Photo of the month: Teaching assistant with pupils
DEAR READERS,

This is the November issue of our magazine. The lead-in column of this issue is Education, which brings texts about the work of teaching assistants and about the jubilee of the City Library in Novi Sad.

We bring you a report “Analysis of the position of Coordinator for Roma issues in local government units in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina” in the Provincial Institutions column.

The Employment column presents you the opportunities offered by the National Employment Service. Another text in this column brings a true example of a successful and young Roma woman, while in the third, we write about the public works in Tovariševu.

In the Social protection column, we will introduce you to the “Center for Foster Care and Adoption” in Novi Sad.

International Day for Tolerance is an article from the Human Rights column.

The story of the Roma Educational Center and of a project of Roma Cultural Center “Roma caravan of Art” is in the NGO column.

We remind you that, thanks to the Research and Education Center and to the Preschool Teacher Training College “Mihailo Palov” in Vršac, you can read our publication in its electronic form at www.rec.org.rs/bilten/.

Your editorial board
Interview with ZORICA KALANJOŠ, teaching assistant at the elementary school "Dušan Radović" in Novi Sad

WHEN YOU LOVE YOUR JOB

How did you decide to work as a teaching assistant?
Initially, I worked in a kindergarten for Roma children called “Step by Step” in Bački Monostor and I really liked that I could help the children and advance them to a higher level. Kindergarten was very successful. After some time, the vacant post for teaching assistants came out and I immediately applied and got the job.

Have you completed additional training for teaching assistants?
I finished school, which was not related to work in kindergartens and schools. However, I liked the job and then I enrolled in a higher school educator that I had an education in accordance with my job. When teaching assistants started to employ, we had a variety of additional training in the form of modules and training that we went for years and last year they finished.

How many children do attend your elementary school?
This is a large primary school. There are about 2000 students in three buildings.

Was there a need for a teaching assistant?
The need was great because teaching assistants are a great support to Roma children. The right word and right access are support to everyone. Roma children have the language barrier, and are included late in the school and have a number of problems they face on a daily basis. When they come to school everything is unknown, and the teacher and teaching assistant join forces to return a child into the school system. Jobs in education should be loved. Successful teaching assistant can be a person who loves their work and loves children.

What is the cooperation like with the parents?
In the education of children, parents are the most important link. The problem is that Roma children are from backgrounds where their parents do not see the importance of education. So we have to motivate children and parents by holding parent meetings or consultations. Given that I have worked for many years at this position, there was a positive step. Before I constantly had to go into the field and talk with the parents, and now parents themselves come to school and this is very important. However, I’m still on the field, but only once a week. Also, parents come to PTA meetings with me regularly, and not with the teacher, because they still have a barrier.

Did you not understand what your job entails?
In the beginning, I did not, because we fought various resistances at school. School employees thought that we are a type of control that will oversee their work, because nobody knew what a teaching assistant means. Teachers were mad because they thought they did not need a teaching assistant, but that is now different. I was lucky because the director at the time was sympathetic to my work and me, and I was immediately presented as an aid, and not as a control.

How does your workday look like?
It is very turbulent. Not a single day is the same. When I walk through the door, there is a new situation every day. First, someone from the parents waits in the hallway. Then, it all depends on where I go to school, because I go to all the three facilities. When I’m in a school, I assist the first class and I am present with the teacher in class. In another school I am an assistant as well, but since there are many children who remain in the extended care, I am partly in class, and partly there. Sometimes, when I’m working individually, I bring the students to the library or to a classroom that is free. I hold workshops that are very important to them. The entire week runs so fast, so I have to hold additional classes on Saturdays.

What do you see as an obstacle in your work?
I do not have an obstacle but I try to be functional and do whatever it takes. I work together
with parents to solve problems around the purchase of textbooks, various calls because they are mostly illiterate and do not know how it works.

- **Is it difficult for children who are returned under the Agreement on readmission to fit into the school environment?**

  When they come back, we have a problem because they attend only language classes on Asylum. Mostly, we put them in classes where they were before. That period where they are not there usually lasts from 4 months to even a year. This is a big problem, but their teachers can meet with them, give them additional lessons, and I’m working with them. Also, the director really understands the children and does everything for them to pursue further education.

- **What are you particularly proud of in your work?**

  I am proud to see that children attend school regularly. When I go to school, they greet, hug me and rejoice to see me. They come from settlements where they have nothing, but when they come to school, they are more or less neat and clean. There are some little problems, but we solve them in school. I have a good cooperation with the director, pedagogue, psychologist and the entire teaching staff, so we always come up with a solution together.

- **Due to the fact that you have been working this for the last ten years, did the children who went to school when you were starting to work completed their education successfully?**

  There are plenty of students who have succeeded, and since all of them are from the area, we see each other often. I cooperate with them, they greet me and are very successful. I’m really proud of them.

