



Centar za građansko obrazovanje
Centre for Civic Education

Are free textbooks truly free?





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Content

- **General framework** 6
- **Free textbooks - standard practice or pre-election activity?** 7
- **Conclusions and recommendations** 10

General framework

Free education for all, as a right, has for the first time been presented in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights: *“Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory”*¹.

The importance of this right for development of society was also recognized through other relevant international documents. In this context, the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, *“The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right: (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all”*². Hence, it is a recommendation that should be respected and implemented by all signatories of this document, among who is also Montenegro. In addition, the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education stipulates: *“make primary education free and compulsory; make secondary education in its different forms generally available and accessible to all; make higher education equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity; assure compliance by all with the obligation to attend school prescribed by law”*³.

In accordance with international obligations, Montenegro also has, after restoration of independence, clearly prescribed in its Constitution⁴ in Article 75: **“Primary education is compulsory and free.”**

However, the practice indicates that the Constitution does not have binding force and that its consistent application depends predominantly on political will. So for years, despite appeals that the Centre for Civic Education (CCE) has submitted to relevant authorities, finding a sustainable solution for complete coverage of the costs of basic education so that it was also *de facto* free is still being avoided.

¹ Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 26

² International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, Article 13

³ UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, Article 4

⁴ Constitution of Montenegro, Official Gazette No. 1/2007

Free textbooks - standard practice or pre-election activity

In the school year 2015/16 free primary education was compulsory for 68.108⁵ pupils attending regular primary education and 733 pupils with special educational needs, which also includes that many textbooks packages. Although there are no official figures yet on the exact number of pupils in the 2016/17 school year, it can be estimated that it is approximately close to previous school year.

Media have during this year repeatedly reported that some municipalities provided free textbooks for pupils and CCE welcomes such practice. However, bearing in mind that this is an election year and the fact that this approach has suddenly «come to life», the question arises to what extent and whether these «investments» are related to genuine commitment of the local government for providing free primary education or they are part of election activities.

Therefore, the CCE has sent requests for free access to information to all Montenegrin municipalities, the Capital City and the Royal Capital, i.e. a total of 23 requests. Until 10/12/2016, 16 municipalities have sent their responses, the Capital City and Royal Capital, i.e. a total of 18 local self-governments. The answers, in spite of several interventions, did not submit the following municipalities: Budva, Bijelo Polje, Plav, Rožaje and Gusinje.

Out of 18 local self-governments that have submitted their answers, 14 stated that they had costs on the basis of providing free textbooks in the past three years, for which CCE requested information.

No.	Municipality	2014/15 amounts in EUR	2015/16 amounts in EUR	2016/17 amounts in EUR
1	Andrijevića	0	0	0
2	Bar	0	24 668,2	24 083,50
3	Berane ⁶	11 206,00	51 418,62	189 737,95
4	Cetinje ⁷	0	0	4 999,60
5	Danilovgrad	0	0	8 447,60
6	Herceg Novi	0	17 138,7	16 507,30
7	Kolašin	0	0	3 448,00
8	Kotor ⁸	0	0	12 542,10
9	Mojkovac	0	0	2 025,70

⁵Data of the Statistical Office of Montenegro, url.: <http://www.monstat.org/cg/page.php?id=194&pageid=194>

⁶The municipality of Berane, as it was explained to CCE, provided funds for pupils from grade I for 2014/15 year; for 2015/16 for pupils from grades 1-4; for 2016/17 for pupils from grades 1-9

⁷In the Royal Capital of Cetinje, 4 + 15 sets of textbooks was provided by Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare

⁸Funds for these purposes, as it was emphasized to CCE in the response of municipality of Kotor, were provided by donations of the PR China through the accounts of the Institute for textbooks and teaching aids

No.	Municipality	2014/15 amounts in EUR	2015/16 amounts in EUR	2016/17 amounts in EUR
10	Nikšić	0	0	33 029,50
11	Petnjica	0	1 494,00	2 068,80
12	Pljevlja	0	0	0
13	Plužine	3 338,40	5 681,55	16 288,10
14	Podgorica	41 550,00	88 486,10	109 657,90
15	Tivat	0	0	8 835,50
16	Ulcinj	0	0	11 474,00
17	Šavnik	0	0	302,00
18	Žabljak	0	0	1 249,90

The preview of local government budget allocations for textbooks for first grade pupils in the last three school years

