

ARISE

Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education

Policy Road Map

Helping Children from Low SES Families Complete Primary Education as a Prerequisite for Better Quality of Life

Republic of North Macedonia

Skopje, 2023

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Policy Road Map: Helping Children from Low SES

Families Complete Primary Education as a Prerequisite
for Better Quality of Life

Publisher

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Abbreviations

ARISE	Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education
BDE	Bureau for the Development of Education
CAE	Center for Adult Education
CSO	Civil Society Organization
CSW	Center for Social Work
DDAEC	Directorate for Development and Advancement of Education of the Communities
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
HR	Human Resources
MoES	Ministry of Education and Science
MoF	Ministry of Finance
MoLSP	Ministry of Labor and Social Policy
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
PS	Primary School
RNM	Republic of North Macedonia
SEC	State Examination Center
SES	Socio-economic Status
SIT	Student Inclusion Team
TCPD	Teacher Continuing Professional Development

About the project

The ARISE Project: “Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education” addresses the issue of poverty and students affected by poverty on two levels: on one hand educational and social policies can provide long-term solutions to creating equity in education, whereas pilot interventions at school level address immediate needs of students with low SES background, also providing lessons for the policies.

The Project is implemented by a consortium consisting of eight entities: Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives “Step by Step” - North Macedonia, Kosova Education Centre - Kosovo, Network of Education Policy Centres - Croatia, Sabancı University Egitim Reformu Girişimi - Turkey, Children Are the Future - Albania, Centre for Education Policy - Serbia, proMENTE social research - Bosnia and Herzegovina and Centre for Educational Initiatives Step by Step - Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The overarching goal of the Project is strengthening the capacities of civil society organizations for equal participation in policy development processes and advocacy for equity and equality in education through regional cooperation and building national coalitions.

Specifically, the project aims at supporting educational and social inclusion of low SES students by building national and regional partnerships between CSOs that advocate, engage in a constructive political dialogue with government, raise stakeholder awareness and design and implement pilot interventions.

On policy level, partner CSOs advocate for and participate in a constructive political dialogue with authorities, establish national partnerships by supporting local CSOs and increase stakeholder awareness on the impact of poverty on children’s education and welfare.

On the school level, they create effective programmes based on regional and international experiences and contribute to reducing effects of poverty on achievements and general welfare of low SES students.

In addition to activities involving research and analysis of policies that also provided recommendations for improvement; advocacy and raising public awareness; enhancing capacities of CSOs through training, mentorship, support, educational events, study visit and regional workshops; a school development program involving interventions in 5 schools in each country, through mentoring and building sustainable school practices in order to reduce the disparities and poverty, one project component directly addressed development of nationally appropriate consultation processes and tools aimed at combating poverty in and through education.

This policy development component was led by a National Policy Coalition comprising representatives of the government, the expert community, practitioners and civil society, that through consultations developed a Policy Roadmap, particular to the respective country, that outlines a possible and desirable process of addressing poverty in an area selected based on its importance and priority for supporting students from low SES families and communities.

This resulting Roadmap can be used by policy-makers and practitioners to create, develop, implement and monitor the activities and measures focusing on students with low SES, as well as an instrument for self-evaluating the progress in improving the responsiveness and effectiveness of the education system and/or individual schools in eliminating the impact of poverty on children's education, especially those from vulnerable groups.

Poverty in Education in the Republic of North Macedonia

The National Report [1] prepared under the ARISE project showed that the poverty risk rate in the RNM was 21,6%, the highest being in households with two adults and three or more young children - 44,7%, and 42,6% in households with one parent and young children. Child poverty rate was 27,8%.

PISA results showed that children from financially challenged families lagged in their achievements compared to the children from better-off families. The greatest difference in the children's achievements was in Reading (41 points), and the smallest in Math (23 points). The general students' results in Reading on the international average scale of economic, social and cultural status were among the lowest of all the participating countries in the research.

ECEC attendance rates of vulnerable or harder to reach groups were very low. More than half of the Macedonian children attended ECEC, compared to one out of five Albanian children. Only 2,6% of the Roma children attended ECEC, which seriously contributed to difficulties in their further education. The greater part of the students who started first grade did not have the necessary prior knowledge and experienced language barriers to a lesser or greater degree, which led to delayed literacy proficiency, which, further on, caused problems in their following of instruction, eventually leading to lower achievements. The probability of attending kindergarten was six times higher for children from urban communities, compared to those from rural areas. 73% of the Roma children who attend school never completed their education.

