

Written recommendations

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For the European Regional Forum on Education, Language and the Human Rights of Minorities

In recent years there has been no significant improvement regarding the rights of minorities in Romania. In several crucial aspects, most notably in the field of linguistic rights and minority language education, the situation is much the same, in some cases even worse, with systematic double standards.

The Hungarian minority of Romania presently faces three serious issues related to the minority language education system, issues that we believe hinder Hungarian pupils and students from getting access to quality education, and thus infringe upon their basic rights:

Regarding access to quality education in the mother tongue, an increasingly concerning matter has to do with the lack of textbooks available in Hungarian in primary and secondary education. At the start of each school year, Hungarian pupils suffer the consequences of a discriminatory and ill-working educational system. An entire generation, starting with the current sixth graders are being taught based on a new national methodology adopted in 2011, however, many of the textbooks printed according to this new methodology have in the past years arrived late, well after the start of the school year. It is worth noting that this is a problem which disproportionately affects children studying in a minority language, since after the lengthy process of approval, most of their books also have to be translated from Romanian to a minority language.

Another issue of concern affecting students belonging to the Hungarian minority continues to be the teaching of the state language. In recent years, there has been a slow, but progressive adaptation of the national methodology for teaching Romanian to minorities. The aim is for these children to study Romanian as a second language, instead of studying it according to the same methodology as children whose mother tongue is Romanian, which was the norm until a few years ago. However, there are still a number of problems when it comes to implementing the new methodology. Overall, teachers that we have surveyed agree that content focused on theoretical knowledge should be further reduced, and significantly more practical exercises should be included into these new

Romanian textbooks, exercises that focus primarily on useful knowledge and develop the communication skills of minority pupils in the state language.

Regarding higher education in Hungarian, an issue of major concern is the future of medical training in Hungarian. The Hungarian community has been asking for a separate and independent Hungarian department at the University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Târgu Mureş for years, an institution which is categorised as “multicultural” by the Ministry of Education. According to the 2011 National Law on Education, multicultural higher education institutions are required to create separate faculties or departments for minority students. However, the Romanian leadership of the University of Medicine has resisted the idea for years, invoking academic autonomy.

The situation got even worse last year, when the University of Medicine and Pharmacy and the Petru Maior University, which is a purely Romanian university, were merged, despite the objections of students, professors, prominent political leaders and the entire Hungarian community of Romania in general. The already unstable and never quite fully materialised multicultural aspect of the university is in more danger now than ever before, as the percentage of Hungarian students and professors dropped significantly after the merge. Paradoxically, in early 2019 the senate of the university decided to establish an English faculty, after resisting for years the idea of creating a Hungarian one.

Recommendations for primary and secondary education

- In light of the shortage of textbooks that has been plaguing primary and secondary education in Romania for several years now, it is important that when designing any educational reforms, particular attention is paid to the process of implementation, the resources needed, as well as anticipating possible shortcomings and solutions. This is especially relevant in the case of the minority language education system, which is more vulnerable when it comes to the implementation of new laws and methodologies, and is susceptible to being disproportionately affected by any difficulties, complications and shortcomings that have not been anticipated and properly addressed.
- As repeatedly stressed by the panelists at the European Regional Forum, applying a contextual approach when it comes to minority language education is crucial. In order to

ensure this, local and regional governments, as well as schools teaching in a minority language should be given more autonomy in dealing with local needs and deficiencies. This would be a significant step towards a more efficient and quality education in the mother tongue, and would address numerous problematic issues that are presently affecting minority language education. For instance, we must take into consideration the fact that the exposure to the state language of minority pupils living in scattered communities and those living in regions where minorities constitute a majority is vastly different, while the knowledge of the mother tongue and the exposure to the minority culture of pupils living in different areas is also varying.

- When devising and implementing new educational strategies, the relevant government agencies should not only consult, but also closely work together with experts in minority language education and with specialised institutions throughout the entire process, in order to ensure that the new measures adopted are not discriminatory towards minority students, and that they are truly relevant and effective, answering actual problems and needs, as formulated by the minority communities themselves.
- When it comes to the teaching of the state language to minorities, any measures taken should be pupil-centred, ensuring that minority children acquire proper language skills in the state language, which focus primarily on communication competences (rather than literature and theoretical grammar), thus preventing later disadvantages for minority youth on the labour market.
- Regarding the specific problems related to the teaching of the state language in Romania, the methodology of teaching Romanian to minorities should be continuously adapted and improved at a much faster pace, as the effects, results and challenges of the new, revised methodology become more evident, with a special focus on the quality of the textbooks and teaching aids, as well as the compatibility of these with the overall goals and methods set forth in the new methodology.
- The provisions of the 2011 National Law on Education, which stipulates not only that students who study in a minority language education system have to be taught Romanian based on a modified curriculum, but also that the evaluation of these pupils should be accordingly adapted as well, must be effectively implemented as soon as possible.

Recommendations for higher education

- State-financed higher education in minority languages should be as broad as possible, answering to the needs of the minority communities. Therefore, higher education in minority languages should include not only the fields of study that are directly linked to the survival of a minority community, such as training teachers, but also the ones that are linked to the development of a minority community and the region that they inhabit, and which are traditionally taught almost exclusively in the state language, such as engineering sciences and medical training.
- In light of the increasingly problematic situation of medical training in Hungarian in Romania, this issue can only be satisfactorily solved if the provisions of the 2011 National Law on Education, which states that higher education institutions that are designated as being multicultural by the Ministry of Education have to establish separate faculties or departments for minority students, are unequivocally implemented.