EXPERIENCES OF THE ROMA EDUCATION INITIATIVE

Documentation Studies
Highlighting the
Comprehensive Approach

REI { ROMA EDUCATION INITIATIVE }

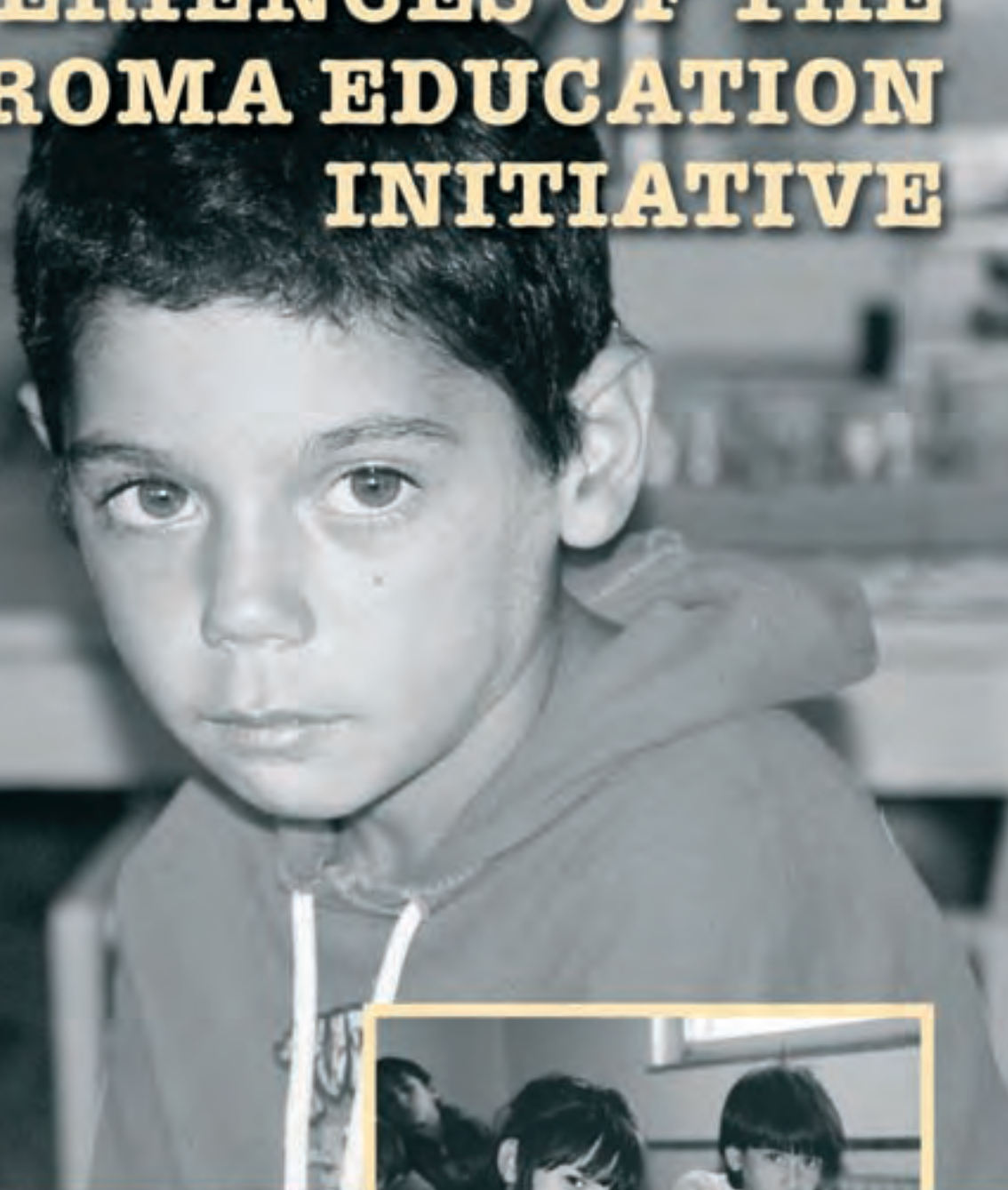**Experiences of the Roma Education Initiative**

Documentation Studies Highlighting the Comprehensive Approach

Education Support Program of the Open Society Institute

2007

Experiences of the Roma Education Initiative

DOCUMENTATION STUDIES HIGHLIGHTING THE COMPREHENSIVE APPROACH

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The views and opinions expressed in this book are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Open Society Institute.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

List of Acronyms[1]

ALCT	Active Learning for Critical Thinking
AHP	Aid for Handicapped and Poor, a Roma-led NGO in Prilep (Macedonia)
CEPOR	Center for Political Development of Small Business (Croatia)
CIP	Center for Active Pedagogy (Serbia)
ESP	Education Support Program (Open Society Institute)
EU	European Union
FOSS	Fund for an Open Society - Serbia
ISSA	International Step by Step Association
LIN	Local Integration Network (Hungary)
MOE	Ministry of Education
NGO	non-governmental organization
OSI	Open Society Institute
PHARE	Pologne, Hongrie Assistance à la Reconstruction Economique, European Union
REC	Roma Education Center
RTA	Roma teacher assistant
RWCT	Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking
SbS	Step by Step
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

The problems that Roma face in education, and the issue of Roma integration into mainstream education systems in Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, has been a pressing matter for many years now. With awareness of the issue steadily increasing since the early nineties, there have been a number of actions – primarily third-sector – on the program and advocacy level.

A recent development has been for governments to become more engaged, especially with the launch of the Decade of Roma Inclusion (2005–2015)[2], in which education was identified as a priority. Though national governments have agreed to participate in the Decade and declared new strategies and action plans to promote educational equity and quality for Romani children, individual countries approach this issue in various ways and there are significant differences in the extent to which they are committed to development or the implementation of new policies.

Countries are grappling with complex educational questions, such as: What practices work in achieving real results in access, desegregation and learning outcomes for Romani children? Romani activists and social justice-minded educators seek solutions to bring real access and equality to the education of Romani children. Governments search for solutions as more and more pressure is applied by the European Union, international agencies and by strong Romani pressure groups. Private foundations look for answers in order to fund practices that will have an impact.

A lack of information and analysis has hampered the debate on how best to address these issues. Few publications touch upon the design of interventions – whether governmental or NGO-based – discuss the impact of projects, or provide information instrumental to interventions. One reason, perhaps, why so little has been published is because so few interventions integrate external evaluation as an ongoing component of project implementation. Indeed, one recognized problem that hinders the long-term impact of interventions is the lack of external evaluation.[3]

Recognizing this lack of information, the Open Society Institute's Education Support Program (ESP) began to seek answers by funding qualitative and quantitative research. This became an integral component of OSI's programming and work in Romani education, with the Roma Special Schools Initiative, Roma Education Research Project, and other projects implemented by Children and Youth Programs in New York.[4] These projects revealed that no individual program model could respond to the entire spectrum of educational needs of all Romani children in any single country. Rather, program models which have been developed, adapted, or expanded should offer a continuum of services in response to an array of needs, through partnerships and across various age groups.[5] Such conclusions have since been corroborated by international studies that have been published in recent years.[6]

THE ROMA EDUCATION INITIATIVE

The Roma Education Initiative (REI) was an ambitious project that was funded and implemented by the Open Society Institute in partnership with Soros Foundations and Roma and non-Roma NGOs spanning from 2002 to 2005 and was based on the concept of the comprehensive approach. Recognizing that a complex set of issues required complex solutions, each national project offered a continuum of services – in school and out of school, educational and other sectors – in response to an array of needs and across various age groups (ages 3 to 18 years and beyond). Complementary services contributed to improving access and educational outcomes in the name of integration. Because projects were large and complex, services were delivered by a group of implementing partners, each taking responsibility for certain components which together formed a whole. REI's reach was significant: over 20,000 students of whom 5,000 were Roma. Furthermore,

1,000 teachers including 120 Roma teacher assistants in 7 countries and approximately 75 schools, including preschools, also participated.[7]

The *REI Final Report* describes the comprehensive approach as follows:

> *Projects were expected to target children and youth ages 0 to 18, using existing OSI network education and other program resources, while partnering with Roma NGOs and leaders, as well as with other NGOs, organizations, institutions, and governments. The intention was to provide a range of services – both in and out of school – to Romani children and families that, in combination, would support children's educational success.*[8]

REI focused on early access and retention in education by providing quality education services in schools, which included Romani community involvement. The logic was that unless schools improved, the rate of school abandonment would continue, and the perpetual downward spiral of poor school performance would continue, along with the negative stigma Roma had carried for so long in education. Focusing on early access and providing support to students at critical transition points in the education system (usually from Grades 4 to 5, and from Grades 8 to 9), became understood as "vertical integration". Such an approach did not physically transfer students from segregated neighbourhoods and schools into inclusive ones, but focused rather on early access and maintenance in the system. However, physical transfer of students from segregated classrooms within schools did take place in some locations, and in a few instances involved the transfer of preschool children (which was always paid for by the local municipality). REI worked on the assumption that segregation did not end once Romani children were placed in inclusive environments in integrated schools. The pedagogical practice offered in most mainstream schools was often outdated and not high quality, and had to be improved.

DOCUMENTATION RATIONALE

The *REI Final Report,* which was completed in June 2006, summarizes the main issues coming from national-level external evaluations and other centrally collected data, and provides quantitative evidence on project outcomes. To the highest degree possible, the report also contains qualitative information. Though the *REI Final Report* is a valuable source of information and contributes much in terms of knowledge, it could not meet all needs and expectations. In recent years, ESP has received frequent requests from international donors, organizations, national partners and interested parties to investigate and document OSI's experiences in education for Roma, both in policy and practice. Confirming what OSI already knew, documentation and research was emerging as essential for improving the quality of education for Roma.

