

Entity Education Ministers Sign Interim Agreement on Education for Returnee Children

Under OHR auspices, RS Education Minister Gojko Savanovic and Federation Education Minister Mujo Demirovic, on Tuesday in Banja Luka signed an Interim Agreement on the educational rights and needs of returnee children throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina. The agreement is a major step forward in resolving an issue which affects families throughout Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Agreement stipulates that all children in both Entities will be taught all general subjects on the basis of the curriculum wherever they are currently living or wherever they and their families return to live. Parents can choose which curriculum they prefer their children to follow in the "national group" of subjects - language and literature, history, geography, religious instruction, and (in primary school) the subject of nature and society. This means that parents can opt for the curriculum of the Entity or Canton where they return, or choose another curriculum. As a matter of priority, returnee teachers will be re-hired or engaged to teach the national group of subjects to minority returnees.

The Agreement requires the Education Ministries in both Entities to be more pro-active in finding solutions to educational problems faced by returnees. Each Ministry will immediately appoint a qualified official or a team of qualified professionals to deal with the issue of returnee education and systematically monitor the situation in their respective Entity. The Ministries must also ensure that the ethnic composition of School Boards reflects the composition of each school's population.

Under the Agreement, the two Entity Ministries of Education commit themselves to finding more permanent solutions for the education of returnees and accommodating the specific rights and needs of all constituent peoples. This will include the adoption of new education legislation, the production of new curricula and textbooks which contain no objectionable material, respect for the rights of all pupils, students, parents and teachers, and the re-employment of teachers in their pre-war schools.

Two agreements concerning the removal of objectionable material, signed in 1999, had limited effect and were not fully implemented. A new textbook agreement was signed in December 2001 by the Entity Ministries. This is now being implemented and will be closely monitored on the ground by OHR, the OSCE and UNHCR.