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**Engagement and Monitoring of Assistants to Teachers of Serbian as a Non-Mother Tongue in Selected Elementary Schools in Bujanovac and Preševo**

**THE FINAL REPORT**

**(February 2019 to June 2019)**

**Ref. UNOPS-EUPRO-2018-S-006**

**June, 2019**

**Introduction**

The Final Report has been specified as a deliverable in the Contract for Services UNOPS- EUPRO-2018-S-006, related to the consulting services in respect of engagement and monitoring of assistants to teachers of Serbian as a non-mother tongue in 4 elementary schools in Bujanovac and Preševo. The Final Report was prepared by Robert Kozma, Program Manager, on 17 June 2019.

#### Background

One of the characteristics of Bujanovac and Preševo as post-conflict municipalities is the protracted polarisation of citizens based on their ethnicity and language. This polarisation is also visible in the education system. Schools are not based on ethnic background of students. However, there are separate schools in which teaching is either in Serbian or Albanian. School students of mainly Albanian ethnicity attend schools with tuition in the Albanian language and vice versa, school students of Serbian ethnicity attend schools with tuition in the Serbian language. Children of Roma ethnicity mainly attend the latter schools. Students in the schools where teaching is in Albanian have obligatory subject of Serbian as a non-mother tongue, while there are no courses of the Albanian language as the language of local community offered in schools with teaching in the Serbian language. Inadequate knowledge of the Serbian language among youth of the Albanian national minority seriously damages their opportunities for further education and employment in Serbia, while the lack of bilingualism among all citizens hampers social cohesion in these municipalities. In 2014, the Coordination Body for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa (CBO) conducted research and the following report: the “Study on the Possibilities for Improvement of Teaching/Learning of Serbian as a Non-Mother Tongue in Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa”. They have detected that only 5% of Albanian school children from 16 elementary schools encompassed by research have functional ability to communicate in Serbian. One of the main reasons for shortcomings in teaching Serbian as a non-mother tongue is the lack of qualified staff. Because of that, authors of the Study proposed introduction of teaching assistants with appropriate qualifications in teaching methodology of Serbian as a non-mother tongue. Since 2015, a confluence of stakeholders[[1]](#footnote-1)have supported and implemented recommendations specified in the Study, enabling for six teaching assistants to be engaged in four elementary schools in Preševo and Bujanovac. Project “Engagement and Monitoring of Assistants to Teachers of Serbian as a Non-Mother Tongue in Selected Elementary Schools in Bujanovac and Preševo” builds on the results of previous actions and aims to contribute to the recommendation of the Study and to improvement of social cohesion of Bujanovac and Preševo.

**Milestone I –1 February 2019 to 17 June 2019**

1. Communication and coordination of the key project stakeholders
2. Results of the second testing of students’ knowledge of Serbian as a non-mother tongue
3. The TAs engaged regularly in delivery of classes of Serbian as a non-mother tongue
4. Executed regular supervision, management and monitoring of the TAs work;
5. Regular communication with the schools, ensuring project implementation in accordance with the work plan;
6. The third testing of students’ knowledge of Serbian as non-mother tongue

**Output 1: Communication and coordination of the key project stakeholders (Ministry of Education, Coordination Body for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa, EU PRO)**

**Activity 1.1: Regular communication and coordination**

Regular communication among all key stakeholders maintained in this reporting period.

On April 2nd 2019, CBO, Group 484 and UNOPS EU PRO representative held coordination meeting. We have agreed to organize the third testing of pupils’ knowledge of Serbian as non-mother tongue from 11th to 13th June. After internal assessment of project activities, it was concluded that there is a strong need for continuation of project and for support in teaching Serbian as non-mother tongue. EU PRO representative stated that will assess possibilities for continuation of project through support of EU PRO programme. Also, it was acknowledged that it is highly important for improvement of pupils’ knowledge of Serbian language to include pupils in extracurricular activities with their peers whom Serbian is mother tongue. In order to do so, it is important to create synergy with other similar projects implemented by Group 484, CBO or other respective CSOs. Following this meeting, CBO applied to Fund for Open Society – Serbia for funding with project proposal “Lets talk” which would be implemented in Preševo and Bujanovac. They aim to connect through several educational workshops pupils from classes in which are TAs engaged with their peers from schools in which are tuition in Serbian language. Group 484 associates would be engaged as educators in workshops and extra-curriculum activities.

The Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development approved the organisation of the third testing of Serbian as a non-mother tongue of school students in the selected elementary schools in Bujanovac and Preševo, upon the request of the CBO. At the same time, CBO and Group 484 asked schools to determine days in June that would be suitable for testing school students. Furthermore, CBO informed and invited School Administration of MESTD – Leskovac to the testing of school students.

**Output 2: Second testing of students’ knowledge of Serbian as a non-mother tongue**

**Activity 2.1: Realisation of second testing**

The second test was realised from 23rd to 25th January 2019. School students of 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grades of all schools included in the project participated in testing, namely Elementary School “Ibrahim Keljmendi” and Elementary School “Seljami Halači” from Oraovica, Preševo, and Elementary School “Naim Frasheri” and Elementary School “Muharem Kadriu” from Veliki Trnovac, Bujanovac. In total, 69 pupils of 3rd grade, 237 pupils of 4th grade, 78 pupils of 5th grade and 258 pupils of 6th grade participated in testing. They all conducted test in their schools during one school hour i.e. 45 minutes. They all participated anonymous.

Test was designed in such way to measure functional knowledge of Serbian language and not a theoretical knowledge of language neither knowledge of Serbian literature. Test was printed in Latin alphabet, while instructions were also given in Albanian language. Furthermore, to pupils were given examples of correct answer or solution for each task. There was different type of tasks that would be solved by choosing a correct answer within multiple choices, filling the parts in sentencing, transferring sentences from Latin to Cyrillic alphabet, connecting and transforming sentences as according to instructions, describing pictures, and similar. Test was in accordance with valid curriculum for 3rd, 4th, 5th and 6th grades and with valid standards for the language and language culture of Serbian language as a non-mother tongue. Test aimed to assess three language competences: writing, reading (understanding of written text) and listening (understanding of listened text).

Results of pupils of 3rd and 4th grades: in total, average test results of classes are better in January 2019 than in May and November 2018. Modest progress is visible in all classes, except in one class in “Ibrahim Keljmendi” and in “Muharem Kadriu”. Eight classes had average mark that was satisfying, with more than 50% of correct answers, while only four classes had satisfying mark in November 2018. These eight classes show that they as a collective have basic language competence in accordance with their age. On individual level, more pupils than in previous two testing achieved satisfying mark i.e. had more than 50% of correct answers, i.e. 143 pupils in 4th grade (while in previous testing 106 pupils) and 12 pupils in 3rd grade (while in previous testing 4 pupils). As in previous testing, the best achievements had pupils of fourth grade of Elementary School “Ibrahim Keljmendi”.

Pupils were the most competent in listening, understanding of listened text. Similar as in previous tests, younger pupils show stronger progress, which is something that should be taken in consideration for future activities. Assumption of engaged experts is that in the first cycle of education (up to 5th grade) teachers pay attention more to learning basic lexicon of Serbian language than to grammar of Serbian language, as well as that teachers in these grades apply more useful methods for learning foreign language and approaching to pupils.

Results of pupils of 5th and 6th grades: pupils achieved more diverse results in these grades. There was small or modest progress in twelve classes, while in 6 classes pupils achieved weaker results than in tests conducted in May/June and/or November 2018. For instance, three classes in Elementary School “Seljami Halači” had lower grades of achievement than in previous tests, which was unexpected because in that school teacher and TA cooperate for two years already. Only one class as a collective had on average satisfying mark with at least 50% correct answers (one class in “Muharem Kadriu”). The best progress was in “Muharem Kadriu”, which was unexpected due to issues of the lack of discipline among pupils which TA faced with at the beginning of engagement. On individual level, there was strong increase of number of pupils that achieved satisfying grade with 50% or more correct answers: from 69 to 99 pupils, in comparison to previous testing.

Pupils were the most competent in listening, understanding of listened text and in using correct lexicon, while the main issues had in applying appropriate grammar rules and achieving grammar competence, above all in functionally using three basic verb tenses. Pupils of all grades had the best achievements in listening, after that in written and speaking production (i.e. using of correct lexicons), while the main issues had with grammar rules.