[1] Velkovski, Z. (2021): Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education - National Report for North Macedonia, Step by Step Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives, Skopje

[1a] Velkovski, Z. (2021): Action for Reducing Inequalities in Education - Policy Brief: North Macedonia, Step by Step Foundation for Education and Cultural Initiatives, Skopje

SES is one of the most powerful adverse influences not only on the life of the low SES families, but also on the education of affected children and youth at all levels, from primary school to higher education.

Negative effects included: lower rates of participation in the education process, greater probability of drop-out, poorer achievements and insufficient progress.

Children with low SES had lowest rates of ECEC participation and poorest achievements in primary school, which later affected their progress to and within secondary and higher education. Legal solutions for adult education were not very functional because of the poor quality of schools/centres for adult education and their limited network across the country.

An additional reason for discontinuation of primary and/or secondary education and thus lack of work competences for low SES individuals was their engagement in the grey economy, including child labour.

Strategic Aim

The policy goal and the specific objectives of the Policy Roadmap aim to contribute to the strategic aim of the national education system, namely that **all children complete primary education equipped with the necessary competences.**

Goal of the Policy Road Map

All children from families with low SES progress thanks to quality teaching, stimulative learning environment and support at enrollment and throughout their primary education, so as to ensure all prerequisites are met for continuation into and completion of secondary education.

The goal is to be pursued through a set of interrelated specific objectives, each operationalized by means of mutually reinforcing activities.

Specific Objective 1

Existing education and social policies are reviewed and, if necessary, revised and new flexible and effective ones are developed providing for additional support and opportunities guaranteeing that the right to quality education of children with low SES is appropriately met.

Activities

1.1. To raise awareness about the importance of ECEC and the participation of the vulnerable groups/children from families with low SES in ECEC.

1.2. To provide learning support to children with low SES at enrolment in primary school and throughout their primary education.

1.3. Social services coordinate with the schools and assist the learning process, especially with regard to attendance and progression.

1.4. To promote and expand the implementation of the concept for validation of prior learning for children and youth (without formal evidence/documents) in primary education.

Specific Objective 2

Schools are supported in building an inclusive culture and improving competences of staff to help improve quality and relevance of education for students with low SES.

Activities

2.1. To improve teachers' competencies for working with vulnerable children and families.

2.2. To reduce/eliminate stereotypes in the wider school community against vulnerable families/communities.

2.3. To increase the participation of parents of students from vulnerable groups/with low SES in school governance.

Specific Objective 3

Schools implement tailor-made, timely and effective additional education services that help compensate the adverse consequences of poverty among children with low SES.

Activities

3.1. To provide children who have not attended preschool programs and/or lack school readiness skills and prior knowledge with short compensatory programmes before starting 1st Grade.

3.2. To provide additional opportunities and measures to ensure that students from vulnerable groups/with low SES can master the curricular requirements and acquire expected competencies necessary for progression into subsequent grades and education tiers.

Specific Objective 4

A wide range of information and services are provided in the community to assist the learning that takes place in schools and to assure children with low SES progress along with their peers.

Activities

4.1. CSOs improve the quality and expand the reach of/coverage with the mediation process between schools and families.

4.2. Parents from vulnerable groups/with low SES improve their understanding of positive and responsible parenting.

4.3. The learning occurring in school is strengthened and reinforced through non-formal learning in the community and support at home.

The Appendix elaborates in greater detail the respective objectives and activities, specifying accompanying measures and defining other aspects necessary for successful implementation of the activities, including results, target groups, priority levels, responsible entities and partners, and risks and steps necessary to mitigate said risks.

Appendix - Policy Road Map Overview

Goal	All children from families with low SES progress thanks to quality teaching, stimulative learning environment and support at enrolment and throughout their primary education, so as to ensure all prerequisites are met for continuation into and completion of secondary education.			
Specific Objective 1	Existing education and social policies are reviewed and, if necessary, revised and new flexible and effective ones are developed providing for additional support and opportunities guaranteeing that the right to quality education of children with low SES is appropriately met.			
Activity 1.1	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To raise awareness about the importance of ECEC and the participation of the vulnerable groups/children from families with low SES in ECEC	Low SES families with children of preschool age	1.1.1 Launch a campaign for raising awareness of the benefits of attending ECEC that targets vulnerable groups/families with low SES.	More children attend ECEC	High
		1.1.2 Introduce compulsory preschool education in the year prior to starting primary school.	All the children start first grade with necessary prior knowledge and skills	
		1.1.3 Continue and expand measures for covering the ECEC user fees for children from low SES families from the central and/or local budgets.	More children with low SES covered with ECEC	
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Experience, research, commitment, practice of waiving ECEC user fee	MoLSP	Kindergartens, local authorities, NGOs active in the sector, schools	Lack of interest Lack of funds	Selection of committed and responsible individuals, cooperation with donors, media
Activity 1.2	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To provide learning support to children with low SES at enrolment in primary school and throughout their primary education	- all primary school students - primary school students with low SES	1.2.1 Introduce legal obligation to transfer children's portfolios from the kindergarten to the primary school when they enrol in 1 st grade, so that schools can prepare to meet the specific needs of the future 1 st -graders.	Better distribution between classes and easier planning of instruction	High
		1.2.2 Reformulate and expand the deployment of education mediators (following the example of the work with Roma children and their families) in order to support all the children with low SES and their families.	Better family-school cooperation, more engaged parents	Medium
		1.2.3 Introduce (state) budget for tutors who provide non-formal compensatory learning for children with poor attendance or longer period of absence (migration, parents' seasonal engagement, illness, disability)	Regular performance of school tasks, higher	Medium