- **How many Roma children each year enroll in the first grade, and how many of them complete it?**

  About 50 children attend first grade, but only eight fifteen reach the end of the eight grade. There is a lot of attrition when they reach the fifth
Extended Day Care
grade. Mostly good children go abroad and when they return they lose the thread, so we have to take them to adult school.

■ What would you say to your students?

Education is the key to positive change and a better life. They can do anything, but only if they have the knowledge. I constantly repeat it to them, especially to girls, and I have a special workshop on the importance of education for them. Some listen, but some marry early because of their tradition.

■ Ljiljana Maričić
THE CITY LIBRARY IN NOVI SAD MARKED TWO JUBILEES

The City library in Novi Sad presented the plaques to deserving individuals and institutions on the occasion of two big jubilees in the reading room of the City Library in Novi Sad on October 28. The Roma Inclusion Office was among the winners of the plaque.

Celebration

A grand ceremony on the occasion of two jubilees was held at the City Library in Novi Sad: 170 years of existence and operation of the City Library in Novi Sad and 60 years since the children’s ward set aside as a special branch of the library. At the beginning of the program, director of the library, Dragan Kojić, expressed satisfaction with the large number of attendees who also contributed to the success of the operation of the City Library in Novi Sad and who are responsible for its existence. Plaques were given to the Serbian Armed Forces, the President of SASA Branch in Novi Sad, University of Novi Sad, the Roma Inclusion Office of the AP Vojvodina, some schools, cultural institutions and deserving individuals. “Estimates of the general public about the work of the libraries are favorable. Libraries are appointed as a space of freedom for the users, because only users give meaning to our existence and work and certify the profession. Without strong partnerships and cooperation with representatives of governmental and non-governmental sector, public library could not be this powerful cultural institution,” said Kojić. The program continued with a short speech about...
the history of the city library, and after that, there was the stage show entitled “At the Library”, by elementary school “Dositej Obradović” students, under the mentorship of Vera Mihajlović, who also scripted the text. After that, Žarmira Benka from the cultural artistic association “Isidor Bajić” sang the “Oči čornie” song.

Plaques were awarded after cultural programs. Director of the Roma Inclusion Office, Duško Jovanović, thanked for the award and said he was satisfied with the long-term cooperation. He pointed out that it was the director of the City Library in Novi Sad, Dragan Kojić, who was responsible for the establishment of libraries in Šangaj called “Trifun Dimić” and he thanked him for that.

History of the Library

City library in Novi Sad, with more than 25,000 customers and a fund of over 500,000 books, is one of the largest public library in the country. As the main library in South Bačka district, it designs and monitors the development of library services in a network of 250 libraries and library units. City library in Novi Sad is located at the Dunavska Ulica no. 1, in a building that was endowed by Anka and Arsa Pajević, publisher, patrons and benefactors of the Serbian people. The Library has worked on continuing the tradition of Serbian Reading Room of Novi Sad which was established on 23 September 1845.

Its first president was John Rajić junior, a Novi Sad lawyer. The first Constitution, rules on organization and functioning, the Reading Room received in December 1860. Svetozar Miletić became the head of the Reading Room in 1861, and Jovan Jovanović Zmaj became a secretary. The Serbian Reading Room founded the Serbian National Theatre in 1861, the first professional theater of Serbs. It is a patron of the work of the United Serbian Youth, Serbian Singing Society and many other institutions and organizations.

The Serbian Reading Room kept its individuality in Novi Sad until 1958, when it united with the Library “Djura Danićić,” rayon libraries of the city, and later with the Lending Department Library of Matica Srpska, and it takes the form and manner of today, as the Municipal Library in Novi Sad.

Ljiljana Maričić
In late 2013, the institution of the Provincial Ombudsman - in the area of national minorities protection joined the project “VET4 Mediation between the Roma men and women.” This international project is being implemented with financial support from the Programme for Lifelong Education of the European Commission, and its main implementer in the Republic of Serbia is the civil society organization “Work in progress” from Novi Sad. With its implementation and the strengthening of Roma mediators, the aim of the programme is to provide a greater degree of realisation, protection and promotion of Roma rights in the participating countries - Spain, Italy, Belgium, Romania and Serbia. The project envisages that the Provincial Ombudsman as a partner institution, among other things, should also participate in the analysis of existing formal legal framework and practice in relation to mediation among the Roma and the publication of the results of the analysis, as well as the exchange of experience of the participating countries related to the work of the Roma mediators in the four areas covered by the Roma Decade - education, employment, health care and housing.

