members are not a resource of social network of pupils to whom they are refer and from whom they expect help and support.

In support of the basic research of the social difficulties and problems of the pupils, a survey was conducted with 144 teachers and expert associates for their knowledge related to the social situation of the pupils. On the question of which problems in day-to-day functioning are most commonly faced by pupils, their answers differ from those of pupils. Most of the teaching and professional staff as the dominant problem point out the problem related to learning and achievement (105 persons or 75% of the total number of respondents). The following most frequent problems are problems with school attendance (91 persons or 63.2%) and problems with the discipline (87 persons or 60.4%). What is obvious when comparing the results of the research between the two groups of respondents (pupils and teaching and professional staff) is that the teaching and professional staff is more focused on pedagogical problems than on social ones, as was the case with pupils in whom in addition to learning problems and success, problems related to disagreements with classmates and teachers were dominant.

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The most frequent social problems among pupils, in the opinion of teachers and professional staff, are physical calculations with classmates (noted in 25% of respondents), followed by the problem of gambling (19%), which as a problem is significantly more pronounced by teachers and professional associates, than that was the case with pupils, indicating the degree of its presence and visibility. It is worth keeping in mind that teachers and professional services, unlike pupils, consider that the expressed social problems among pupils are also health problems and conflicts with the environment, with 14% of the respondents highlighted. For other social problems that are more serious, with teachers and professional

associates there is awareness of their presence, which is not insignificant. These are the problems associated with deviant behavior among pupils, ie thefts (8%), alcohol consumption (6%), and drug use (5%).

In terms of family social problems, according to the teaching and professional staff, the expected dominant problems are unemployment (indicated by 107 persons or 74.3%) and poverty (98 persons or 68% of the respondents). They are followed by poor housing conditions (80 persons or 55.5%) and conflicts between parents (66 persons or 45.8% of respondents). Basically, there is a similarity in the answers to this question between the pupils and the teaching and professional staff, with the difference that the teachers pointed out in a significantly larger number as a family problem alcoholism in a family member (in 36 cases or 25%) and health problems - chronic diseases (in 33 cases or 23%).

Unlike pupils with insufficient information and/or developed awareness of the importance and benefits of a social worker as part of the professional team, the teaching and professional staff unambiguously recognizes, acknowledged and demanded satisfaction of the need to strengthen the professional team of the schools with the profile social worker. The majority of teachers and professional associates consider that such a need exists (87% of the total number of surveyed teachers and professional associates).

Case study: Prevailing problems Roma children in the educational process

The second research conducted by Donevska, Bogoevska, and Trbojevik (2010) is related to the issue of dropping out of regular education which was and still is a serious problem in the Republic of Northern Macedonia. This problem is in the focus of attention of all relevant actors involved in the processes of planning, development, implementation and support of educational policies. Although this phenomenon is present in all ethnic groups in our society, the rate of drop outs from regular education is the highest within the Roma ethnic community. Linking this problem with a particular ethnic group indicates the existence of social exclusion based on social, religious, cultural, linguistic and gender background. The situation with the educational exclusion of Roma children can be defined as very serious. A number of children are not included in the education system of the Republic of North Macedonia at all, or many of the children who start formal education do not finish, although, according to the legislation, primary education is obligatory. The following are stated as the most frequent reasons for this state: insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language, low degree of education of parents and poor socio-economic status.

According to the data from the Census in 2002, 23% of Roma did not attend primary education, 28.6% were with incomplete primary education, 37.4% had primary education, 9.7% secondary education, 0.2% higher education, and 0.2% masters and doctors of science (SSO, 2002, Population Census data, Book XIII). In 2002, more than half (51.8%) of Roma adults did not have an education or did not complete primary education in contrast to the percentage of 18% of the total population. Roma children have a lower literacy rate and still low inclusion rates, attendance and completion of primary (61%) and secondary education (17%) (Commission of the European Communities, 2009). However, it is evident that the number of Roma in all levels of education has increased in recent years. Namely, the representation of Roma in the total number of pupils who completed primary education in 1997/1998 was 1.3%, in 2002/2003 it was 2.1%, while in 2007/2008 it increased to 2.5%. The representation of Roma who completed secondary education points also to a tendency of growth, from 0.4% in the academic year 1997/1998, 0.6% in 2002/2003 and 1.2% in 2007/2008. Also, the number of Roma attending higher education is increasing (National Strategy for Reduction of Poverty and Social Exclusion in the Republic of Macedonia, 2010).