			achievement of learning objectives	
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing portfolios, needs awareness, Rulebook on the work of tutors, project experiences, trained and experienced tutors and education mediators	MoLSP, MoES, MoF	Kindergartens, primary schools, NGOs	Lack of funds	Securing donor assistance, rationalization in primary education
Activity 1.3	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
Social services coordinate with the schools and assist the learning process, especially with regard to attendance and progression	- children from vulnerable groups/with low SES - teachers, professional support staff, social workers	1.3.1 Redefine policies that define the responsibilities of CSW to include joint field work/outreach activities together with school support professional staff, i.e. visits to families with children at 1 st grade age, provide information on their rights and the school, also providing information to the school for the purpose of appropriate preparations (every year in the period March-May).	Identification of children who are out of school and their inclusion in the education process	High
		1.3.2 Redefine policies that define the responsibilities of CSW for regular or occasional visits to vulnerable families, together with the school support professional staff, to monitor attendance, progress and transition of the vulnerable students and provide the necessary support to families	Children with low SES attend classes regularly, have better achievements and progress to next tier	Medium
		1.3.3 Assign a social worker responsible for cooperating with and working in schools with majority/significant share of low SES students and constant contact with the professional support staff, the teachers and the parents.	Direct and timely detection and reaction to absenteeism	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
School and CSW staff	MoLSP, MoES	Primary schools, especially school professional support staff, CSW, local authorities	Other priorities, CSW is burdened, lack of concrete cooperation practices	- Lobbying by schools and NGOs - piloting new local practices, dissemination
Activity 1.4	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To promote and expand the implementation of the concept for validation of	Out-of-school children, returnees,	1.4.1 Implement in practice legally adopted solutions for validation of prior learning in primary education, prioritising class exams to assess achieved learning objectives/expected results at the end of the first two cycles	Greater number of out-of-school children verify their	High

prior learning for children and youth (without formal evidence/documents) in primary education	children of (e)migrants	(third grade and sixth grade), instead of abridged programs (since they require older students to sit in class with younger children).	competences and enrol in age-appropriate classes. ²	
		1.4.2 Redefine the concept of adult education for low SES youth aged 16 or over, who still have not completed primary education, by improving the quality and efficiency of the schools/centres for adults, provision of flexible instruction (including online and multimedia) and establishing cooperation with their previous primary schools.	Greater number of youths aged 16 or over who have not completed primary education are able to obtain school leaving certificate and acquire work skills	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing legal solutions for validation of prior learning, trained staff, class exam practices, pilot projects	MoES, SEC, CAE	Primary schools, BDE, civil society	Resistance to innovative forms of completing a grade, circle, primary education Necessary funds	Lobbying with MoES, DDAEC

Goal	All children from families with low SES progress thanks to quality teaching, stimulative learning environment and support at enrolment and throughout their primary education, so as to ensure all prerequisites are met for continuation into and completion of secondary education.			
Specific Objective 2	Schools are supported in building an inclusive culture and improving competences of staff to help improve quality and relevance of education for low SES students			
Activity 2.1	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To improve teachers' competencies for working with vulnerable children and families	Primary schools, teachers, professional support staff	2.1.1 Structure TCPD (intra-school, within the municipality, with expert external trainers, through learning communities, mobility projects, etc.) to develop competencies for working with vulnerable children and families (e.g. social justice training, additional/remedial instruction, individualised support, outreach activities, creating stimulative learning	Competent teachers who can plan and deliver instruction for all students including those with special needs and low SES	High