In the Republic of Serbia, i.e. the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina (APV), there are Roma Coordinators who mediate communication between the members of the Roma minority and the authorities, institutions, services and other holders of public powers. The institution of the Provincial Ombudsman in the field of protection of national minorities rights wanted to establish the manners of regulating employment of these Coordinators in local governments on the territory of APV, and the influence of the form and manner of their employment on the quality of their work and the work of the local government, as well as the quality of the human rights of the Roma minority.

This analysis consists of three parts:

1. Overview of the legal framework relevant to the employment of the Roma coordinators in local governments in Serbia, i.e. APV,

2. Data and information from the field, obtained from the Roma coordinators in APV, together with recommendations,

3. Conclusions concerning the position of the Roma minority in APV.
The legal framework of Roma Coordinators’ employment

The establishment of Roma Coordinators, their authorities, role and position are not regulated by laws or by-laws of the Republic of Serbia. Roma coordinators are mentioned in policy documents - The Strategy for improving the status of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia and the National Strategy for resolving the issues of refugees and internally displaced persons for the period from 2015 to 2020. The job title of the coordinator is not uniform - the National Strategy for resolving the issues of refugees and internally displaced persons for the period from 2015 to 2020 uses the term Coordinators for the Roma Issues, while the Strategy for improving the status of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia states the terms Roma coordinators, coordinators or Coordinators for the Roma Issues.

Most Roma coordinators were hired through open competitions, which were within various projects for improving the situation of Roma. An example of such competition is a competition for the position of Roma Coordinator in municipalities and urban municipalities announced by the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities - Association of Towns and Municipalities of Serbia within the project “SCTM Network for the Roma issues” for the period of engagement between June and December 2015. The “SCTM Network for the Roma issues”, which is part of a larger project “Strengthening the role of the local Roma coordinators in local governments in Serbia”, financially supported by the Kingdom of Sweden / Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency (Sida), and implemented by the SCTM and the Organization for European Security and Cooperation (OSCE) in Serbia. Within this project, a Roma Coordinator can be engaged for the period of six (6) months and has the role of providing professional and technical support to local government in relation to the areas covered by the Strategy for improving the status of the Roma in the Republic of Serbia and local strategic documents for Roma inclusion. Roma Coordinator provides professional and technical assistance in improving the situation of the Roma (prevention of all forms of discrimination, employment, education, health, social care and housing) in the territories of cities, and municipalities involved in the project. Qualification: compulsory secondary education, fluent

Workshop for Roma Coordinators
Provincial institutions

Serbian, speaking the Roma language is an advantage, the ability and readiness for intensive cooperation and communication with people of different national and religious background, being familiar with the life and problems of the local Roma population, knowledge of the responsibilities and functioning of local self-government advantage, being familiar with the Roma inclusion problems and the rights of minorities, understanding of the socio-economic conditions and institutional discrimination against the Roma community, possession of organizational and analytical skills and computer skills.

As Roma coordinators are not legal categories, the establishment of such a mechanism at the local level is not imperative. It depends on the assessment of the competent authorities of the local government whether they will hire somebody new for the job, for what period of time, which will be the legal basis of engagement, and what that person’s responsibilities are. The absence of a legal basis in practice leads to unequal position of Roma coordinators, inability to perform continuous operations and illicit influence on their work.

Data and information from the Roma Coordinators

From September 2014 until the end of March 2015, 19 of the 25 local government units with RCs on the territory of APV were visited. 162 coordinators were interviewed, while the Roma
Coordinator from Subotica sent the requested information via e-mail. The text of the analysis below is based on the information and data obtained from the Roma Coordinators at these interviews, or received in writing. The interviews were conducted on the basis of semi-structured questionnaires. The notes taken during the interviews were later used to analyse the obtained data and information.

This questionnaire, during the interviews with the coordinators for Roma issues in Apatin, Sombor, Odžaci, Žabalj, Zrenjanin, Alibinar, Pančevo, Kovin, Indija, Sremska Mitrovica, Vrbas, Beočin, Novi Sad, Bačka Palanka, Bač, Sečanj, Titel, and the data obtained in writing from the coordinator from Subotica, reviewed the formal and legal aspects of the employment of Roma Coordinators, the state of the rights of the Roma in the fields of education, health, housing and employment, as well as the issues related to the elections for national councils of national minorities held in October 2014.

The analysis results below are grouped in relation to specific topics relevant to the work of the Roma Coordinators, and the realization, protection and promotion of the rights of the Roma, and at the end of each section provides recommendations.
In Tovarišev, there is a large number of Roma and, therefore, it is additionally important and commendable that the Association “Čarain” from this place received public work in the competition of the Provincial Secretariat for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality. Through this association, three Roma (Vladimir Kolompar, Živan Pavel and Stanko Nikolić) from Tovarišev were given the opportunity to work and make money. They did the cleaning and removing garbage, digging and clearing channels in the local community Tovarišev, over a period of four months (from July 1 to October 31), and the locals are companions responded very positively to this. From an elderly companion, we learned that the main channel that runs through the village and accumulates atmospheric precipitation, and then transports it out of the village, has not been cleaned for several decades, and its function was greatly reduced. With these works, this feature was brought to the previous level, which is very important for the entire village.