This instigates the need to study the causes that led to this situation and determine the measures to overcome the problem. Data from the State Statistical Office on the coverage of pupils in primary education show that not all children are included in the regular educational process, ie in 2008/2009 only 91% of the total number of school-age children enrolled in school, whereas in the school year 2018/2019 the enrolment rate increased to 93.72%, an increase of 2.72%. This data indicates that there is insufficient representation of children from vulnerable categories (children with disabilities, children from socially endangered families, Roma children, children from remote rural settlements, etc.) in educational processes. The high level of dropout of pupils after the completion of lower primary education is very often attributed to the very low inclusion of children in pre-school institutions. The coverage of children aged three to six in kindergartens is only around 12.5% (Source: State Statistical Office. Statistical overview 2.4.9.02/614, Public institutions for child care and kindergartens, 2008). In 2016, there were 33,238 children up to 6 years old enrolled in 64 public and 19 private pre-school institutions, 4 kindergartens within private schools in the capacity of legal entities, 1 early child development centre in the capacity of a public entity, 6 early child development centers in the capacity of private legal entities, 1 public kindergarten within a legal entity established for the needs of its employees, 1 private kindergarten within a legal entity established for the needs of its

employees (Statistical bulletin no. 2.4.17.03/871 for 2016 by the State Statistical Office). Out of the total number of children, 16,796 are female children. Out of them, there were 840 Roma children and only 174 were children with disabilities (or with special educational needs)(Statistical bulletin no. 2.4.16.01/842 for 2015 by the State Statistical Office).

In that context, in the period 1998/1999 in the Republic of North Macedonia there were only 48 Roma pupils, while in the year 2000/2001 108 pupils were enrolled at higher education institutions. In the last two decades, a number of strategic activities, programs and projects have been realized, aimed at developing the capacities of the Roma community, utilizing human capital and reducing social exclusion. The focus is generally on the processes of strengthening the Roma community through the implementation of programs to support Roma in the educational process. Beginning in 1994, the role of the non-governmental sector in addressing Roma-related issues proved to be particularly significant. The high degree of exclusion of the Roma population from the main social flows caused intense interventions by the civil society, with the emphasis on building internal capacities. In that direction, nongovernmental sector, especially Open Society Institute-Macedonia played a key role in developing and strengthening the potentials of the Roma population, primarily through the development of its own branches. Their work with the Roma was based on a strategic approach focused on developing programs, creating a structure, equipping for independent work and ensuring sustainability. In spite of the significant progress, there is an evident need for evaluation of the effects of the implemented programs. Identification of the strengths and weaknesses of the implemented programs will contribute to their further improvement and adaptation to the needs of the Roma community. Hence, the realization of this research emerges as a result of the need to identify the reasons related to leaving the regular education of Roma children, and developing additional measures and activities for improving enrollment, attendance and stay in the educational process. For this purpose it was necessary to determine the knowledge of the relevant stakeholders involved in the planning, development, implementation and support of the Roma educational processes. Co-operation between local authorities, social services, school boards, professional school services, educational centers and partners was also examined. The survey was conducted in Skopje, Prilep and Kumanovo, cities where "121 Roma educational project" is being implemented.

The survey included representatives from local self-governments, Roma educational centers, teachers, professional services in schools, school councils, local leaders, as well as parents and children who use the services of Roma education centers. The survey employed exploratory research method with the following instruments: an expert interview for local government officials involved in creating local education policies and representatives of school boards; semi-structured interview for teachers, professionals from the professional services in the schools and representatives of the Roma educational centers; and focus groups for parents, local leaders and pupils.

The sample of the research consists of 240 research units selected according to several criteria. I. The first criterion for selection is: professionals and volunteers involved in educational processes at the local level. According to this criterion, the sample consist of: 1. Relevant local self-government representatives engaged in jobs related to educational processes (8 representatives/2 from each municipality) 2. Educational Roma centers (25 representatives/5 from each educational center) 3. School boards, teachers and professional services; 12 professionals from professional services in schools (2 professionals from each school); 12 members of the school boards (two members from each school); 36 teachers (6 teachers from each school). II. The second criterion for selection is: parents, local leaders and pupils included in the educational centers. 5 local leaders (1 from each educational center); 30 parents (6 from each educational center); 120 pupils (24 from each educational center / 8 in each focus group).