[2] Cutting down on unnecessary, demotivating and unproductive time students are required to spend in abridged program classes together with younger children, providing them with certificates for 3rd and 6th grade if they have mastered the requirements through any alternative learning pathway.

		environments, differentiated planning and instruction, improving the school climate, better student-teacher interaction etc.)		
		2.1.2 Improve cooperation of schools and teaching faculties with CSOs that have direct access to and information on families, communities and children with low SES - their situation and difficulties they experience.	Timely information available to stakeholders Uniform messages	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing SIT, piloted teacher training programmes, pool of mentors/trainers (academia and practitioners), experienced organizations	MoES, BDE	Primary schools, expert community / universities, NGOs and professional organizations	Wide scope of activities, need for comprehensive logistics and budget Insufficient cooperation and lack of trust among stakeholders	Distribute strategic plan for HR development in education to donors ³ Regular meetings to share experiences
Activity 2.2	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To reduce/eliminate stereotypes in the wider school community against vulnerable families/communities	Parents schools attended by students from vulnerable groups and majority groups	2.2.1 Organise workshops for parents on accepting diversity, promoting cooperation, mutual respect and support.	Greater awareness leads to acceptance and develops a sense of belonging	Medium
		2.2.2 Organise events and activities to bring people together and respect diversity (e.g. bazaars, show/salesrooms, visits, student exchanges, local activism etc.)		
		2.2.3 Strengthen the work of the Student Parliament by organizing training and partaking in planning and implementation of various activities (preferably initiated by and/or implemented by students).	Students become owners of the process of eliminating stereotypes in their schools, families and communities	High
		2.2.4 Including successful alumni (students or working adults) who came from low SES families and have overcome adversity	Positive role-models increase self-confidence, motivation and trust in the system	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation

[3] By area/theme/project, according to their expressed interests.

Existing good practices, engaged teachers, willing stakeholders	Primary schools	Student parliaments, students, parents' councils, active community members, civil society	School staff needs to invest additional efforts	Activities planned and included in the annual work plan of the school
Activity 2.3	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To increase the participation of parents of students from vulnerable groups/with low SES in school governance	Parent councils, parents of vulnerable/ low SES students	2.3.1 Strengthen the role of the Parent Councils through training, assigning of tasks and including parents of low SES students in monitoring quality of teaching and student achievements. ⁴	Active, open-minded, inclusive parent councils	Medium
		2.3.2 Include representatives of the dominant vulnerable groups in the work of the Parents Council and/or other advisory and/or governing bodies in the school.	The vulnerable groups get an instrument for meeting their specific needs	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing parent councils, trainers for education for tolerance and related topics	Primary schools	Parent councils, experts, civil society	Low level of importance attributed	Empower parents, raise public awareness

Goal	All children from families with low SES progress thanks to quality teaching, stimulative learning environment and support at enrolment and throughout their primary education, so as to ensure all prerequisites are met for continuation into and completion of secondary education.			
Specific Objective 3	Schools implement tailor-made, timely and effective additional education services that help compensate the adverse consequences of poverty among children with low SES			
Activity 3.1	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To provide children who have not attended preschool programs and/or lack school readiness skills and prior knowledge with short compensatory programmes before starting 1 st Grade	children younger than 1 st grade	3.1.1 Organise intensive preparatory activities during the summer before the start of the school year for incoming 1 st -graders who have not attended ECEC, so that they can acquire prior knowledge, work routines and/or command of the language of instructions so as ensure their school readiness.	The children possess all prerequisite knowledge, skills and habits and are familiar with school rules and expectations	High
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation

[4] In addition to the acquisition of knowledge/academic progress, of equal importance is building of tolerance, social and emotional skills, the sense of belonging and development of democratic attitudes.