As with other major projects, there were many lessons to be learned from REI and much to be recorded in the way of experience, process and analysis. To further ensure the legacy of OSI in ongoing work in the field of Roma education there was a need for more qualitative documentation of the work. In undertaking the REI Documentation Project, it was recognized that the potential for a wider opportunity for positive change was emerging and it would be unfortunate to lose the opportunity for reflection. It was particularly important to safeguard experiences established through REI, as OSI's funding for Roma education projects was being diverted to the newly established Roma Education Fund.[9]

REI established an approach that emphasized improved practice through research, review and discussion. This needs to be a continuing component in any process intending to achieve deep and lasting change. Research and documentation, which embodies a participatory and reflective process, is important to OSI's partners in education. Involvement of REI stakeholders (i.e. project implementers) in reflecting upon the capacity built and deep knowledge gained through REI implementation contributes to efforts for strong and sustained advocacy on the national level. An ongoing process continues to build and sustain a professional cadre (network) that has confidence in evidence-based results to support their advocacy efforts.

The goals of the REI Documentation Project were to:
- explore and document qualitatively the challenges, opportunities, and experiences in implementing REI.

- give "voice" to the practitioners of REI as experts in their field.
- advance knowledge on implementation-policy dynamics.
- strengthen advocacy around what "works" and provide an evidence base to support in-country challenges.
- share the lessons learned and give practical advice to donors, NGO implementers, and governments who will be funding Roma education projects in the future.
- disseminate and develop peer discussion to improve practice within an extended professional network; to further a living, ongoing and vibrant process in which both research and documentation are the means to an end.

METHODOLOGY

In January 2006, a methodology for the documentation of practice was developed through a participatory process involving project implementing partners, experts in qualitative methodology, and representation from the Roma Education Fund. After the methodology was finalized, it was sent to the project directors of the seven REI participating countries. The project directors were asked to identify possible topics and possible authors. The process of documentation study development was envisaged to be one with little central support, and one that was primarily the responsibility of the author to develop, using the agreed-upon methodology. Authors were also responsible for translation. Potential authors were asked to submit an abstract which was further refined through an editorial process with the ESP team.

Finally, sixteen studies were chosen, representing seven countries.[10] The studies developed represented various aspects of the comprehensive approach. The REI projects implemented on the national level were too large and too complex to have been documented individually, and then internationally. Instead, it was decided to capture different components of the comprehensive approach, taken from different local projects that, together, communicated what REI attempted to achieve through each national program.

Each study is constructed according to four main parts, with some minor variations where appropriate. The four core sections of the documentation study are as follows:
- The *Context* describes where the intervention took place – the location – the educational level of participants, the needs the intervention addressed, and the goals of the project. It may also include the specifics of the project background, and how this practice fits into the national context.
- *Description of the Practice* focuses on the compelling story of the documentation study. It describes the technical aspects of implementation, including information on what was achieved, and how it was achieved. It touches upon topics such as who were the main people involved, what it took to bring the practice into successful implementation, and what challenges were encountered along the way. Authors attempt to explain the feelings and hopes of the stakeholders, and bring in several perspectives.
- This is followed by a section where authors outline the *Outcomes and Lessons Learned* from the documentation study.
- The final section of each documentation study, *Reflection,* is where the authors draw conclusions from external evaluation, comment on strengths and weaknesses, as well as reflect upon challenges and lessons learned. Advice for those who may be replicating or implementing a similar intervention is also included.

1.2 Organization of the Book

Because the comprehensive approach was complex, deciding on which aspects to capture in a validated practice documentation exercise was challenging. Therefore, the participants of the methodology meeting in January 2006 designed a matrix, which consisted of two axes representing two dimensions. The vertical axis represented the technical means or "tools" by which projects implemented their work; and the horizontal axis represented broader domains, or larger common goals that all the REI projects were working towards. The organization and presentation of the studies took both of these axes into consideration.

As indicated through their titles, each of the 16 studies in this report highlight a particular means or set of practices and tools used to achieve REI goals. These included, for example, provision of preschool education, introducing Romani culture and history through workshops or in the classroom, and involving Roma teacher assistants as co-teachers. In presenting the studies, they have been grouped into broad categories reflecting the methods used for improving both access to quality integrated education and the educational outcomes of Romani students. As it was often possible to place a study in more than one category, the most significant emphasis of the documentation study determined its categorical placement.

These categories are:
- access to education;
- supporting educational achievement;
- family and community involvement and capacity building;
- multiculturalism, Romipen and anti-bias education;
- complex approaches to influence policy and systemic change.

Each category is divided into a separate chapter. Included at the end of each chapter is a brief outline of policy and systemic directions emerging from the documentation studies grouped within this category.

The category/chapter headings, as well as the titles of the studies themselves, provide insight into the means elaborated by the study. This is linked to a third aspect of the comprehensive approach: providing a range of services – both in and out of school – to Romani children and families by using existing OSI network educational and other program resources.

At the same time, it is important to emphasize that the documentation studies embody and achieve a number of important domains or larger goals that REI projects were striving to attain. Therefore, in each study a synopsis of some key aspects of the project is provided at the beginning. These aspects include:

Participants: comprehensive approach meant to target children and youth ages 0 to 18 and beyond.
Supports:
- access
- educational achievement
- social relations (including improvement between age/gender/ethnicity)
- family and community involvement
- improvement of school management and governance
- capacity building
- multiculturalism and Romipen
- direct policy influence
- civic involvement in project management

Partners: the comprehensive approach stressed the necessity for stakeholders to work collaboratively in finding solutions and to include Roma NGOs and leaders, as well as other NGOs, organizations, institutions, and governments, to provide much-needed services.

In addition to the chapters focusing directly on the documentation studies, a discussion of the larger social and educational context is included in Chapter 2. It provides a backdrop, grounded in educational literature, and situates the studies within a regional and global framework. The final chapter of this publication outlines the lessons learned as well as key policy and systemic directions. Therefore, it is hoped this publication will function on both a practice and policy level.

1   A glossary explaining some of the acronyms can be found in the Appendix.
2   The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is an unprecedented international effort to combat discrimination and to close the gap in welfare and living conditions between the Roma and the non-Roma, in order to break the cycle of poverty and exclusion. The initiative is supported by OSI and the World Bank, and endorsed by nine Central, Eastern, and South Eastern European countries. The declared objective is to accelerate progress in improving the social inclusion and economic status of Roma.

3 See Hollo, L. & Quinn, S. (2006). *Equality for Roma in Europe: A Roadmap for Action,* Open Society Institute.

4 Examples of such programs are Step by Step, School Improvement, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking and related programs, which have already (over the past 8 years) been piloted in 27 countries (networked together within the Netherlands-based International Step by Step Association).

5 See Education Support Program (2002). *Research on Selected Roma Education Programs in Central & Eastern Europe,* Open Society Institute, Budapest, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/rerp.html**; Proactive Information Services (2004). *Transition of Students: Roma Special Schools Initiative, Year4 Final Report,* prepared for the Open Society Institute, New York, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/research.html**.

6 Hollo, L. & Quinn, S. (2006). *Equality for Roma in Europe: A Roadmap for Action,* Open Society Institute.

7 Details of project design and concrete outcomes can be found in the *REI Final Report,* and on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

8 Proactive Information Services (2006). *REI Final Report,* Education Support Program, Budapest, p. 6.

9 The Roma Education Fund was established in 2005 within the framework of the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The goal of the Roma Education Fund is to contribute towards closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma, through policies and programs to support quality education for Roma, including desegregation of educational systems. For more information see: **http://www.romaeducationfund.hu**.

10 The only country that did not develop a study was Montenegro. Due to technical and financial constraints, ESP could not support the development of a study in this country. At the same time, Croatia submitted three studies. Croatia, though operating within the framework of the Roma Education Initiative, used its own funds for project implementation. The REI network shared information and provided technical assistance.

CHAPTER 2
A REVIEW OF LITERATURE –
EDUCATION FOR SOCIAL CHANGE: SUPPORTING
SCHOOL SUCCESS FOR MARGINALIZED POPULATIONS

2.1 Introduction

A vast amount of literature within the field of educational research and philosophy today is filled with references to theoretical paradigms asserting the need for education which promotes social justice, multiculturalism, citizenship, anti-bias, character development and notions of democracy. Although these concepts may extend from varying epistemological foundations, they do complement each other in that they all employ a "language of critique, and endorse pedagogies of resistance, possibility, and hope".[1] They hold in common the notion that things could and should be different and better and schools occupy a vital space for affecting this change.

This chapter intends to highlight the role schools can play in affecting widespread and sustainable social change through the creation of equitable learning communities founded upon principles of democracy. For the purposes of this publication, democratic schooling is used to refer to education that supports and enhances students' social participation, particularly the participation of students from marginalized populations. This participation impacts the spheres of economics, politics, and community, with the aim of moving toward a more peaceful and inclusive society.

It has been extensively documented that access to quality education can reduce poverty, raise global standards of living and health, protect children from hazardous labour and sexual exploitation, and by extension, promote human rights and democracy. This is achieved through the implementation of pedagogical practices in schools and their communities which link empowerment and individual agency to social responsibility in young people.

The necessity for education for social participation stems from the belief that schools can be a locus for broader social change:

> There may be no other institution as able to resolve these tensions and create unity within diversity the way public schools can. No leaders who are positioned to create just and democratic communities in the way school leaders are.[2]

Simply put, schools can be places where we teach young people what they need to know to survive in the world, or they can be places where we teach people how they might go about changing the world.[3]

> To preserve newness is to teach in such a way that students acquire an understanding of themselves in relation to the world without regarding either the world or their positioning in it as fixed, determined, and unchangeable ...the point of this exposure... [is] to motivate our students to imagine new possibilities for the future.[4]

The work of critical scholars including Paulo Friere, Henry Giroux, Michael Apple and Peter McLaren has revealed the inextricable link between educational change and social change processes. Because the educational system influences, and is influenced by, the larger society, there can be no meaningful social change within the educational system without analysis of the social context in which it exists.

There have always been unique systems through which different societies have socialized their youth. These include specific ways of transmitting and preserving their collective social knowledge and history. In fact, J.G. Partington and B. Harrison state:

Prior to [colonial] expansion, indigenous groups around the world maintained clearly defined and unique systems of knowledge, wisdom and learning, but since colonization much of this has been lost.[5]

Historical processes of colonization around the world have marginalized groups of people within schools and within the broader society.