Seća Kolompar, on behalf of the Association of Citizens “Čarain”, told us about the reasons why they signed up to this competition of the Secretariat, its importance, but also about the difficulties that have arisen when it was necessary to find three Roma in Tovarišev to perform these tasks.

The problem was not in the fact that Roma did not want to work, but that it was very difficult to find the Roma who have a valid identity...
There were many Roma who wanted to apply for a job, but could not just due to that. Thus, another problem was discovered and sprung, and that is the lack of personal documents, which entails a number of other problems: the achievement of social, health, and educational rights. It is necessary to work on solving this problem because it is unacceptable that in a modern society there are people who do not have personal documents, and even less permissible that it hinders them in the performance of daily duties, but in a much larger and more serious activities, such as finding a job.

At the citizens’ association “Čarain”, they consider that such competitions are a chance to Roma to enter the work system and feel as equal and valuable members of the society. For this reason they decided to apply for this vacancy, and are very grateful to the Provincial Secretariat for Economy, Employment and Gender Equality, which designed and completely implemented it. Everything would have been more complete and more successful if such projects were more frequent and when an increasing number of Roma would be included, but any initiative that improves the situation of the Roma is a huge, important thing and deserves to be told and written about.

All three Roma who performed this public work expressed their happiness and satisfaction with the offered opportunities. They say that they do not fear the job, they do not flee from it and would always respond when it comes to business, regardless of its weight and complexity. They find that it is not true that the Roma do not want to work, and this is confirmed with their example and responsible attitude towards work entrusted to them. It was very important for them that this work was accounted into their work booklets, and that their pension and social security was regularly paid for. They will spend the earned money on purchasing fuel for the winter, materials for house reparation, textbooks and school supplies, clothing, as well as daily necessities. Finally, they wish that this type of competitions and actions would be more frequent, and for the Roma to be more active and more involved in the society, and working is the first condition to be met on the way of full integration and equality.

Tijana Ćubrilo
ANOTHER ONE IN A SERIES OF YOUNG AND SUCCESSFUL ROMA WOMEN

On October 1, 2015, the day of the new school year, the Preschool Teacher Training College “Mihailo Palov”, Eldena Jovanović received her diploma and her thesis was awarded the best. In addition, October the 1st was her first working day as a qualified staff in teaching at the same school. This is the story of a highly educated and emancipated woman.

The road to education

When Eldena was a child, Romani was not spoken in her family. However, in fourth grade, her grandfather decided to enroll her and her brother to Romani folklore, and thus, together with the other children, they learned to dance folk dances and speak Romani language. “I am proud to know my language, to be able to teach it and work with children who are my nationality,” says Eldena, satisfied. After primary school, she finished vocational school for financial technicians in Stara Pazova. This beautiful Romani woman said that she had no problems in learning nor did she encounter discrimination, even though she was the only Roma in the class. She regularly received scholarship since she started high school. “When I went to college, I was the first on the list for state funded scholarship, and I got two scholarships - from the Roma Inclusion Office and the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development. I managed to get into the boarding school with these points, “says proudly Eldena. She finished the Preschool Teacher Training College “Mihailo Palov” for vocational teachers in Romani, and
with that degree she is able to work with both Romani and Serbian children.

**Education is worthwhile**

The key to success for the entire Roma poverty is education. After a long and difficult road to education, Eldena has succeeded in her intention. She has worked as a teaching assistant and has taught five courses related to the development of speech and literature in Romani, and will maybe teach mathematics as well.

“Today is my first work day, and before this job, I worked as a pedagogical assistant at the Paja Jovanović School. At the time, I volunteered and worked with children who barely went to school. Also, I worked with their parents. There were cases where the children had straight “A”s, while their parents were illiterate. When they had problems with doing their homework, I would help. I did it with pleasure because I saw that they needed it,” explains Eldena. She points out that she is very proud to have finished just this college. She is from Stara Pazova and originally wanted to enter the Faculty of Philosophy in Novi Sad, but eventually opted for this school and she
did not repent. Professors have helped her a lot and had a lot of confidence in her.

**Thesis**

Title of her thesis is *Cognitive Development, Structure, Capabilities and Opportunities of measuring Intelligence of Preschool Children*. The paper deals with the intelligence of children, and was praised to be the best. Eldena admitted that she was a bit lazy when it comes to graduate paper, but her professor and mentor, Tanja Nedilović, helped a lot in order for her not to give up in the end. She points out that she was proud of having such a teacher. And not only her, but all who work in this educational institution and who are responsible for the fact that today she completed a long journey to education.