The results showed that local self-government experts from all three municipalities point out that there are problems in educational processes that are characteristic of the Roma population. The key problems are the following: the coverage of Roma children in educational processes, average achievement and regular attendance at schools. The reasons for this are mostly located in the family, the poor socio-economic situation, the tradition and the system of values. It can be noted that experts identify the causes of the problem mainly within the framework of Roma culture and community. From their attitudes, it can be noted that they do not take into account structural factors such as: long-term discrimination against Roma, their economic, social, political and cultural exclusion in society, as well as the long-standing state's passivity in terms of taking measures to overcome this situation. Local authorities are involved in a range of activities to improve the situation of Roma in general and to reduce the obstacles for involving children in regular educational processes. As a result of such activities, there is a certain degree of progress in the coverage of Roma children in educational processes.

Some experts note that there is a need to undertake future activities at the local level in order to improve the educational inclusion of Roma children. In the first place, the need for holding educations, tribunals, workshops for raising awareness

about the importance of education, changing the ways in which the Roma mobilize resources and use the opportunities, as well as using the advantages offered by the pre-qualification and retraining are emphasized.

The poor financial situation of the households stands out as a reason for engaging children in seasonal work, which is why they are missing from the regular educational process. Experts, point out: poverty, tradition, childhood, begging, early marriage and family formation, lack of interest of parents and transferring patterns of behavior from generation to generation. As can be noted, the members of the school boards as the most common problems point out: the rash of Roma students, the irregular visit to the school and the difficulties in mastering the teaching material. The root causes of these problems are several reasons related to the family: poverty, child poverty, tradition, parents' ignorance and lack of interest in their children's education. Successful inclusion in the educational processes of Roma children is limited by the insufficient knowledge of the Macedonian language as a language of instruction.

The data obtained through the realization of a semi-structured interview with the teachers, professionals from the professional services in the schools and representatives from the Roma educational centers are presented in a cumulative manner. They emphasize that the issue is related to the existential needs, the need for help and support the family, need to improve housing conditions and hygiene needs. It is particularly important for successful inclusion in the educational process is the insufficient knowledge of the teaching language and the lack of didactic material. Due to the large number of juvenile marriages, teachers emphasize the need to introduce sexuality education. It is important to note that representatives of Roma education centers especially stress the need for help and support from teachers.

Attempts to determine the reasons for the problems of Roma children in educational processes have imposed a need to identify the main factors that have influence the adequate growth and development and the realization of their potentials. Professionals working directly with Roma children locate the main causes of problems in children, the family, the school, the state, and the system. Most respondents consider that the family is the main generator of problems related to the Roma children's education. They also point out that some of the reasons are derived from the children themselves, and in particular they emphasize: the lack of motivation, the absence of positive goals and negative comradeships. School as a problem generator is also an important factor for the rash of students. School-related problems are generally associated with the Ministry of Education's policy, inflexibility, and the inadequacy of the educational process. The last large group of answers addresses the lack of systemic measures, the financial sustainability of programs to support Roma education, and the lack of positive examples of employment for educated Roma.

Respondents point out different aspects of the living of Roma families that influence the level of attendance and the success of children in the school. The most significant reasons that limit the children for successful inclusion in the educational processes are the socioeconomic status of families, the tradition, the way of living and communication, as well as the lack of understanding of the importance of education in the Roma family. When combing some of the stated reasons, the results show that Roma families have greatly disturbed family relationships and educational disadvantage of children.

Some of the respondents find the reasons for the educational problems of Roma children in the school. Respondents from all profiles think that children are facing school problems as a result of certain didactic reasons, high passage of mobility from lower to higher classes without adequate adopted knowledge, inadequate and inflexible educational process, and failure to attend preschool education.

Didactic problems are identified as the most significant cause of children's educational problems. In the statements of most of the respondents from all profiles, issues related to the scope, weight and content of the teaching material are highlighted. It is also stated that many of the children do not speak the Macedonian language as a learning language, which is why there are problems in following lectures. It is not about absolute ignorance of the language, but about a limited fund of words and the inability to understand and use abstract and complex language constructs that are immanent to master the teaching content in the higher grades. An additional problem is the lack of didactic material. It is important to note the problem related to the great passage of students in the first five years of primary education. This problem is highlighted by all professionals because this practice allows children who have not mastered the elementary knowledge reading and writing, as well as basic mathematical operations, to get to higher school year. That is why children repeat the higher classes several times and lose interest in further education.