The arrival of the [colonizers] in most parts of the world …had far-reaching consequences, for they brought with them their own languages, religious beliefs and political systems. They were certain of the superiority of their own knowledge and wisdom, and in most cases imposed it unquestioningly on those they conquered. Hence, they introduced systems of education that were based exclusively on their own processes of knowledge, analysis and transmission. Indigenous knowledge and learning were suppressed, often in quite deliberate and systematic ways. As a consequence, many indigenous groups were marginalized.[6]

Colonization has disrupted the transmission of these knowledge systems resulting in a different value system. In addition, this process has prioritized certain ways of knowing. Systemic and systematic processes of "othering" were thereby imposed. Processes of colonization have impacted indigenous people all throughout the world. While the process was reversed for Roma (as they migrated into lands of other groups) the outcomes were the same.[7] Systematic processes of "othering" have led to the marginalization of Roma in all social spheres, ultimately resulting in a disproportionate representation of Roma living in poverty, suffering from unemployment, substandard health care, and lack of access to quality education.[8]

Despite arguments that the colonial era is long past, the lasting effects are still seen and mirrored in all social institutions, manifesting themselves in schools as "unconscious racial bias, stereotypes, and other race-linked factors [which] have a significant impact on the patterns of identification, placement, and quality of services for minority children".[9] As a result, "…too many schools are plagued by structures like tracking and ability grouping that deny equal opportunity and results to many, particularly the poor, people of color, and women".[10]

The overrepresentation of minority students in programs for students with disabilities has been the direct result of "high stakes" testing oftentimes based on discriminatory assumptions of student ability and what constitutes authentic learning. Such assessment methods have also been used to differentiate between students who will be promoted or retained. Evidence of such discriminatory educational practices is noted in the vast overrepresentation of Romani students in special education or "special schools" within Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe. In addition, it is common for Romani students to be segregated in "special classes" even if they are retained within the mainstream school system.[11] Such practices have a massive long-term impact on the future opportunities available to young people, including limited post-secondary education opportunities and future employment prospects.

2.2 International Context for Democratic Schooling

In 1960, the Convention against Discrimination in Education[12] was adopted by UNESCO, presenting education as a basic human right in an attempt to highlight its transformative power:

…education should be a means to empower children and adults alike to become active participants in the transformation of their societies. Learning should also focus on the values, attitudes and behaviors which enable individuals to learn to live together in a world characterized by diversity and pluralism.

Further, the Convention was the United Nation's first binding instrument containing an in-depth definition of "discrimination" as "any distinction, exclusion, limitation or preference based on race, color, sex, language, religion or political or other opinion, national or social origin, economic condition or birth".[13]

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, ratified in 1990, elaborates on the link between education and human rights, requiring participating nations to prepare children for "responsible life in a free society, in the spirit of understanding, peace, tolerance, equality of sexes, and friendship amongst all peoples, ethnic, national and religious groups and persons of indigenous origin".[14]

More recently in 2000, United Nations member states have endorsed eight goals, termed the Millennium Development Goals, to be achieved by the year 2015. These goals focus on the creation of a more equitable global society through the eradication of poverty and disease, increased quality of health care, and the promotion of basic human rights and responsibilities. Two of the Millennium Development Goals focus specifically on education:
- Achieve universal primary education – ensure that, by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling.
- Promote gender equality and empowerment of women – eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.[15]

A review of the literature has revealed that it is increasingly common now for education to be discussed in a manner that declares it to be a "right of all children and the obligation of all governments".[16] In literature discussing education in relation to principles of democracy this obligation is expanded to encapsulate "empowering the young to become members of the public, to participate, and play articulate roles in the public space".[17]

2.3 Democratic Schooling

John Dewey (1939) presented the ultimate task of democracy to be the "creation of a freer and more humane experience in which all share and which all contribute,"[18] while acknowledging "the conception of education as a social process and function has no definite meaning until we define the kind of society we have in mind".[19]

Schools within democratic societies are not necessarily democratic schools (or those modelled after democratic principles). In fact, it has been argued that the majority of schools are decidedly undemocratic. Democratic schools are the result of deliberate and explicit attempts by educators to create equitable learning communities which link change in schools to change in the world. They are structurally modelled after democratic principles. Perhaps more importantly, however, they model aspects of democracy in all that they do, in so far as classroom experiences/ opportunities are tailored to provide students with democratic experiences. "If schools are to educate for democracy then they must practice what they preach".[20]

These democratic schools hold pivotal common beliefs which include:
- the open flow of ideas, regardless of their popularity, that enables people to be as fully informed as possible;
- faith in the individual and collective capacity of people to create possibilities for resolving problems;
- the use of critical reflection and analysis to evaluate ideas, problems, and policies;
- concern for the welfare of others and the 'common good';
- concern for the dignity and rights of individuals and minorities;
- an understanding that democracy is not so much an "ideal" to be pursued as an "idealized" set of values that we must live by and that must guide our life as a people;
- the organization of social institutions to promote and extend the democratic way of life.[21]

Schools organized in such a manner employ a pedagogical approach informed by social justice which "...address[es] the social, political, and economic conditions that undermine both the possibilities of democratic forms of schooling and a democratic society".[22] Extending from a participatory conceptualization of democratic citizenship, Nagda, Gurin, & Lopez (2003) define democratic sentiments to include "the ability to think actively and structurally about

people's behaviours and social issues, to understand the perspectives of other people, and think about actions to resolve intergroup conflicts".[23]

Schools founded on democratic principles must be strongly aligned with the teaching/learning of literacy. Social participation in the contemporary context relies on the ability to read and decode information within the social context. UNESCO further defines literacy as:

...the ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts. Literacy involves a continuum of learning in enabling individuals to achieve their goals, to develop their knowledge and potential, and to participate fully in their community and wider society.[24]

However, in 1999, UNICEF declared that "nearly a billion people will enter the 21st century unable to read a book or sign their names".[25] Education for democracy rests upon the idea of social participation, thereby placing great importance on literacy levels. Therefore, developing literacy skills within the context of a democratic school provides students from marginalized populations the environment and practical tools that will promote their educational and later life success.

2.4 Framework for Equitable Learning Communities

Acknowledging the myriad of complex and oftentimes conflicting variables present in school settings makes it both difficult and undesirable to offer a finite framework of considerations of the "democratic school". However, this does not preclude our ability/the need to identify and suggest certain considerations amounting to a model of validated/effective practice.

FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT

The importance of family and community involvement cannot be stressed enough as this is the foundation on which all of the other considerations depend and are built. It is imperative that schools practice creative and sustainable ways to elicit the involvement of the widest variety of participants in the educational experience (i.e. parents, children and youth, local community members/agencies). Education takes place not only in the school, but in homes and community places where families are valued as partners in the educational process.

ACCESS TO EDUCATION

The notion of accessibility refers to physical, economic and geographical access to the educational system and beyond this to encompass the degree to which all children are meaningfully included, represented and valued in all aspects of the school climate. Access to an educational system is a concept beyond the simple enrolment of children in an educational institution; rather, it focuses on their meaningful participation in a setting where teachers hold high expectations for them and where the important elements are in place to support their educational achievement.

SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

Instruction: Acknowledging that teachers are required to follow predetermined curricula does not prevent them from presenting the material in innovative and relevant ways, emphasizing specific topics, structuring assignments, and using supplemental materials. Shifting from a teacher-directed to a child-centered paradigm means adopting a:

...dialectical stance: One eye firmly fixed on the students – Who are they? What are their hopes, dreams, and aspirations? Their passions and commitments? What skills, abilities, and capacities does each one bring to

the classroom? – and the other eye looking unblinkingly at the concentric circles of context – historical flow, cultural surround, economic reality.[26]

Such a stance can be a powerful force in engaging students, instilling self-esteem and confidence. This provides the foundation for lifelong learning where it becomes possible to:

...optimize the developmental potential of each child, enhancing children's ability and propensity to think critically, empathetically, and imaginatively and to use their multiple intelligences in the real world. The ability to formulate alternative solutions, ask meaningful questions, resolve conflict, and exhibit cross-cultural competence are not simply ideals to strive for; they are necessary.[27]

Examples of classroom practices which facilitate critical learning include hands-on activities, small group discussions, and problem-solving activities: "We see what we understand rather than understand what we see".[28] Research has illustrated the importance of making continuous connections between subject matter and the lives of individual students. This provides students with a useful way of forging links between their past experiences and background and new knowledge. Encouraging students to situate themselves in relation to all material presented is equally important.

Materials: Not all students will have equal access to learning materials through which to facilitate/enhance their learning processes. Despite a family's best intention, they may not be able to provide their children with the requisite educational materials. Schools play an important role in ensuring that all children have access to textbooks and other materials which may be required. Further, these materials should be reviewed to ensure they are appropriate in so far that all students feel represented in their learning environment.

Attitudes/Beliefs/Interactions: This is a direct extension of the child-centered paradigm and refers to the way in which teachers critically reflect upon the link between social locations and systems of oppression/privilege. The experiences of all in the classroom need to be critically examined with respect to "how we hear, how we speak, to the choices we make about which voices to use, when and most important of all, developing pedagogical practices that enable us to pose those questions and use the various answers to guide the ethical choices we are constantly being called upon to make".[29]

This requires processes of reflection and dialogue amongst educators and between educators and students. This, in turn, produces an educational process which values equally the perspectives of all, and places the knowledge of teachers and students on an equal footing. There has been extensive research documenting the powerful effect which attitudes and expectations of educational administrators and teachers have on student outcomes. Studies emphasize high expectations and supportive attitudes communicated to all students as an essential component facilitating student learning.[30] Furthermore, teachers need to reflect upon the inherent power and authority of their position and build respectful relationships between staff, students, and community members.

It is important to note, however, that attitudes of educators do not exist in a vacuum, but are influenced by broader social values. Like all members of society, educators are a product of their society. Therefore, they must be constantly aware of social attitudes and their impact on students' academic success and social/emotional well-being.

Assessment: It is important that educational assessment practices allow for students to demonstrate their growth and achievement in multiple ways at varying times throughout the school year. Assessment practices which are tailored to the unique developmental and cultural characteristics of each child foster students "who want to know" as opposed to psychometrically based practices which attempt to produce students "who know what we want".[31]

Assessment practices should be framed in a way that presents them as a tool for building upon the unique strengths of each student. These practices are reflective of the school culture and they "operationalize the school's values.