**Message to her Roma compatriots**

Eldena says that education must be a priority. While she was studying, several students left college because they got married. “I would not want to make this a practice and since I’m now starting to work as a teaching assistant, I’d pay more attention to this problem and I will talk with students about the importance of education,” says Eldena at the end of the conversation.

**Ljiljana Maričić**

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**Interview with Tatiana Vidović, Director of Novi Sad Branch of the National Employment Service**

- Please introduce the institution where you are employed as the CEO.

The National Employment Service (NES) is a modern public service that provides services to the unemployed and employers in Serbia. It consists of the Directorate, the two Provincial Offices, 34 branches, 21 offices and more than 120 branch offices in all districts in the Republic of Serbia.

If the unemployed want to start their own business or they need support, advice, training and mediation related to employment, they address the National Employment Service. If employers cannot find and choose the right employees for their company, the National Employment Service they can solve their problem. We have the largest database of the unemployed at the national level. The support that we provide for employers comes with free trials and selections, as well as financial support in the form of active employment policy measures: subsidies for hiring workers, exempting employers from paying contributions for the People with disability (PwD), public works, employment fairs, PwD employment measures, training and mentoring, acquisition of practical knowledge, professional practice, support in the process of reorganization of business entities and declaring redundant employees.

- Small and medium enterprises are the engine of development of any society, and many developed countries are now able to develop their economy by encouraging small and medium enterprises. How is it done in Serbia today, and are we willing to follow European trends in this area?

The Republic of Serbia has followed the trends in the domain of supporting SMEs for long
years. What NES offers to the unemployed when they are starting their own business is support – informational and counseling, educational, and financial. When it comes to financial support, the Romani could apply in throughout this year for self-employment subsidies, and employers could apply for employing less employable unemployed persons, which include the Romani people. All the other measures implemented in the NES also involve the participation of the Romani.

- Who do you cooperate with in the implementation of programs for the Romani?

The NES cooperates with numerous institutions and organizations. The inclusion of the Romani in the sphere of labor is also a reason to cooperate. In order to improve the situation of the Romani in the labor market, we cooperate with the Centre for Social Welfare, Directorate for Economy of the City of Novi Sad, the Government of Vojvodina, educational institutions, and a large number of governmental and non-governmental organizations, of which, among others, include Romani Students Association, Roma Inclusion Office, Ecumenical Humanitarian Organization - Roma Resource Centre and Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre.

- Is the NES involved in some special projects financed by international funds, or are there any plans for such projects?

Within IPA 2012, NES is involved in the project “Increasing the effectiveness of employment policies towards disadvantaged groups”, which will enable the inclusion of 300 Romani people in the two cycles of training during 2016 and 2017. For that purpose, a survey was conducted among the Romani at the end of 2014, and a proposal was made for verification of training for assistant hairdressers and training for hands and feet care.

The NES is also involved in the implementation of the project “We are here together - European support for Roma Inclusion” implemented by the OSCE Mission. One of its components envisages the establishment of mobile teams for the Romani, which would improve the status of the Romani through more integrated services by various institutions.

- In August 2015, Serbia signed the agreement on the seven-year EU program for employment and social innovation, the so-called EaSI program. Is the NES ready for involvement in this program?

Minister of Labor, Employment, and Social Issues of the Republic of Serbia, Aleksandar Vulin, and the European Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Marianne Thyssen, signed the Agreement on the Accession of Serbia to the EU Program for Employment and Social Innovation - EaSI.

The Employment and Social Innovation Program (EASI), together with the funding from the European Social Fund (ESF), and the European Globalization Adjustment Fund (EGF), forms a coherent set of EU programs for the promotion of employment, social protection and social inclusion, as well as working conditions in the period 2014-2020.

The program aims to support social policy and employment policy in the European Union. The program supports the efforts of the Member States in creating and implementing social reforms and reforms in the field of employment at European, national, regional, and local level through the identification, coordination, analysis, and exchange of best practices.
Given the fact that so far the NES has been involved in a number of international projects whose aim was modernization of the NES services, status improvement, and employment of less employable categories in the labor market, I believe it will also have the capacity for implementing this Agreement within the scope of their activities.

- Are there any competitions that are designed only for the Romani? If there are, what is their budget, and what are they intended for?

According to the National Employment Action Plan for 2015, the Romani are recognized as hardly employable categories of unemployed persons, and therefore have a special treatment when using active labor market measures.

In 2015, a public call was published for self-employment, designed only for the unemployed Romani for the allocation of 160,000 dinar grants. The response of the Romani was weak. Only two of the three submitted requests were approved and two contracts were made on the allocation of grants (the third request had been withdrawn...
because of the approved funds from the budget of the City Administration for Economy).