Existing caregivers and teachers	MoLSP, MoES	Kindergartens, schools	Necessary funds for additional workload	Easy logistics, a pilot would provide expected timeline, scope and expenses
Activity 3.2	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
To provide additional opportunities and measures to ensure that students from vulnerable groups/with low SES can master the curricular requirements and acquire expected competencies necessary for progression into subsequent grades and education tiers	Out-of-school children, low achievers, students with low SES and/or without support at home	3.2.1 Include separate section in the Annual school workplan including measures for work with vulnerable students, tailor-made for each school depending on its needs and based on regularly refreshed data, containing necessary information on students, factors affecting achievements and individualised recommendations.	Well-planned evidence-based activities are more likely to be accomplished in time and with good quality	High
		3.2.2 Provide specially equipped space(s) for learning, writing homework, social and emotional learning activities, etc., that students can use after classes, with adequate teacher support.	Shortcomings in home support are compensated adequately	High
		3.2.3 Design and pilot special measures to provide additional services and opportunities in addition to schooling (e.g. transport and mobility, lobbying for local financial support, health, social and special education services in the community, assistive technology and learning resources in the homes and in the school etc.) for students with disabilities ⁵ .	Education is supported by the other sectors in dealing with non-education related issues Families and schools have necessary resources	High
		3.2.4 Provide free snacks for children receiving social and/or special assistance.	Reduced disparities, additional help for families	High
		3.2.5 Organise short, intensive, multimedia, flexible compensatory instruction (additional/remedial) for students without education, those who have been absent for a longer period of time or are older than 16.	Students who have missed (part of) instruction can compensate by non-formal learning in a formal environment	Medium
		3.2.6 Strengthen remedial instruction for vulnerable students within the framework of the 6-hour workday of school staff, beyond requirements of the provisions of the Concept for Primary Education and introduction of remedial instruction for 1 st -graders	Students with poorer achievements have opportunities to catch-up	High

[5] Especially bearing in mind high expenses these families face in caring for a child with disabilities, employment barriers parents face, insufficient accessibility and equipment of schools, etc.

		3.2.7 Design and operationalise online platforms that support learning for children with low SES (based on the ANNO platform created by CSI "Nadez" as a part of the ARISE project).	Children with low SES get extra support and motivation to learn	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing school facilities and staff that should ensure that all students master curriculum requirements; existing peer support example	MoES, primary schools, BDE	Students, families, local authorities, civil society	Inconsistent remedial instruction Lack of monitoring practices for students with high absenteeism	MoES monitors implementation of strategies and its responsibilities

Goal	All children from families with low SES progress thanks to quality teaching, stimulative learning environment and support at enrolment and throughout their primary education, so as to ensure all prerequisites are met for continuation into and completion of secondary education.			
Specific Objective 4.	A wide range of information and services are provided in the community to assist the learning that takes place in schools and to assure children with low SES progress along with their peers			
Activity 4.1	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
CSOs improve the quality and expand the reach of/coverage with the mediation process between schools and families	Primary schools, families	4.1.1 Mediation between vulnerable families and schools is a regular activity and is strengthened when a student is at risk.	Better information, coordination, motivation of families, enhanced child rights protection	High
		4.1.2 Expanding the role of CSOs in education mediation (currently focused only on Roma children and their families) in order to support all low SES students.		
		4.1.3 Organise events and activities to help people get together and respect diversity (e.g. bazaars, show/salesrooms, visits, student exchange, local activism etc.)		
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Motivated professional staff, positive practices, active civil society	Primary schools, CSOs	Local authorities, parents	The civil society is not accepted as equal partner	Comprehensive campaigns, involvement of local influential champions
Activity 4.2	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority

Parents from vulnerable groups/with low SES improve their understanding of positive and responsible parenting	Parents, families from vulnerable groups/with low SES	4.2.1 Organise non-formal educational activities for parents focusing on responsible positive parenting, learning support at home, entering the labour market, empowering families, etc.	Improved parenting skills and self-confidence	High
		4.2.2 Organise informational activities for parents on children's health and development, family hygiene, access to health, social services, labour market and justice, importance of education, gender equality, etc.	Parents are better informed	High
		4.2.3 Provide opportunities to improve family hygiene and quality of nutrition (as prerequisites for learning).	Better health and hygiene	Medium
		4.2.4 Organise activities for distributing humanitarian and other assistance.	Improved SES status of families	High
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Existing experience, facilities and infrastructure at the local level	Civil society	Local authorities, families, business sector	Donor dependence Inadequate municipal funding ⁶	Raising public awareness Lobbying with donors
Activity 4.3	Target group	Measures	Results	Priority
The learning occurring in school is strengthened and reinforced through non-formal learning in the community and support at home	Students from vulnerable groups/with low SES	4.3.1 Organise educational activities for children from the vulnerable groups without parental support for learning and continuation of education	Helps master curriculum requirements	High
		4.3.2 Organise activities for strengthening self-help of families and peer support in the community (e.g. doing homework together, group care for younger children etc.).	Increased independence and mobility	Medium
Resources	Resp. entity	Partners	Risks	Risk mitigation
Experience and facilities of CSOs	CSOs, families	Primary schools, local authorities, civil society in general	Donor dependence Dependency culture of the users	Engagement of local activities and champions, building on best practices based on "from-us-4-us" principle

[6] Recent research indicates that less than 0.1% of municipal funds are dedicated to CSO local initiatives.



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