More than what educators say, more than what they write in curriculum guides, evaluation practices tell both students and teachers what counts".[32]

Within a school modelled/based upon democratic sentiments, student achievement is recognized not simply "for the sake of symbolic standards or agreeable publicity, but because of its ability to make a difference in how we understand and act powerfully on the social world in which we live".[33]

Perhaps Dewey's statement made in 1916 rings true today: "we are doubtless far from realizing the potential efficacy of education as a constructive agency of improving society, from realizing that it represents not only a development of children and youth but also of the future society of which they will be the constituents".[34]

In fact, a more cyclical approach may be warranted; one which acknowledges and accepts that "education is often about returning again and again to certain existential and intellectual problems, sometimes in new ways or with particular insights, but not with a sense of ever solving them or making them go away".[35] This approach to reflective practice informed by research and evaluation acknowledges that:

> ...the "answers" to research questions do not end things but offer new circumstances for exploring the persistent question of what is good for people.[36]

DOCUMENTING GOOD PRACTICE THROUGH GOOD RESEARCH

Research offers the framework/opportunity for problematizing the "justifications put forth for why we educate as we do" and further, in those spaces where such justifications are not readily apparent, "to question why so much of our practice is taken as an unexamined matter of course, simply because it has always been done in certain ways".[37] A central consideration of research in schools and communities should always be the multiple and "different ways of knowing the world, and thereby, investigating it".[38] Those investigations extending from a transformative paradigm place emphasis on the experiences of marginalized groups and "link the results of the inquiry to wider questions of social inequity and social justice... transformative research has the potential to contribute to the enhanced ability to assert rigour in the sense that ignored or misrepresented views are included".[39]

Connell et. al. (1982) echo this sentiment with the assertion that in order for research to have transformative power it must be "organized in a fundamentally different way – by and with the people it is ultimately supposed to benefit". Kirby and McKenna (1989) have termed one way of doing such work "researching from the margins" and propose the following considerations:
- knowledge is socially constructed;
- social interactions form the basis of social knowledge;
- different people experience the world differently;
- because they have different experiences, people have different knowledge;
- knowledge changes over time;
- differences in power have resulted in the co-modification of knowledge and a monopoly on knowledge production.[40]

Any research project should hold as its goal the empowerment and development of capacity of all involved. The following documentation studies are an attempt to deepen understanding of the initiatives undertaken in 16 sites geared towards creating more equitable learning environments. The methodology employed attempts to honour and preserve the "multiple realities" of schools and communities which allow for the inclusion of all perspectives including "different and even contradictory views of what is happening,"[41] both within and between the individual study sites.

Ultimately, these modified studies are reflective of attempts to consciously place issues of equity and justice at "the

very heart of the educational enterprise".[42] As stated by Greene (1984), schools need to become spaces for:

> *expression, for freedom ...a public space... where living persons can come together in speech and action, each one free to articulate a distinctive perspective, all of them granted equal worth. It must be a space of dialogue, a space where a web of relationships can be woven, and where a common world can be brought into being and continually renewed.*[43]

Creation of this "space" requires an ongoing partnership between research and practice where research and evaluative practices are seen as a vehicle through which to improve how we educate the young. Acknowledging the link between education and democracy reveals the moral obligation educators have to act in a way that does not further alienate, but instead engages; does not speak "for", but with; and does not interpret, but understands the multiple ways in which meaning is made.

> *...only one road leads to democracy: Education. And in a democracy where freedom comes first, the first priority of education must be the apprenticeship of liberty. Tie every school reform to this principle, and not only education but democracy itself will flourish.*[44]

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CHAPTER 3
ACCESS TO EDUCATION

3.1 Introduction

As outlined in Chapter 2, access to education is an element for equitable learning communities. This issue is of particular importance within the context of Romani students in, Central, Eastern, and South Eastern Europe, as access to quality education has long been denied to many Romani children in the region.

Access to education deals with more concrete issues such as the elimination of physical, geographic, and economic barriers to quality education. However, on a deeper level, access to education implies opportunities for the meaningful inclusion of all students, as well as a climate of respect where all students can thrive academically, socially, and emotionally. Finally, the experience reflected in the Slovak study points to the importance of flexibility to "home grow" solutions as they apply to particular communities.

When considering issues of access to education, the focus is on the whole child and addressing their needs in a holistic fashion. This focus necessitates cooperation and partnership in the areas of health, social services, infrastructure, sustainable transportation, and quality preschool. Looking at all the needs of students helps ensure access to education is not denied through a lack of services and resources in other areas. REI's comprehensive approach takes this into consideration.

Both Chapter 2 and the documentation studies included in this chapter stress the importance of improving access to education for Romani students. It is important to note that access issues are present at all levels of education, from preschool to post-secondary education. Nevertheless, access to quality preschool and primary school appears to be urgently needed. Once established, access to higher levels of education is much more likely to follow. However, REI documentation studies also emphasize the importance of supporting students at critical periods of transition, such as between Grades 4 and 5, as well as between Grades 8 and 9. This highlights the importance of access issues at these key points in students' education.

3.2 Documentation Studies

- *Sonja Sedloska,* "Community Centers Providing Access to Preschool Education for Disadvantaged Romani Children" (Macedonia);
- *Snezana Bangievska-Tomeska,* "Integrating Romani Children Outside of the Education System: The Role of the Roma Educational Center" (Macedonia);
- *Zita Baduríková,* "Improving Access to Quality Preschool Education in Slovakia" (Slovakia).

3.2.1 Community Centers Providing Access to Preschool Education for Disadvantaged Romani Children

By: Sonja Sedloska, pedagogue, Education Center Romano Pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead), Prilep, Macedonia

- **Participants:** children aged four to seven years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family-community involvement;
- **Partners:** Romano Pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead) of the Aid for Handicapped and Poor, Roma-led NGO in Prilep, Dobre Jovanoski Primary School.

CONTEXT

Prilep is a city in the central part of the southern region of the Republic of Macedonia. Of the 76,878 citizens in Prilep, approximately 70,878 are Macedonian or of other nationalities. Approximately 4,433 or 6% are Roma, which constitutes the largest ethnic group in Prilep. The majority of Prilep's Roma live in the neighbourhood called Trizla 2, which is a part of the city, though geographically isolated. This neighbourhood is located in the north-western part of the city, and is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Prilep. It is densely populated, the streets are narrow and there is little to no infrastructure. The water system is improvised and in some places there is no network for electricity. People live mostly off social welfare, growing tobacco, selling goods in markets, and short-term day labour such as farm or factory work. Lack of education is a significant issue that people from this neighbourhood face, and it is the biggest reason for the high unemployment rate. According to data from the city Employment Bureau, 1,910 Roma are unemployed, of whom 1,127 have not completed primary education; only 9 have finished high school, and 2 have completed higher education.

The Romani students from Trizla 2 attend the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School which is located in the neighbourhood. In October 2002 the Center for Educational Support, Romano pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead) was opened to meet the needs of Romani children and students from the neighbourhood, with a primary focus on education. Ultimately, the Center hopes to assist the Romani community to integrate into mainstream education and also into society at large. The Center focuses on Romani youth from preschool to secondary school age, together with their parents, and currently works with approximately 275 students from 5 to 18 years of age.

The necessity for the Center was sparked by low school continuance by many Romani children in the area. Despite efforts of the local school in taking necessary pedagogical measures and in following the law for including students into compulsory primary education, an increasing number of Romani children do not continue their education. Endemic poverty is certainly one of the largest factors, where families do not have the means to support children to be successful in school.[1] Moreover, many parents are illiterate, and may feel helpless in assisting their children's school success or home study.

According to data taken from the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School, 24 out of 644 Romani students in the 2004–2005 school year left school in Grades 1 to 8. This often happened after having reached 15 years of age (the legal age at which they could leave school), or because they were not attending school regularly. In the 2005–2006 academic year, 6 Romani pupils left school after the first semester from a total number of 698 Romani students.

The Dobre Jovanoski Primary School and Center for Educational Support were part of the Roma Education Initiative from January 2004 to June 2006. This documentation study focuses on the project activities aimed at increasing Romani children's access to and success in preschool education. Work with preschool-aged children began in 2002. At that time, around 70% of preschool-aged children did not attend kindergarten, even though there was a state kindergarten located in the settlement. One of the main reasons for this was the financial cost of kindergarten and insufficient income among Romani families in Trizla 2.[2] The lack of preschool education led to a difficult start for many Romani children, since they missed elementary knowledge and could not follow the teaching materials. For example, some students who left in

early primary school could not hold a pencil, did not know how to draw, were unable to narrate and answer questions, and had difficulties concentrating in class.[3]

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: The overall goal of the REI-supported project was to increase participation of Romani students in the educational system from preschool through secondary education.

To achieve this goal, the Center worked with children in the following groups:
- preschool education;
- students from Grades 1 to 4;
- students from Grades 5 to 8;
- high school students.

The Center carried out all of its activities in collaboration with the primary school and high schools where Romani students were enroled.[4] The Center employed a team of educators to work with the children in different groups to increase general knowledge, reinforce learning from the school lessons, assist in completing homework, provide individual guidance when needed and carry out various workshops. In addition, the educators also organized various activities to engage parents and schools.

Establishment of a preschool class in the Center

The team working with preschool students in the Center involved an educator, a social worker and the lobby group. The lobby group included five Roma from the settlement, who made home visits with the social worker to speak with the parents of children who did not attend school regularly.

The activities began with putting together a list of five to six-year-old children from the settlement who did not attend any formal educational institution. The preschool program within the Center was provided free of charge, and generally worked with children for about two hours per day, for a period of one year. After completing the program, most children enroled in primary school.

The curricula for working with the children followed the national curriculum for preschool and involved both individual and group work, along with some frontal teaching.[5] Subjects included: meet yourself; the traffic in our town; hygiene is half of our health; learning about the four seasons and their characteristics; my family; domestic and forest animals; mathematical shapes and sizes; learning the numbers from 1 to 10; and relationships. In addition, the Center also introduced elements of Romani culture, customs and mutual celebration of religious holidays.