■ What is the reaction of the Romani to retraining and additional training organized by the NES?

The Romani are mostly involved in the functional elementary adult education, but due to the difficult life conditions of and for some objective, but also subjective reasons, that often results in great dispersal. Upon completing primary education, the Romani also have the opportunity to complete the training for simple jobs, which brings the same results.

As part of the third cycle of Functional Elementary Education in 2013 and 2014, the Romani who had completed primary education opted for specific training. However, the groups either could not be established, or there were fewer people involved than the original applicants. For example, only five of the seven candidates completed the pastry cook training, and only two of the five participants completed the sausage making training.

■ Ljiljana Maričić
Interview with IVANA KOPRIVICA, Director of the Center for Foster Care and Adoption of Novi Sad

SUPPORTING FOSTER PARENTS
Could you explain the need for opening the Center for Foster Care and Adoption Novi Sad (CFCANS)?

Center for Foster Care and Adoption of Novi Sad was created as part of activities that serve to advance protection of children without parental care and quality upbringing and the elderly in Vojvodina. Its foundation contributes to building quality systems for protecting social protection beneficiaries. The Center was established on 19 February 2014 by the Decision of the Government of AP Vojvodina, in the territory of South Bačka, Srem, and Central Banat Administrative Districts. Its offices are located in House 1 in Children’s Village in Sremska Kamenica. Initiating such a center in Vojvodina, directly contributes to the achievement of the most important reform aims set in the strategic documents of the Republic of Serbia, which are related to the development of services, measures and forms of protection of children and the elderly. The center is an innovative institution in the system of social protection in AP Vojvodina, and is the youngest institution of this kind in the territory of Vojvodina and Serbia. It aims to build a modern and comprehensive approach to beneficiary protection.

Are there any other centers like this in Serbia?

Besides the center in Novi Sad, there are currently five more centers for Foster Care and Adoption in the territory of the Republic of Serbia. They are located in Belgrade, Niš, Kragujevac, Ćuprija, and also Miloševac, which is a place with a long tradition of fostering. The plan is to establish two more centers in the territory of Bela Crkva and Subotica.

What is the aim of establishing the Center?

Based on the records from social welfare centers in the districts of South Bačka, Srem and Central Banat, there are currently 780 families providing foster care. Our Center was founded with the aim of providing quality support and monitoring of these families. Furthermore, another important aspect of the Center is the assessment of future foster parents’ eligibility, as well as their preparation and continuous training for foster care.

Who are your beneficiaries and how do you provide support?

As I have already mentioned, there are 780 families providing foster care in the territory for which the Center has been founded. This segment of social protection enables a special quality of cooperation with the beneficiaries, or foster parents. Namely, the foster parents in the social protection system are considered to be service providers, based on the Law on Social Protection. The role of the Center is to provide them with support and monitoring by maintaining partnership relations. In this way the direct beneficiaries of our services are foster parents, while children and their progress are the responsibility of the Center for Social Work. A holistic approach as our starting framework allows us to create a service plan for each family, based on the specific needs of the family. In this way, by supporting foster parents, we also monitor the child in care.

The following graphs respectively show the distribution of the children, and the adults/elderly placed in foster families in the administrative districts of South Bačka, Srem and Central Banat.
Tell us about the structure of the Center (number of staff, organizational structure)?

There are currently 13 employees in the Center for Foster Care and Adoption of Novi Sad, including one supervisor (social worker), an implementer of training programs (teacher), four foster care advisers (one social worker, two psychologists and an educator) and one intern-adviser for foster care (a teacher), who work directly with foster families. The head of the Center is the director, while other employees include the Secretary of the Institution, the head of accounting, an administrative worker, a driver, and a maid. The systematisation stipulates the total of 24 employees in the Center, and we are still focusing on how to provide the necessary human resources to perform our activities freely.

Tell us briefly about the activities of the Center for Foster Care and Adoption of Novi Sad?

The Center’s activities can be broadly divided into two segments: the first relates to the direct work with the family, while the other focuses on the creation of conditions to achieve better cooperation with the family.

When we say direct cooperation with the family, we primarily refer to the processes of selecting and preparing the foster; that is, determining general eligibility for foster care. Then there are the processes of selecting the adequate foster families, and participating in planning services and protection measures in foster care. CFCA of Novi Sad monitors and reviews the implementation of fostering, but also supports the direct beneficiaries of foster care and foster families. One of the most important tasks of the Center is also to participate in the preparation of the beneficiary to exit the system of social protection or change the service provided. Of course, we must not forget the constant support to foster families, the children
and the elderly, but also to professionals in the form of training, practice and work on strengthening competencies.