Recommendations: support the work of TAs and expend teaching assistance in as much as possible classes because there are visible indicators of progress of pupils’ knowledge of Serbian language; if possible, continue with TA support in current classes in order to allow pupils to gain the maximum possible language competences while they are in elementary school; encouraging teachers to apply teaching knowledge and methods, which they learned at trainings, at classes; assess the needs of teachers and create training for them to gain appropriate knowledge for teaching those segments of curricula and language competences in which pupils constantly show the lowest knowledge, i.e. learning grammar rules in the second cycle of education (from fifth to eight grade); continue with testing in order to measure (possible) progress and/or to detect main challenges in teaching process.

**Output 3: The TAs engaged regularly in delivering classes of Serbian as a non-mother tongue**

**Activity 3.1: The TAs regularly assist in delivering classes**

The assistants are supporting teachers in delivery of classes of Serbian as a non-mother tongue in 36 classes of 3rd, 4th, 5th, 6th and 8th grades and one combined class (3rd and 4th grade), together with nine teachers of the Serbian language. The overall number of school students covered with the project is 738. There are 398 male students and 340 female students.

The teaching assistants are submitting regular monthly reports and provide insights in their work with school students, applied teaching methods, curriculum and class units, as well as relation with students and teachers. Here is a short review of TAs work in period from February 2019 to Jun 2019:

* **TAs Impression of the executed work with school students and achievement of students**

In this period, a special focus was on practicing to reinforce specific knowledge of the vocabulary, grammar, and sound and spelling systems (phonics) with extensive planned practice and use in order to build the skills needed for communication. Testing shows that students have increased their knowledge, but also that they should constantly return to the previous lessons through repetition, because this is the only way for students to remember and practice (in communication) things they already learned.

Assistants encourage students to seek answers to their questions themselves and, if they do not know the answer, they are then guided to a solution. The students are happy when they complete the task and when they get a certificate of their knowledge by the assistants. Also, the students can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Most of students can introduce themselves and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has and so on. Also, they can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (very basic personal and family information, shopping, food topic etc.) Assistants select textbooks and adapt their approach to students’ level of achievement. They work with whole class, small groups, and pairs to provide students with frequent opportunities to talk and try to activate students’ prior knowledge about a given topic before the text is introduced.

The students now freely ask questions, explain something in their own word and participate in different language exercises without fear of mistake. In this period the focus was on communication through creative games (pantomime, game association, writing diary, creating test for TAs) and students are increasingly free and more willing to use the Serbian language.

TAs recommend that students should have more opportunities to interact with native speakers through socializing with other students in Serbian schools, going together to the cinema or theatre, going to excursion in Niš, outdoor activities and so on.

* **Cooperation with teachers**

In cooperation with teachers, there are no changes compared to the previous reporting period. Teachers generally support suggestions for teaching lessons and consultations. On the other side, when it comes to preparation for classes and designing teaching material, teachers are reluctant to collaborate on this matter, assistants often prepare teaching material on their own.

Only in the case of Assistant Ivana Milenković there is constant problem in cooperation with delegated teacher, due to his mental health and health related issues. He generally does not pay attention to fulfilling his task of teaching pupils or to maintain discipline in class. Thus, TA Ivana Milenković conducts most of classes alone, without the cooperation with him, although teacher is present in classes. Management of the Elementary School “Ibrahim Keljmendi” is aware of this problem, but are reluctant to solve it, because teacher have several months before going into retirement.

* **Work-related difficulties**

During this reporting period the assistants identified the lack of discipline of students as a main difficulty in their work. Furthermore, some of the assistants reported the problem concerned the unsuitable textbooks for teaching. What is continue in this reporting period is that teachers leave assistants alone or consider TAs as a substitute for their presence, as they did in previous period.

* **Consultations / meetings/ cooperation between assistants**

Assistants closely cooperate with their colleagues deployed in the same town, while cooperation with assistants deployed in another town is quite rare. It is still noteworthy that Dragana Milutinović, engaged in Oraovica / Preševo, maintains frequent communication with assistants engaged in Bujanovac and shares the teaching materials / ideas she applies to everyone.

Note: TA Brankica Zivkovic reported that she worked with the student who should work according to IEP (Individual Educational Plan) for school students with intellectual disabilities/with difficulties in learning, because she demonstrated willingness and potential to learn and feels emotionally satisfied when somebody is working with her.

**Activity 3.2: Extracurricular activities**

Brankica Živković and Marko Radulović started attending the advanced course on the Albanian language in May 2019 organised in Bujanovac by the OSCE – Mission in Serbia.