In the beginning of the program, the Center encountered challenges in getting parents to bring their children to the preschool group, since this was not one of their usual practices. The class was organized in the local school, since there was no prepared space in the Center. The program started with one group of 22 children, aged five to six years old. When other parents started to see the positive changes in the children attending the Center, they decided to send their children to the class as well. It also helped that the class was cost free, since most families were living on a survival basis. With the increase in students, it was decided to renovate a space in the Center so that two separate groups of 15 to 16 children could be organized throughout the day.

The preschool class in the Center was a big room with a soft floor, and four tables with small chairs. The room was colourful, with many friendly pictures, and a lot of toys for the children to play with. In order to provide enough attention to each child, the children were divided into two groups, with a maximum of 15 per group.

I am illiterate and I don't want my child to be like me and to suffer in life.

Comment from a parent of a child attending the Center

> **The groups attended the preschool program at different times of the day.**
>
> Generally the daily program was as follows:
>
> > 10:00 – 10:20 – arrival of children and free-time activities
> > 10:20 – 10:50 – lesson activity
> > 10:50 – 11:10 – meal time
> > 11:10 – 11:40 – lesson activity
> > 11:40 – 12:00 – play time.
>
> From 13:00 – 15:00 the second preschool group attended the Center with the same program.

In addition to daily contact with parents when they dropped off and picked up their children, the Center organized parents' meetings once a month, where all parents came together and discussed various issues concerning the children. A health education session was organized for the parents, and the Center held individual meetings throughout the year.
When necessary, the teacher from the Center would call the parents or make a home visit.

Story of Ekrem[6]

At the beginning of the 2003–2004 school year, when the educator of the preschool group put together the list of five and six-year-olds who were not in preschool, she came across Ekrem. At that time, Ekrem was only four and a half years old, but his mother insisted that he be given the opportunity to start preschool. She wanted him to have more of a social life, to make new friends and to "learn something". The educator made an exception and accepted him into the class.

Ekrem came to the Center every day. In the beginning, he was very quiet, introspective and prone to daydreaming. Although there were other children who were shy and did not answer the questions, they were more attentive, listening carefully. They eventually started to become active, to ask questions and to answer questions on the subject "my family". Ekrem, however, did not want to cooperate and take part in the discussions and activities.

When the educator met with Ekrem's mother, she asked if this was his usual behaviour at home. On the contrary, his mother said that Ekrem was normally very active and outgoing. The educator then started to work individually with him on a daily basis. At first he would write and draw when she was sitting next to him, but stop once she went away. When asked why he did not play with the other children, he said that he was alone at the Center, without brothers or sisters or any of his usual friends. The educator explained that the children in the class were also his friends, and each day she made an effort to organize interactive games between Ekrem and other children. He gradually began to socialize more and more. After about four months he started helping other children, became interested in activities and started working independently on the given assignments.

When the next school year came (2004–2005), it was suggested that Ekrem enrol in the preparatory year at the primary school. However, his mother preferred that he continue at the Center, since he was familiar with the educator and the surroundings. Since pre-school attendance at school was not yet obligatory, Ekrem completed another year at the Center. He continued to improve his studies, take part actively in the lessons and fit well into the group. He learned to read and write numbers up to 10, along with some letters of the alphabet. However, the biggest success in working with Ekrem was his socialization into the classroom environment and among classmates.

Preschool educator working one-on-one with a student in the Center.

By the autumn of 2006, Ekrem had started Grade 2. Educators from the Center continued to work with him in the context of after-school lessons to complete homework.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The experience of the Center showed that children who attended preschool had a better start in primary school, and a greater chance of success. Since beginning its preschool class in 2002, the Center has worked with about 182 children. At the end of each school year, the Center encouraged parents to enrol their children in the primary school, and they also provided school books and materials. Up to 2006, about 130 students had been enroled in the primary school.[7]

In 2006–2007, the Center worked with 40 preschool students, in 3 groups over the course of the day. The program was also expanded through regular collaboration with the Nasa Idnina settlement kindergarten, in which the Center negotiated the inclusion of 13 Romani children, at no cost to their parents.

There is a big difference between the children who have some preschool education and those who do not. The children who attended preschool in the Center or in the school are well adapted. They have the elementary knowledge needed to start primary education. The students who do not attend any preschool class have difficulties from the beginning of their primary education and also later on. Unfortunately there are many children like this. This supports the fact that preschool education is a basis for successful education.

Statement from a primary school teacher

The Center found it challenging to convince parents to send and keep their children in school, since economic difficulties led many to encourage their children to earn money rather than to continue their studies. Nevertheless, there were others who saw the value in the Center and were thankful for its assistance and work with the children

REFLECTION

The Educational Center – Romano Pro Angle – provided disadvantaged Romani children with an opportunity to gain basic starting knowledge and socialization in the classroom before starting Grade 1. Unlike state kindergarten, the Center's program was free of charge, thus making it accessible to children from impoverished families.

The Center found it was also better placed to meet the individual needs of children since they worked in small groups of about 10 to 12. The ability to accord individual attention meant it was easier to become familiar with the child's personality and meet his or her individual needs. In this way, the educators could establish good communication and the child opened up to the educator and the learning process. This was more difficult in other preschool institutions, such as the "zero" class in the primary school, since they worked with a group of about 28 children. By introducing elements of Romani culture and traditions, the Center also created an inviting and comfortable environment with which the children could associate.

Since most of the children came from marginalized families and this was their first experience in a classroom, the Center found that they had more needs than the average child. Some children encountered serious issues at home, and this naturally affected their behaviour in school. For example, Center staff dealt patiently with various behavioural and emotional issues of some children, such as rude language when arguing, anxiety about being without their parents, no initial interest in learning, and talking about violence in their families. In addressing these issues, the staff worked with children individually or organized discussions to explain what was right and wrong. They also worked out texts and dialogue based on some examples of the children's everyday lives.

By working with the children at an early age, and developing good relations with the parents, the Center helped the families overcome barriers to accessing preschool and obtaining a good start in primary school. In doing so, they ultimately increased chances for school success and completion among disadvantaged Romani children from Tuzla 2.

Author: A preschool educator active within the Romani community since 2002, Sonja Sedloska is currently enroled in the Pedagogical Faculty in Bitola and studying to become a primary school teacher for Grades 1 through 4.

NOTES

1   According to the UNDP, the percentage of households living below the poverty line in Macedonia is in constant increase, having reached 30.2% in 2003. Macedonia has one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, and unemployment rather than low income became one of the key factors of poverty and social exclusion. The long-term unemployment rate is increasing (31.2% in 2003 to 31.7% in 2004); the long-term unemployment share increased from 85.1% in 2003 to 85.45 in 2004. High unemployment rates are recorded among minority groups, with the highest rate of 78.5% found among the Romani population. See: **http://intra. rbec.undp.org/mdg_forum/Session3_FYRMacedonia_Summary.html**.

2   Monthly kindergarten fees amount to about €25 per month, and parents have to buy supplies (notebooks, coloured pencils, etc.).

3   It may be noted that from the 2006–2007 school year, the educational system in Macedonia introduced a mandatory "zero" preparatory year with the primary school system.

4   These included: Dobre Jovanoski Primary School, the high schools of Gorche Petrov (medical studies, hair-dressing, cosmetics, mining, wood technology), Kuzman Josifoski-Pitu (economics, law, trade and marketing), Riste Risteski-Richko (mechanical and electrical technology), and Orde Chopela (tobacco, agricultural, veterinary, and optical technology).

5   Frontal teaching is predominantly thematically orientated and is conveyed orally and visually. Communication between teacher and pupils is at the forefront – cooperation of the pupils with each other is limited.

6   In order to maintain anonymity, fictitious names have been used in this study.

7   More results can be found in the *REI Macedonia Annual Research and Evaluation Report Macedonia, 2005* and in the *Roma Education Program Evaluation Report, 2005-2006* both available at: **http://www.osi.hu/rei**.

3.2.2 Integrating Romani Children Outside of the Education System: The Role of the Roma Educational Center

By: Snezana Bangievska-Tomeska, pedagogue and program coordinator, Program for Education for Roma, Dendo Vas Center for Educational Support, Skopje, Macedonia

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 4 to 18 years, and adults;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family-community involvement;
- **Partners:** Dendo Vas Educational Support Center, Straso Pindzur Primary School.

CONTEXT

According to official state statistics of 2002, the Romani population numbered about 53,879 or 2.66% of the total population in the Republic of Macedonia. Unofficial estimates considered the Romani population to number about 135,490. This number did not include the Roma who declared themselves as Turks, Macedonians, Albanians or Egyptians. Roma in Macedonia are confronted with numerous social and economic difficulties. Many are illiterate or partly educated and living on social assistance or from work as short-term day labourers on farms or in factories.

There were many reasons for low educational attainment levels among Roma. These included leaving school due to early marriage or doing informal work for income instead of furthering education, insufficient knowledge of the official Macedonian language, lack of preschool education, lack of financial resources for books and other school materials, unsuitable clothes, a shortage of teaching methodologies for the education of Romani students, the existence of prejudices and stereotypes toward Roma, and a distrust of education among parents.

The high percentage of unemployment and poverty among Roma was seen as the main cause for the educational issues Romani children encountered.[1] Indeed, unemployment and poverty were interdependent and together they accounted for the low educational attainment levels among Romani children. When families did not have enough money for basic necessities, education was understandably put on the backburner. The goal of the Dendo Vas Educational Center was to make education a priority by providing the children and parents with as much support as possible.

The intervention described in this study took place in the Dame Gruev settlement in Skopje, which has about 1,020 Romani inhabitants. Among the Roma, 553 are children aged 1 to 18. Out of these, 172 children attend primary school, 34 attend preschool at the Dendo Vas Center and 32 children are in secondary school. Sadly, more than 40 children are completely excluded from the educational system, due primarily to early abandonment of primary school. Most of the parents are illiterate and therefore incapable of helping their children with homework, and all families speak the Romani language as their mother tongue.

The children from Dame Gruev who were younger than six years old did not attend any state kindergarten or preschool institution. This was due to the fact that the closest kindergarten was over two kilometres away from the Romani neighbourhood, and also cost €50 per month, which made attendance almost impossible. This fee was roughly the same amount provided by the government as social assistance for families to support their daily needs. Furthermore, the parents were expected to buy educational supplies for their children (such as colour pencils, books, scissors and glue). In such circumstances, the preschool program within the Dendo Vas Educational Center was the only option for the children who lived in the Dame Gruev settlement. From September 2006, the number of preschool children attending this program was 50. The children were five and six years old.