The second segment of the Center for Foster Care and Adoption of Novi Sad refers to the creation and development of conditions to achieve better cooperation with the family. The Center achieves this by popularising foster care, informing, and campaigning for foster care, but also by raising awareness and involving the local community resources; finally, by implementing research and project activities, as well as by publishing the professional literature.

You can find more information about the activities of the Center at the website: http://www.cpsuns.rs

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**How can one become a foster parent?**

The process of establishing foster care begins by filing a request (free form) to the Center for Social Work in the municipality of residence. The application should include the appropriate documentation:

1. photocopy of the ID card;
2. birth certificate;
3. marriage certificate (if the foster parents are married);
4. certificate of citizenship;
5. medical certificate;
6. confirmation of employment and monthly income (including income from agricultural activities, rental of apartments/houses, and unregistered activities);
7. certificate of the property (the sales contract for apartments/houses, the rental contract, the purchase contract, the probate);
8. police clearance certificate (issued by the police department);
9. certificate that foster parent is not under any investigation or indictment (issued by the court);
10. certificate that the prospective foster parent is not deprived of parental rights (issued by the court);
11. certificate that the prospective foster parent is not deprived of the capacity for work (issued by the Center for social work);
12. certificate that the foster parent does not have a record as a person under measures of protection against domestic violence (provided by the Center for Social Work).
Spouses or common-law partners - the prospective foster parents, attend the preparation program for foster care. Training lasts 33 hours, and is organised into 11 thematic units.

Upon the completion of the preparation programme, the Center for foster care makes a synthesized report - the results and expert opinion on the general suitability of the prospective foster parents, which are submitted to the Center for social work. The Center for Social Work shall decide on the general suitability of the prospective foster parents and issue a certificate of foster care, with a validity period of two years.

After the two-year period expires, the Center for Social Work shall decide on the extension or termination of the certificate of foster care, valuing the success of accomplishing the foster role, based on the monitoring of the foster family; that is, the report of the Center for Foster Care on the re-assessment of the foster family.

The foster parents have the right to appeal against the decision of the Center for Social Work in case they do not get general eligibility for foster care.

A tolerant person is not a person who makes concessions, but a soft person, who holds their beliefs, but also accepts the fact that others are entitled to their beliefs, and that every human being is equally valuable and has the right to be who they are.

The institution of regional ombudsman has assessed on the occasion of the International Day of Tolerance, that the society in Serbia should put more efforts for the tolerance to become the rule rather than the exception.
Commissioner for Equality, Brankica Janković, said on the occasion of this day that since the beginning of the year, the number of Serbian citizens who have filed complaints of discrimination is rising, and that most complaints are related to discrimination in employment.

Tolerance, however, is no mere appreciation of the diversity of other people, race and nation, tolerance is a way to improve our personal development. By acknowledging and learning about other people’s differences we learn about the world that we do not know well enough. After all, learning about different, and re-evaluating your values, priorities and beliefs. People who are different with their lives and lifestyles do not disturb others around them but only members of a minority and as such have the right to be part of the motley majority. These are different people of different ethnic, sexual and religious beliefs, the sick, the poor, the elderly, refugees and handicapped.

How to prevent intolerance?

Education is the most effective means of preventing intolerance. Education should be considered an urgent imperative. Therefore it is necessary to promote systematic tolerance teaching methods that will address the cultural, social, economic, political and religious sources of intolerance - the main root of violence.
Roma Educational Center

Roma Educational Center was founded as a non-partisan, non-profit and non-governmental organization in 2005 with the mission of Roma Inclusion into the local community on the territory of Serbia. The term “inclusion” is viewed as a series of complex activities whose goal is to create conditions for the equal integration of marginalized groups (like the Roma) into society. This is accomplished through capacity building and their active involvement in integrative social processes. Stevan Nikolić, president of the Roma Educational Center told us something more about this association.

Institutional cooperation system with NGOs

From the perspective of the NGO sector, certain organizations in Vojvodina and Serbia have made a very good platform that concerns the engagement and defining positions to set up pedagogical assistants, health mediators and Roma Coordinators and it is very important that the relationship between the institutional system and the non-governmental sector is not interrupted. “We have to be unique because time is not a renewable resource, and we have huge problems on the field, such as people who do not have identity documents. Back in 2005/6, we registered 124 persons in Subotica in the register of births and so far we have brought about 90 people to enroll later. In parallel, we collaborate with other organizations dealing with the same issue. Those are “Praxis” and “Help the Children” from Belgrade. So far, we are proud that we have over 3,500 personal documents renewed and that we have defined a new position of the local community, and to the Committee on Inter-Ethnic Relations in Peščara. Chairman of the Board is of Roma ethnicity. The core work of this committee is that if the court finds a misunderstanding between neighbors, that body sits as a peace council. “

The vision of “Roma Educational Centre”

The vision of REC is a society without prejudice, where an individual has a democratic right to participate in creating an environment that will provide equal opportunities to everyone.