Four TAs (Brankica Živković, Vlada Petrović, Marko Radulović, Olgica Stojanović) in April 2019 successfully finished seminar for teachers “We and the Others” organized by Group 484 in Bujanovac. Seminar is accredited by the Institute for the Advancement of Education of the Republic of Serbia for increasing teaching capacities for intercultural cooperation and developing pupils’ intercultural competences through the prism of local social history and the history of everyday life of “ordinary people”. The seminar included 2 days of lectures, after which the participants were applied the acquired knowledge and skills in working with school students, through a small school research or an experimental class. TAs reported high satisfaction with gained knowledge and conducted research projects with pupils in May 2019.

TA Dragana Milutinović attended training “Мир-paqe-mir“ organized in Kruševo, Macedonica, from 10th to 19th May 2019, by the Centre for nonviolent action from Belgrade/Sarajevo. Participants were from Serbia, Macedonia and Kosovo. Training covered several important concepts and issues: functioning of multicultural societies, gender equality, how to resolve violence and conflicts in societies.

**Output 4: Executed regular supervision, management and monitoring of the TAs work**

**Activity 4.1 Maintain regular communication with the assistants and review of regular TAs monthly reports**

Besides teaching, the assistants have an obligation of preparing and submitting monthly reports, where they summarise their activities. The deadline for the submission of monthly reports was 20 every month. All the reports were very well prepared by all engaged assistants. The communication with the assistants was regular. They informed Group 484 about any deviation in the work (absence of teachers during the class, day off, school day, etc.) The Project Team maintained regular communication and field visits with the assistants. The following meetings were organised during the reporting period:

1. 10 April 2019: Katarina Najdanović, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, Robert Kozma, Project Manager, and Ivana Seratlić, Project Assistant met all six assistants and discussed the work-related topics (teaching methods, cooperation with students and teachers, as well as potential problems) at the premises of the CBO in Bujanovac.
2. 10 May 2019: Ivana Seratlić, Project Assistant, met with all six assistants in Bujanovac to discuss the current situations in schools, cooperation with teachers and school managements, but also to talk about upcoming third testing of students’ knowledge of Serbian language as non-mother tongue.
3. 12 June 2019: Ivana Seratlić, Project Assistant, will meet with TAs to discuss possibilities for continuation of project and to see whether current TAs are willing and motivated to continue working. All TAs expressed willingness to be engaged if there would be a continuation of project.

They have several propositions for improvement of teaching of Serbian as non-mother tongue: most of them would like to continue working in the same classes because they have established relations with pupils, they see how they progress in gaining knowledge, and would like to support them further. It would be useful to inform school principals about the engagement of TAs in August this year before they make time schedule of subjects for all classes. That would allow TAs to have time schedule of their engagement without big gaps between classes in one day. TAs suggested that extracurricular activities for learning Serbian language that would they like to organize for pupils could be also considered as working hours within their monthly working hours package. That would be instead of ongoing practice of delegating TAs to some classes merely to fulfil whole working hours package. It would be very useful for practicing Serbian language and for increasing of learning motivation of pupils to organize excursions and visits to schools or to participate in extra curriculum activities in other towns.

**Output 5: Regular communication with the schools, ensuring project implementation in accordance with the work plan**

**Activity 5.1. Maintain regular communication with all the schools and conduct field visits**

The Project Team maintained regular communication with teaching assistants during the previous period, while consultations with school principals and appointed teachers were conducted when needed.

As part of evaluation process, project team created small questionnaire for assessing teachers’ perspective on cooperation with TAs: how they cooperate with TAs, which methods they apply together, suggestions for further improvements; advantages of cooperation with TAs; setbacks in cooperation with TAs… Here are summarised answers:

Cooperation between teachers and TAs: They mostly cooperated to prepare, organize and exchange teaching material and teaching units for classes, scenarios for classes and to conduct classes. They mutually analysed teaching curriculum and which teaching units are important, relevant for pupils, and should be lectured. They mostly assess their cooperation as good cooperation and value team work. As advantages of cooperation they recognize possibility to pay more attention to pupils’ needs, better preparation for and realization of class, pupils are more active in class, implementation of diverse teaching methods, such as more practice of conversation i.e. small chats or role plays. They recognise that there is progress among pupils in learning Serbian language as non-mother tongue.