The Dendo Vas Educational Support Center was established in March 2002, and is the only NGO working in the community on educational issues. The Center works alongside the local families and primary school with the aim of overcoming the

educational and related difficulties confronting Romani children. The local primary school Straso Pindzur is located in the settlement. The Center employs three pedagogues, three assistants, one field worker, one administrator and a coordinator.

The Center is located in the community, in a double-storey house purchased with support from the Freudenberg Foundation. On the first floor there are staff offices and a large multi-functional room, which is used for workshops, creative classes, a multi-ethnic club, parents' meetings, free-time activities, and hobbies organized by Dendo Vas. On the second floor are two joint rooms used for daily activities such as writing homework, studying, organizing debates and larger parents' meetings. In addition, there is a well equipped library and computer room for basic IT lessons. The most beautiful room is used for preschool and contains many toys and educational materials. All the walls within the Center are decorated with drawings and artwork made by the children, as well as pictures from various projects and workshops.

This study focuses on how the Educational Center brings Romani children who are not part of the formal educational system into the primary school system and prepares them for first grade.

The Program for Educational Support of Romani Children and Youth in the Municipality of Gorce Petrov was carried out from 1 March 2002 to 31 December 2004. The project was supported by the Open Society Institute-Macedonia and the Freudenberg Foundation. Started in 1 January 2005 the program will operate until September 2007, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development, Open Society Institute-Macedonia and Pestalozzi Children's Foundation.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: The main goal of the program was to retain Romani students in the educational process, and to improve their achievements and regular attendance in school. This was to be done primarily through supportive actions in all levels of education. In this regard, the main components included educational support and extra-curricular activities for six main participant groups:
- preschool children (aged four to seven);
- children in Grades 1 to 8;
- high school students;
- families of school-aged children;
- the local primary school (see the Appendix on page 31 for a description of the programs).

The Center identified and worked with school-aged children outside of the educational system, through its Program to Prepare Children for a Better Start in First Grade. The program targeted six-year-old children, and was hosted in the Center from April to September.[2] Most of the children in the program were five and six years old and attended the Center's preschool group, although the Center also made extra efforts to identify those children who were not involved in the Center's work, or who did not complete Grade 1. Until then the schools had usually accepted children to be enroled in Grade 1 up to the age of eight, or even nine.

The program began with research in the community. The team from the Center went door-to-door in order to make a list of the children who would start the first grade in September.[3] At the same time they also emphasized the importance of education. It was during this phase that the Center identified children who were over seven years old and out of the educational system. The main reasons for their having left school were: lack of identification documents,[4] personal and health issues, and lack of information. The Center worked with these families to solve these issues and enrol the children in the first grade.

After the lists were completed, the Center organized meetings with the parents to explain about all the documents needed to enrol the children in the school and about relevant deadlines. The children were then divided into groups, and, together with the parents, staff from the Center took them to the school to be tested by the school's pedagogue. In the test, the pedagogue conversed with each of the children to assess their communication skills and to find out if they knew their

name, address, age, place of residence, and other details. The pedagogue also showed the children different colours, numbers and animals to assess whether they had any sight, speech or hearing impediments.

At the beginning of June, the Center started intensive educational activities with the children. These included psycho-motor exercises, writing out the alphabet and counting up to ten, identifying colours, and so on. The main aim of the activities was to learn the Macedonian language and to obtain general knowledge for starting Grade 1. Activities dealing with behavioural habits and cognitive development were also included.

The program took place from Monday to Friday, for two school hours each day. In total, around 30 children participated, but they were divided into groups of 10. Each group had different hours during the day, so that the main pedagogue and other assistants could accord each child adequate attention. The classes were provided free of charge and the children received school supplies and a bag at the beginning of the school year.

Story of Anje[5]

In 2002, the first year of the project, the Center identified Anje during the course of its door-to-door research. At that time, Anje was nine years old and out of school.

The story through Anje's eyes

My name is Anje. I am 14 years old and I'm in fourth grade now. You probably noticed that I should be in the seventh or eighth grade, but I will try to explain why I am not.

When I was seven years old my parents enroled me in the first grade. I was looking forward to it. I was very excited to go to school, but from the beginning I faced many challenges. For example, my teacher was very rude, and she always yelled at me. Sometimes she even beat me. So, after a few months I stopped attending the school. It wasn't because I didn't want to go and learn, but I was afraid. My family also had problems when I left the school, and they even had to pay a fine because I had stopped going.

When the Dendo Vas Center for Educational Support opened, I began to go there every day. The educators working there were very nice to me and they noticed my desire for studying and writing. They insisted that I re-enrol in school. In the beginning, my parents were against it because of the previous issues I had had, but after a lot of discussion they agreed to let me go back to school. The school authority approved my re-enrolment, so I was in the first grade again when I was ten years old.[6]

Anje attended first grade in our school in 1999–2000. Due to irregular school attendance, the local educational inspector was informed and, according to the law, the Ministry of Education and Science fined her parents. Anje did not finish the first grade due to frequent absences from school.

In the spring of 2002–2003, representatives of Dendo Vas had a meeting with the manager and the school. They insisted on the approval for Anje's enrolment. Since she was ten years old, the local educational inspector was consulted. He reported that, despite her age, Anje could continue her education, remarking that she had to attend classes regularly.

Psychologist of the Straso Pindzur Primary School

Since then, I have been an excellent student in the school and in the Center. I have become an example for other students and for my friends. I continue to get help and support from the educators of the Center and I'm getting better every day.

Now my parents are very proud of me. Also, they are very grateful for the Dendo Vas Center and the help they gave me. I am no longer afraid that I will be on the street like many other children I know that did not finish school. I am sure that I will continue with my education and that my future will be better.

The story through Anje's mother's eyes
Anje attended first grade, but she had issues with her teacher and did not want to go there any more. Because of her absence from school, we had to pay a fine. My husband was very angry and he took her out of the school. After two to three years of Dendo Vas work, the educator Svetlana came to our home to inform us about their activities and ask if we had children who should go to school. Then I explained the situation we had with my daughter.

After that Anje visited Dendo Vas regularly. She was satisfied with the educators and the way she was accepted. After some time, Svetlana came again. She asked if we wanted to enrol Anje in the first grade again. We were against it in the beginning, especially my husband. However, the teacher persuaded us that Anje is very bright and talented, that education is important, and that Anje would have no future without it. Finally, we agreed, and she went to talk with the responsible persons at the school, to see if my daughter could return. They reconsidered her case and approved it.

I am very grateful to the people working in the Center because they succeeded to re-enrol Anje in school. Without their help, my daughter would have been uneducated and without a future.

This year they offered to help my other daughter Ramize, who was wild, withdrawn and without friends. She would not communicate with anyone. They got to know her and now she is involved in the preparation group for first grade. They work with her so she can manage when school starts in September.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Alongside its work to prepare children for Grade 1, the Center was able to integrate another two to three children per year, who were up to the age of ten and outside of the educational system. For example, in May 2006, nine-year-old Enise was enroled in the first grade. She lacked a birth certificate and other identification documents, so the Center informed the relevant authorities and started the process for obtaining the documents.

Overall, the Center worked to enrol all seven-year-old children from the community. The estimated success rate was about 90%. Some did not enrol because they needed to repeat the preparatory year or were found to have special needs, such as speech disabilities. It was recommended that the children with disabilities obtain professional therapy before being re-assessed for enrolment. This, however, often proved difficult for families, as such treatment was an extra cost that they could not afford.

In 2006 the Center initiated a process to gain accreditation for the local primary school to hold evening classes for all children and youth who were of school age but remained outside the education system, and adults. This way they could provide easily accessible educational opportunities for those community members over the age of ten.

REFLECTION

In the process of visiting families, the Center was able to detect many issues related to child development and education. The frequent family visits and preparation of lists including names, ages and addresses of the children in the community were also useful for the school. They did not usually have access to such information, and lacked the social or field workers who could collect such data. It was this direct, community-based approach that allowed for the identification of children who are outside of the educational system.

The frequent home visits, parents' meetings and direct work with the children in the community provided for the development of mutual trust among the families and the Center's staff. Likewise, the Center approached the families with immediateness and frankness, while according respect, sensitivity and empathy during discussions and workshops. The existence of such trust was an important contribution to the success of the Center's work in providing the children with an equal start in school and for integrating those who were outside the educational system.

In accompanying parents and children to the school for enrolment exams and procedures, the Center helped to mediate relations among families and the school from the start. It was also worth noting that the Center tried to improve the relations between the parents and the school, as they found that the parents felt free to speak with educators from the Center, but not with the teachers from the school. For the most part, this was due to the fact that the teachers would only invite the parents to the school when they wanted to discuss low achievement or frequent absences of the children. The parents would feel ashamed after such meetings and did not want to return. Therefore, the Center and the school planned joint activities in the school, where the parents felt welcome and had a positive experience.[7]

The Educational Center helped the Romani children and families overcome a number of social and economic disadvantages, which would otherwise have restricted the successful integration into primary school. The state kindergarten was too expensive and far away, and the fact that the Center was located in the community and provided its programs free of charge removed these obstacles. When issues regarding identity documents of children proved to be a barrier to enrolment, the Center mediated between the family and the relevant institutions in order to obtain them. Furthermore, since all families spoke the Romani language as their mother tongue, the preparatory classes provided the children with the opportunity to learn the Macedonian language in a friendly environment.

The parents of the children often stated that without the Center the children would have had no school materials, and their homework would not have been done. They would probably have spent most of their time on the street. The school teachers found that overall school success was improved, and that children showed a more positive attitude and attended more regularly, since the Center had started its work.

Author: An active pedagogue since 1998, Snezana Bangievska-Tomeska is trained in the Step by Step methodology. She has been active in implementing collaborative projects between the Center, local school and the local community.

APPENDIX

Main Components of the Program for Educational Support of Romani Children and Youth in Gorce Petrov

Programs for preschool children
- program for preschool children, intended for children aged four to six years, runs for nine months (September–May);
- program for preparing children for first grade, intended for children up to six years old, runs for five months (April–August).