Teachers have divided opinions regarding workload with Roma children. Most of them consider that additional efforts for education, motivation and animation are necessary. Some of them emphasize that it is necessary to repeat the teaching material many times, as well as greater engagement due to poor discipline, poor literacy and lack of feedback.

Most of the teachers think that Roma children can achieve the same results as other children, but most of them (52%) point out that school success is conditional and above all depends on improving living conditions, family support and the change of stereotypical understanding of education. A small number of teachers (2%) think that Roma children cannot achieve equal results like other children.

The analysis of the statements of the respondents from all profiles shows that the level of cooperation of the parents with the school is assessed as relatively low. In 43% of the statements it is estimated that there is no cooperation at all, in 44% it is assessed as weak, and only in 13% it is estimated that the parents cooperate with the school. It is commonly estimated that a small number of parents have co-operation with teachers, usually parents of children with salutary success, and the rest comes only when there is a problem involving their children. It is basically estimated that parents are not interested in the success of their children, which in some cases is the result of their preoccupation in securing their existence. One part of the respondents indicated that the low level of cooperation with the parents is due to their exclusion and lack of knowledge of Macedonian language. Unlike the cooperation between parents and the school that is generally assessed as weak, cooperation between parents and Roma education centers is assessed as generally good. Namely, in 75% of the statements, the respondents consider that there is good cooperation, in 15% it is assessed as satisfactory, and only in 10% of the statements it is assessed as poor. A general remark is that parents send their children to Roma educational centers, but they themselves rarely engage in their activities.

The role of social workers in professional services in primary schools

The role of the social worker as a professional worker in primary education is perceived through his professional work with students, families and teachers. The main activities undertaken by the social worker are in the domain of psychosocial support of students in the area of social prevention, in discovering social problems among students and their families, identifying the social needs of students and their families, advising with students in social risk and their families, advisory work in the non-violent resolution of conflicts between students and the wider community.

The work of the social worker takes place through direct monitoring of the educational process, through advisory, consultative and educational work with the teaching staff and the other expert team in the school, which reveals the reasons for the problems of the students and offers suggestions for their overcoming.

After detecting a certain social risk among students and developing an individual work plan with the student, the main activity of the social worker is to provide direct social support to the families of the students and to connect them with the social protection system, utilizing the resources in the community until finally overcoming the risk and their re-social inclusion.

Having in mind the fact which is unambiguously confirmed by the results of the survey that the pupils and families in which they live face numerous social difficulties and problems and in order to overcome them expertise from social workers is necessary. Therefore in order to meet these conditions in the system of education, it is necessary to:

Increase the number of employed social workers in all primary schools in the Republic of North Macedonia in accordance with the Law on Primary Education.

Amendments to the Law on Secondary Education and adding the profile "social worker" as part of the professional team, as well as the subsequent employment of social workers in all secondary schools in the Republic of Northern Macedonia.

Conducting education for social workers already employed in primary schools, as well as for those who will be employed in the future for the area of social work in education.

Due to early prevention and timely detection of social difficulties and problems in children and their families, it is necessary to employ social workers in pre-school institutions - kindergartens and early childhood development centers.

Creation of conditions for conducting professional social work in schools, by applying methods and techniques for:

Professional social work with pupils on the primary prevention of social problems, focusing on social problems, typical of children (peer violence, drug addiction, alcohol addiction, gambling, asocial behavior, juvenile delinquency, etc.).

Professional social work with parents for primary prevention of social problems among pupils, as well as promotion of parent-child relationships, successful parenting, family life, etc.

Professional social work with pupils and parents who experience social difficulties and initial signs of social problems at the level of secondary prevention, in order to prevent deepening of difficulties and problems and their complete overcoming.

Professional social work with pupils and parents who already face social problems at the level of tertiary prevention, and for mitigating the consequences of the problems that have arisen.

Develop the cooperation among all local stakeholders that can contribute to the promotion and development of the area of social work in education (NGOs, municipalities, centers for social work, etc.).

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