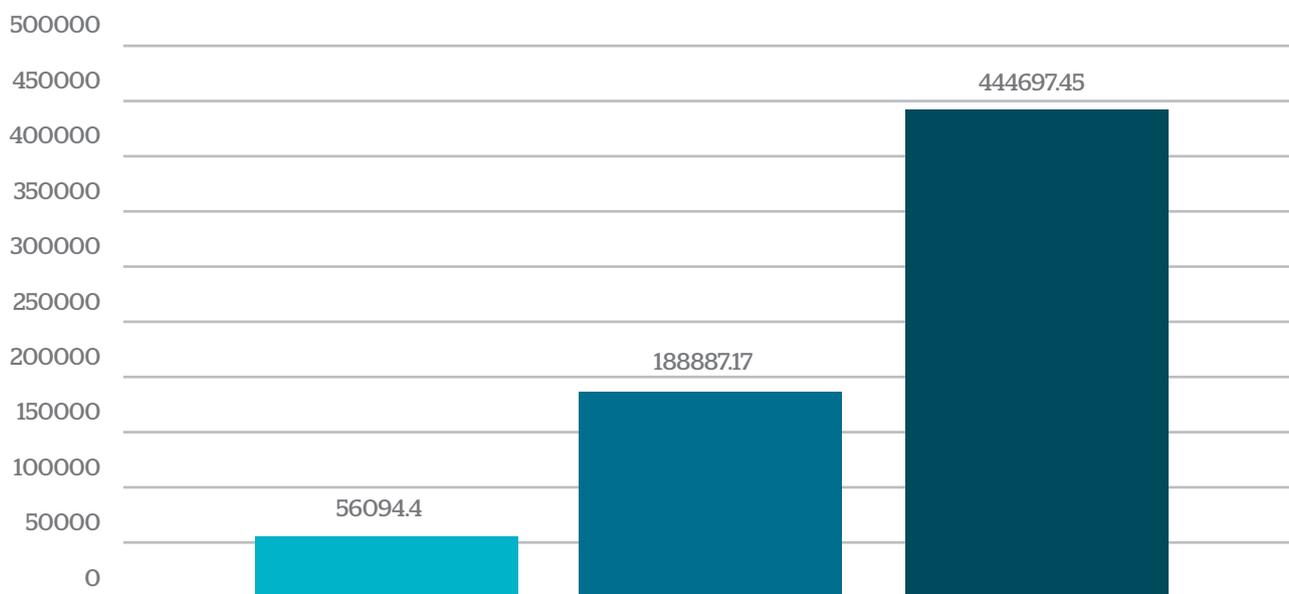
The findings indicate that of 18 municipalities, for which data were available, only two have not allocated even a cent from the budget for these purposes in previous three years (Andrijevica and Pljevlja). Of the remaining 16, three municipalities have been allocating continuously for free textbooks in the past three years, with notable growth during this year (Berane, Plužine and Podgorica), three municipalities have allocated funds for previous three years (Bar, Herceg Novi and Petnjica), while even 10 municipalities have introduced this practice only this year (Danilovgrad, Žabljak, Kolašin, Kotor, Mojkovac, Nikšić, Tivat, Ulcinj, Cetinje and Šavnik), which raises the question whether it really is such a significant step forward when it comes to financing education by local self-governments or this is one of the «incentives» to election campaign for elections in 2016. Expressed in percentages, there was increase in the number of municipalities that have adopted this practice, so that out of total number of municipalities, 69,56% of them have allocated funds for 2016 compared to 2015, where the percentage was 26,08%, i.e. in comparison to 2014 when only 13, 04% of them had this practice.

When it comes to total sum for all years, municipality Berane is leading, having a continuity in addressing the issue of free textbooks, including a step forward which this year was made in the part that textbooks were provided not only for first graders but for all elementary school pupils. It is followed by the Capital City of Podgorica. However, the abrupt growth was noted in municipalities of Nikšić, Plužine, Ulcinj, Danilovgrad, Tivat, Cetinje and Žabljak.

Growth of expenditure is clearly significant when comparing the summary of previous three years, noting that it is 8 out of 23 municipalities for which the CCE has collected data.

More specifically, in the last three school years, from the budgets of local self-governments has been allocated 689,679.02 euros, of which the most in 2016 i.e. 444 697.45 euros, significantly less than in 2015 i.e. 188 817.17 euros, and the least in 2014 i.e. 56 094.40 euros.

Amount of funds allocated for free textbooks per year



Amount of funds allocated for free textbooks per year

● 2014/15 ● 2015/16 ● 2016/17

Amount of funds allocated for free textbooks - summary

Conclusions and recommendations

Centre for Civic Education (CCE) is continuously committed to consistent application of the Constitution and laws guaranteeing free primary education in Montenegro. In this regard, CCE **proposes establishment of clear budget lines in local self-governments through which funds for providing free textbooks for primary school pupils would be allocated every school year**, and not to apply this only in election years.

Given the number of pupils and amount of funds allocated, a rough estimate leads calculation that this is the first year in which, according to total sum of allocated resources, approximately 70% of first graders' needs is fulfilled at least at the level of the first grade of primary school, while **this percentage was multiple times smaller in previous years**.

CCE welcomes the commitment of those municipalities that have already made efforts to establish this practice in previous years, but at the same time **expresses serious doubts that this sudden rise of these examples in an election year is one form of attempt of electoral manipulation**. Therefore, CCE will also closely monitor these trends in following years.