Program for students in Grades 1 to 8
- aid in completing homework;
- support to improve knowledge;
- free-time activities (drama, music, drawing, art, travel, etc.);
- computer and English-language lessons;
- professional orientation for Grade 8 students;
- debates and lectures on different subjects.

Program for high school students
- learning about educational matters;
- debates and educational workshops;

- preparation and implementation of a project;
- computer lessons;
- free-time activities (drama, music, etc.);
- excursions.

Program for collaborating with the families
- home visits;
- parent meetings;
- providing advice on different subjects;
- discussion with the teachers.

Activities and collaboration with the primary school
- exchange of information regarding attendance in school and educational results;
- joint action planning for activities with students and parents.

NOTES

1 According to official statistics from 2002, the total population in the Republic of Macedonia was 2,022,547. Out of these, 460,544 were officially employed, including 3,769 Roma. In the town of Gorce Petrov, where the project's settlement Dame Gruev is located, there are 41,490 citizens, out of whom 1,249 are Roma. In Gorce Petrov 13,536 citizens are officially employed, including 105 Roma. Most of them work in manufacturing jobs. According to a UNICEF-supported study in 2000, made by professor Divna Lakinska of the Institute for Social Work and Social Policy in Skopje, only 55 out of the town's 215 Roma families have working members.

2 Primary school is mandatory for all citizens of Macedonia. Until recently, this has meant the completion of the Grades 1 to 8. From September 2006, a "zero" (preparatory) class was also made obligatory, as part of primary school education. Preparatory classes are for six-year-old children, and first grade therefore generally starts at age seven. If children do not attend the Zero class, then they cannot be enroled in the first grade, even if they are already seven years old.

3 From 2006, the Center started to work with two groups: four and five year olds, to prepare them for the Zero class, and six year olds, to strengthen their studies in the Zero class before starting Grade 1.

4 Some children lack personal identification documents because they were born at home and their parents did not register them, or they were born abroad.

5 In order to ensure anonymity, fictitious names have been used in this study.

6 The Center requested that Anje be assigned to a different teacher, and the school agreed.

7 These included lectures on different topics, roundtable discussions, talks on Romani traditions, history and language for the teachers, and professional orientation for eighth graders and their parents.

3.2.3 Improving Access to Quality Preschool Education in Slovakia

By: Zita Baduríková, PhD, Head, Department of Education Science (Pedagogy), Faculty of Philosophy, Comenius University, Bratislava, Slovakia

- **Participants:** children aged three to six years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family-community involvement, capacity building, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** Wide Open School Foundation (Nadácia Škola Dokorán) Slovakia, participating preschools.

CONTEXT

Promoting and improving integrated preschool education among Roma was an integral part of the REI project in Slovakia. Preschool education in the Slovak school system meant the education of three to six-year-old children. At the end of the 1980s a preparatory year before starting Grade 1 was obligatory, which meant that nearly all children aged five to six attended preschool. However, the preparatory year is no longer obligatory, and currently a lot of Romani children do not profit from high quality preschool education.

It is also important to note that in the period between 1990 and 1994, the number of kindergartens decreased from 4,052 to 3,343.[1] The main reasons for closing down the kindergartens were the introduction of kindergarten fees[2] coupled with increasing unemployment and related financial difficulties, and a decreasing birth rate. Romani children from disadvantaged conditions were among the first to stop attending kindergarten. Although the closure of kindergartens has slowed down, they are still not able to fulfil all parents' requests to enrol their children.

In such a situation, where the existing capacity of kindergartens is not able to cover the demand, principals prefer to enrol children with employed parents. Since the mothers of Romani children are usually unemployed, their children have fewer chances to enrol in kindergarten, even if desired. At the same time, experience showed that the less educated mothers are, the less aware they are of the need for systematic and institutional education of children in the younger years. In such cases, Romani mothers themselves do not advocate for increasing kindergarten capacities. Likewise, municipalities that establish kindergartens often do not give importance or priority to the influence that preschool education has on (lifelong) education and the eventual employability of Roma. The majority of children living in Romani settlements do not attend kindergarten, so when starting primary school, they are not at the same level of development as children who attended preschool; they start with a disadvantage in terms of chances for school success.

The Wide Open School Foundation, the primary implementing partner in REI Slovakia, was established in 1994 and has focused much of its work on educational activities among disadvantaged children. For the REI project, the foundation chose disadvantaged Romani settlements from four municipalities in Eastern Slovakia:

1. The Smižany municipality has a population of about 8,350 inhabitants.[3] The Romani citizens live in a settlement at the edge of the municipality. There is a significant level of social differentiation within the settlement itself with well-off families living in large detached houses and owning cars, and very poor families living in huts. The kindergarten involved in the project was located at the edge of the Romani settlement, and had three classrooms. It provided all day care, attended by Romani children only. It was a municipality-run kindergarten which was built particularly for Roma in the settlement. About 66 to 70 children attended this kindergarten. For Romani parents this kindergarten was perceived as their own. Some of them attended it when they were children and they trust the teachers. Non-Romani citizens enroled their children in another kindergarten.

2. In the Rudňany municipality, the situation was more complicated. Rudňany has 3,402 inhabitants, including 1,379 Roma.[4] The Roma live in settlements about three kilometers outside the village, which limits the transportation of children to the kindergarten and primary school located in the center. The Romani population live in three smaller neighbourhoods in the settlement (called Zabijanec, 5RPII and Patoracke), each with different living conditions.

In Patoracke there is no running water and the families live in appalling hygienic conditions. Relationships among families living in the different neighbourhoods were often tense. For example, parents from one neighbourhood did not want their children to attend the same class as children from another part of the settlement. The project helped to improve relations between two of these communities (5RPII and Patoracke).

A so-called "preschool club" functioned in the settlement until December 2003, which covered the activities of a kindergarten to a certain extent. The club was supported by the local government and functioned in one room of an old building. It was open two to three hours a day to prepare children for primary school. It ceased to operate when a new kindergarten was constructed. The new kindergarten in Rudňany had three classes, which were attended by 51 Romani children during the project. It opened in April 2004 as a regular kindergarten included in the public system of kindergartens. It is located in the 5RPII neighbourhood.

3. Jarovnice has about 4,008 inhabitants,[5] the majority of which are Roma living in a settlement at the edge of the municipality. The project included one municipal kindergarten with three classes. There were a total of 37 Romani children attending the kindergarten, and one of the classes was all Roma. In addition to the state kindergarten, a community center located in the Romani settlement organized a preparatory class for about 20 children. Intensive preschool preparation was also carried out in families, where 39 volunteering parents prepared their children for entering primary school. These different approaches responded to the fact that there were not enough places in the existing kindergarten for all children from the settlement.[6]

4. Košice-Šaca is an urban ward and the Roma live mostly in residential houses. Košice is a city with 235,832 inhabitants.[7] At the beginning of the project there was no willingness to integrate Romani children due to the lack of capacity in the kindergarten. Therefore, in the first year of the project, a kindergarten class was created within the primary school. About 17 Romani children were enroled. This solution was also considered relatively successful, considering the initial extremely negative attitude of the kindergarten management. In the second year, the project integrated 20 children in the mainstream kindergarten.

At the start of the project, the Romani children of preschool age from the participating localities faced similar issues when adapting to primary school. These included:
- differences in the culture of school life and that of the children's families;
- insufficient knowledge of the language of instruction (Slovak);
- a general level of knowledge that was lower than the schools' expectations;
- under-developed social and communicative skills needed for interacting with classmates, teachers and other adults in kindergarten;
- prejudices on both sides;
- insufficient opportunities for hygiene;
- few opportunities to acquire readiness to learn systematically.

The REI project took place between 2003 and 2005, and involved a variety of different components related to integrated education.[8] At the start of the project, the quality of the work and performance in the participating kindergartens varied. Some teachers used child-oriented pedagogical approaches, while others were not well prepared for such demanding work, and preferred the so-called "frontal work" in the classroom. The kindergartens offered similar programs as other kindergartens in Slovakia. Also, kindergarten for five-year-old children and those starting late was free, though later fees were also introduced for this group as well. This study looked

photo by Barbora Kahatova, OSF Bratislava

Romani children in kindergarten 5RPII in Rudňany where the REI project tried to increase preschool attendance in preparation for first grade.

at the activities in which Romani children up to the age of six years participated. In effect this meant the children themselves, the pedagogical staff of kindergartens and the children's parents.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: The main goal of the project was to strengthen the integration of Romani children into quality mainstream education. In the area of preschool education this meant implementing a comprehensive formal and informal preschool education program and countering tendencies to misplace and segregate Romani children into special schools for the mentally disabled.

The principal vehicle to achieve the goal was the implementation of child-centered pedagogy, Step by Step (SbS) methodology, in the work of kindergarten teachers, together with the introduction of a multicultural education. In doing so, preschool education was better able to prepare children for primary school.

The project team worked closely with the mayors and local offices, since they were the responsible founders of the kindergartens. They emphasized that the kindergarten must be an open, organic component of the community. The training of teachers also played an important part in the project, along with improving their cooperation with families, and introducing features of Romani culture into the educational content and classroom.

Teacher training

The teacher is the main vehicle for carrying out education reforms in the classroom. Therefore, the project focused a lot of attention on the process of educating teachers through interactive and practical training. In particular, the aim was to prepare them for working with Step by Step methodology, multicultural approaches and methods, and education for social justice.[9] The teachers attended the trainings together with their Roma teacher assistants (hereafter referred to as RTAs).

Training sessions were tailored to the needs of each kindergarten. As kindergarten teachers and RTAs in Smižany and Jarovnice had already been trained in SbS methodology, they received additional courses on creating an inclusive classroom environment, Romani issues and anti-bias education, and home-based intensive preschool preparation. For teachers and RTAs in Šaca training on an inclusive classroom environment, morning cycles, child assessment, and intensive preschool preparation were organized. Furthermore, a two-day training course on intensive preschool preparation for eleven parents was also given. For 27 volunteers from Šaca and Jarovnice, the project organized a two-day seminar on home-based preschool preparation.