Representation and mediation of the REC works towards the implementation of existing measures and proposes new for the advancement of Roma communities in the region. They promote all human rights and educate environment that fosters diversity as a top value. They advocate “living with each other” and not “next to each other.” It is a necessary prerequisite for the Roma national community (and other marginalized communities) to be accepted and acknowledged as a member and allowed to participate with activism in creating an equal society. As part of this process, a segment of personal responsibility to act is always present.

Xenophobia

Stevan Nikolić, director of the REC, says that Roma are so close and so far away from society and that forms a different mindset in thinking about their belonging. When a community always lives separately, they form their own world, culture of life and point a finger at the other. “Coincidentally, I have traveled with migrants and my experiences were negative. It’s terrible that people are afraid of the unknown. Roma live separately from other communities and therefore are unknown, they’re a little different skin and because of that people are afraid. They fear that Roma will take their position, and do not realize that we are stronger together, “said Nikolić. He pointed out that the development of inclusion rather depends on political will. “It took a lot of time win and have pedagogical assistants. Sixteen years have passed and we were able to introduce them into the school system, but their position has not not been defined.

The state has taken a loan of 12 000 000 euros, 8 500 000 is earmarked for training,
and 3 500 000 was given to schools to improve the quality of early development. School in Bor, which was in the program, received about 30 000 euros. During the school year, 16 children were transferred to special classes. Of 125 children, 119 were Roma. Why? Because it is a tradition that their grandfather was in a special class, their dad and so the grandson should be. However, thanks to a courageous coordinator, this information was leaked and then we went to the meeting in order to resolve this issue, and we succeeded, "said Nikolić. He also participated in school desegregation in Apatin where children were in a separate building for 25 years. Desegregation lasted for 4 years. “These are changes in state in our society where we learn how to live with each other. When we look at the region, we are proud to say we work well, but the path to success must not be blocked. No one has the right to say how far someone could prosper. Therefore, the inclusion is unlimited," says Nikolić.

The results so far

“Knockout Dropout” was the last done project related to the prevention of children dropping out from the education system and is funded by the Swiss Organization Pestalozzi. It is implemented in Subotica, Kragujevac, Novi Sad and Vranje.

Roma Education Centre has excellent cooperation with educational institutions in the territory Subotica: preschool “Our Joy”, elementary school “Matko Vuković”, “Djuro Salaj”, as well as adult education school, where most of the projects in the education program are being realized.

Roma Educational Center managed to establish itself as a leading cooperation organization with its performance and results when it comes to the education of Roma children. In order to provide conditions for ensuring quality-teachers in the education an institution, they sought to establish partnerships with the responsible institutions whose task is to monitor the performance of schools. Roma Education Centre has signed cooperation agreements with school administrations in: Sombor, Novi Sad and Zrenjanin, as well as the Protocol on joint activities with the Secretariat of Education, Roma Inclusion Office of the AP Vojvodine and the three mentioned school administration services for the implementation of inclusive education in Vojvodina.

Ljiljana Maričić
“KAL is a band that not only represents Romani music, but speaks volumes about its people.”

Dragan Ristić, Kal

Art exhibition “Famous Roma”
Within the project of the Roma Cultural Centre “Romani caravan of Art”, in Novi Sad, the event was held under the motto “Yes, that’s me” with the aim of educating the majority of the population - to show on the examples of good practice that Roma people have the potential and that they endowed both Serbian and the world cultural heritage. The project is being realized with the organization Civil Rights Defenders in several cities in Serbia.

Guest performance in Novi Sad is the fourth traveling caravan. It started in December 2014, in Smederevo, and continued the way during 2015 through Požega, Belgrade and Sombor. For the next year are planned performances in 15 cities in the region.

Dragan Ristić, director of the Roma Cultural Center, said the photo exhibition “The Most famous Roma people in the world” was a way to show the successful Roma because only a few people know their origin. He added that this is a completely different concept of presenting Roma population, which is the essence of the project.

Zoran Tairović, painter, said that this is a manifestation of enormous cultural capital for the Roma national minority, not only in Serbia but in Europe as well.

Dragana Rajić, from the KNOW HOW Center, emphasized that the Roma should be more vocal, not silent and that her organization, as a Center, build capacities of young Roma who will be tomorrow’s Roma elite and will have the power to loudly and clearly say: “Yes, I am Romani and I am not ashamed of it, and I want to change things in society.”

The traveling wagon is conducted by KAL band with the Roma Cultural Center, association of intellectuals of Roma and non-Roma origin, founded as a non-partisan and non-profit organization whose main goal is cultural affirmation of the Roma.