Suggestions for improvement of cooperation between teachers and TAs: some teachers suggested that results of teaching Serbian language as non-mother tongue would be better if TAs would speak Albanian language also or if there would be school cabinet for Serbian language.

Teaching methods: the cooperation with TAs brought implementation of new teaching methods which are more interested and appealing to pupils, such as learning by playing games, implementation of language games, work with pupils divided in small groups, using of audio and video teaching materials, as well as post it stickers, more application of demonstration, dialogue and role plays during teaching process.

Suggestions for improvement of teaching: to harmonise teaching program and plan with textbook; study visits to schools in other communities where they also teach Serbian as non-mother tongue; introduction of TAs in all classes during the first cycle of education, from the first to fourth grades; putting focus more on language exercises and speaking than on presenting theory; continuation of learning and cooperation of TAs and teachers.

**Output 6: Third testing of students’ knowledge of Serbian as non-mother tongue**

**Activity 6.1: Organization of third testing**

The school management was informed about the third testing through the formal letter sent by the Coordination Body for Bujanovac, Preševo and Medveđa in at the end of May 2019. School principals offered full support in the organisation of testing. Preparatory activities for the final testing started in June 2019. The experts for Serbian as a foreign language from the Centre for Serbian as Foreign Language of the Faculty of Philology, Nikica Strižak and Vesna Krajišnikare drafted the third test.

All schools included in the project are encompassed by testing. Testing are realised from 11th to 13thJune 2019, in the following schedule: on 11th June 2018 in VelikiTrnovac/Bujanovac in “Muharem Kadriu” Elementary School (classes: V1, V2, III1 and III2) and “Naim Frašeri” Elementary School (classes: III1 and III2), while on 13th June 2018 in “Selami Halači” Elementary School (classes: V1 and V2), in Oraovica, Preševo. Evaluation of the testing results is in process and expected to be completed in July 2019.

**Risks and issues:**

Possible risks in the implementation of action are related to communication and cooperation with schools and TAs engagement:

1. The lack of appropriate cooperation between teachers and TAs:

During June 2019, we had intensive communication with school management of the Elementary School “Ibrahim Keljmendi” due to severe problem in cooperation between teacher Tevide Ramadani and TA Olgica Stojanović, on one side, and teacher Sevdije Halimi, on the other side. Assistant Olgica Stojanovic reported that she and delegated teacher Tevida Ramadani had difficulty with two students because of the lack of their discipline and knowledge and they decided to give the lowest (non-passing) grade/mark to them. Grade was written with pencil, with idea to motivate students to approve their behaviour and knowledge of Serbian langue and to re-write grade upon such improvement. Although TA did not have right to write mark into school record, however she did it upon request of delegated teacher. Main teacher of this class is Sevdije Halimi. She complained to principal that TA did not have the right to do so. Upon her complaint to school principal, there was small quarrel in school hall between Tevide and Olgica, on one side, and Sevdije, on other side, with unappropriated statements which are not related to the issue of concern on both sides. Following this quarrel, project manager allowed to TA to take few days to rest in order to allow cooling down of the tension in relations between colleagues. However, several days after the quarrel, teacher Sevdije Halimi sent formal complaint to CBO Office in Belgrade regarding the TA’s misconduct. Following that, Project Manager spoke with the Deputy of school principal, CBOs representatives and UNOPS representative about the ongoing situation. It was decided that TA Olgica Stojanović will pause with her engagement for the last week of school year in order to prevent situation that could lead to further quarrels which could jeopardise project implementation in the future.

Please note: Impression of Project Manager is that teacher Sevdije Halimi is only concerned about the overall school performance of her class and that she does not value subject Serbian language as non-mother tongue as equal and important as other classes.

**Annexes:**

* Annex 1. Results of the second testing SRB
* Annex 2. TAs Self-evaluation form SRB
* Annex 3. TAs monthly reports from February to June 2019 SRB

Date: 17 June 2019

Signature of responsible person: Robert Kozma, Program Manager

Signature\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. The Delegation of EU in RS through the program European PROGRES supported efforts of the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development and the Coordination Body for Preševo, Bujanovac and Medveđa in implementing recommendations for improvement of teaching of Serbian as a non-mother tongue, while the OSCE Mission to Serbia supported engagement of teaching assistants during the second semester of school year 2017/2018. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)