In Rudňany there were fifteen days of training for three teachers and seven RTAs. The themes included: basics of the child-centered approach, creating an inclusive classroom environment, individualization, assessment of Romani children, organization and planning the educational process, creating the classroom community, family participation, personal and social development of RTAs, communication skills, creating projects, anti-bias education, and Romani issues. In addition to this there have been two micro-trainings on the morning cycle, intensive preschool preparation and thematic planning.

Roma teacher assistants

Another method promoted by the project was the use of RTAs in the kindergarten. Some of the teachers had previous experiences working with an assistant, while others had to adapt to the new situation. Overall, eight new RTAs were introduced at the request of local kindergartens. All of them lived in the respective Romani communities, and had not completed secondary education.

The Roma teacher assistant was a great help for the teacher. He helped the children to get over the fear of the unknown, and his contribution was noticeable when playing games at social events...

Comment from teacher from Rudňany

None of the teachers in the kindergarten refused to cooperate with an RTA. Their main contributions were to help both the children and the teacher overcome the language barrier at the beginning of the school year, improve contact with the children's families, and take part in various learning activities for the children. Furthermore, RTAs served as role-models for

the children. They were paid by the municipality and worked daily carrying out various activities, including direct assistance in the classroom, helping teachers prepare materials, making family visits, and taking children to and from kindergarten.

Introducing Romani culture into the classroom

Kindergarten teachers introduced Romani culture into the classrooms through a variety of methods. In addition to Romani songs and dances, they also included Romani fairy tales, written Romani language, publications, typical dress, and handicrafts. The content addressed issues such as Romani history, meals, traditions, and successful, respected Roma. All these helped children to realize that poems and books are written in their language and to build awareness of their cultural identity.

Engaging and involving parents

To enrol a child into kindergarten is one thing, but it is also important to make sure the child attends school regularly. The parents often needed more information to understand that their child should get used to the regularity of school attendance as a part of their preparation for primary school. This meant improving the mutual understanding between teachers and parents. For this, teachers started communicating more with parents by visiting families at home, and having RTAs "bring" the children to the kindergarten and help in communication among the teacher and parent. It also helped to make the classroom environment more attractive, while opening the kindergarten for parents.

The teachers participating in the REI program visited the families of their children more often than other kindergartens. They showed interest in the reasons for absence, tried to involve the parents in the kindergarten activities and tried to spotlight the role of education in the family.

Parents were also engaged through other parallel activities in other components of REI. For example, in Rudňany, there was a Woman and Health component that included regular bathing for four to five children every day in kindergarten; it also organized meetings with a pediatrician. In Jarovnice and Smižany, a computer literacy program was very popular, and a literacy program for adults was also organized.

photo by Nadácia Škola Dokorán (NSD)

Participant at an REI-sponsored computer literacy course.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Classroom environment and work performance

The work of the teachers in participating kindergartens became more focused on the integration of Romani culture into the pedagogical process. They also emphasized values such as social justice, mutual respect and tolerance. At the beginning of the project, outside researchers/observers saw few signs of Romani culture, even in those kindergartens attended by Romani children only. Gradually, both classroom environments and overall work performance increased. In particular, work planning focused more on educational goals and the individuality of the child.

In Smižany for example, work performance went from 70 at the beginning of the project to a maximum of 240 in the second year. After the initial difficulties in Košice-Šaca, the classroom environment in the kindergarten has also changed markedly. Here it is important to recall that prior to the project there were only two to three Romani students in this kindergarten. The work performance has noticeably changed in the Rudňany kindergarten as well, where a volunteer Romani mother had a particularly positive impact on the learning environment. Some activity centers have been changed and completed in such a way that they accept children's needs and the children became more independent, communicative and brave.[10]

Improved attendance

There were improvements in attendance between the first and the second year of the project in all participating kindergartens. In Smižany the average days for a child to be absent went from 53.5 days to 48.1 days, with frequent long-lasting illness (chicken pox, scarlet fever) being the cause. In Jarovnice the average went from 47.7 days to 28.7 days and in Košice- Šaca absenteeism decreased from 57.8 to 40.9 days on average. The teachers in Rudňany managed to maintain a positive trend in kindergarten attendance after its opening in April 2004, with the lowest average of 17.3 days per child.[11]

Parent–teacher contacts

The average number of teacher-parent contacts and class visits increased in every kindergarten. Other types of meetings also occurred in all kindergartens, for example: parents accompanying children on day trips, visits to the library, shopping for candy for meetings, participation in various gatherings (Mother's Day, Christmas and Easter celebrations), help in ironing and altering children's clothes and bed sheets, cleaning the school surroundings and sandboxes, painting lockers, and visits in the family, in town or on the street.

Parents' opinions and attitudes toward education

The parents appreciated the changes made after the kindergartens joined the project. One of the results of the work with families was that parents were more willing to answer questions and give feedback on the project after the second year. It is interesting that some parents changed their opinions on the importance of various aspects of preschool education over the course of the project. For example, in the first year, there was greater emphasis placed on the importance of the child learning to "play, draw, rhyme and sing songs", and on learning to "speak the official (Slovak) language". In the second year however, there were far more who found "basic skills for life and future", and "reading, writing and literacy" to be important.

We have a beautiful new kindergarten ...my child will learn to speak at least. At home he says rhymes and sings songs learned in the kindergarten.

My daughter enjoys attending the kindergarten, she comes home smiling and with no fear.

In my opinion, an important thing is that children speak Slovak ...it is important for my daughter to learn reading and writing and many other things... I hope she will finish the school, then high school and, if she wants, even the university.

Comments from parents

Graph 1: What parents consider important in kindergartens (%)

Category	2003/04	2004/05
No response	9.8	5.5
Learn to play, draw, rhymes and songs	24.6	15.1
Everything in school is important	9.8	15.8
Learn to speek properly (official language)	26.2	24.2
Basic skills for life, future	3.3	13.7
Achieve a level of education	18	15.1
Reading, writing, literacy	8.2	13.7
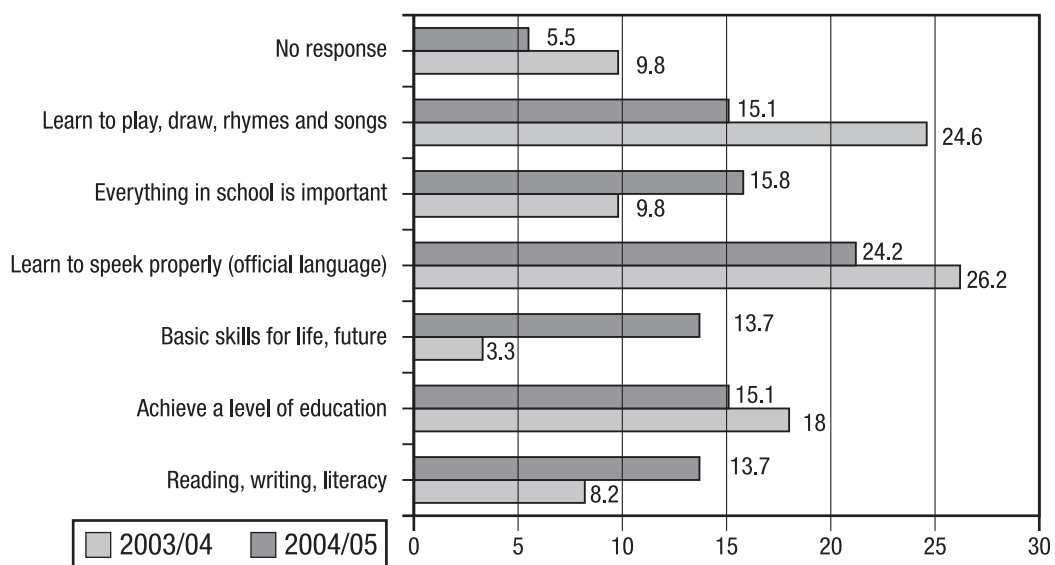
Source: REI Annual Research and Evaluation Report – Slovakia, NSD, 2005

Educators' and leaders' opinions

The opinions of the schools' management changed during the project. Whereas they saw the benefits of participation in material and financial aid at the beginning, after two years they found communication and getting to know a different culture to be more important.

Children attending kindergarten is a wonderful step leading to a better beginning at primary school. We lost a lot when we did not pay much attention to preschool education before.

Mr Blišťan, mayor of Rudňany

Inclusive education

Due to the specific conditions in each of the kindergartens included in the project it was not possible to integrate all Romani children into mainstream kindergartens. The obstacles were both objective and subjective. For example, in Rudňany the Romani settlement is about three kilometers from the village and transportation to the kindergarten was not possible. In Smižany, the kindergarten is close to the settlement, while the other lacks places for all children in the municipality. On a subjective level, non-Romani parents put up strong objections to the integration of Romani students, for example in Košice-Šaca or in Rudňany, where only three Romani children from so-called "better" Romani families were included.

At the same time, the project did make some steps toward the inclusion of Romani children. Teachers became more aware that integrated education from early childhood was necessary. In Košice-Šaca, the second year of the project saw 20 Romani children included into the mainstream kindergarten and there was an immense improvement in classroom interactions. Unfortunately, the introduction of fees for five to six year olds and for children with delayed school attendance caused all Romani parents to stop sending their children to kindergarten.

[The project] gives us the opportunity and space to include the parents in education; mothers come to a class, sit with their children and play or create something nice... Close cooperation with the family, acquiring the trust of the community, and natural authority forms the keystone of a successful project.

Statement of kindergarten director in Rudňany

Teachers in Rudňany made new contacts with the non-Romani kindergarten, and there were two common activities organized, but the non-Romani kindergarten had no interest in continuing. It should be mentioned that parents from the different parts of the Romani settlement in Rudňany did not want their children to be put into one classroom, but during the project, they were integrated in the same kindergarten class and 90% of preschool children from these two communities attended half-day kindergarten programs. Now the children are together in class, and also playing and study together. The mothers from the Patoracke settlement also joined the educational activities, and collaborated in various celebrations and class parties as well.

Even in Jarovnice, where classroom and work performance improvements were least pronounced and classrooms remained separate, many joint activities were organized to provide for cooperation and interaction among Romani and non-Romani students. By the last term of the project, there were no signs of inappropriate behavior among Romani and non-Romani children.

The project led to more children enroling in inclusive primary schools as well. For example, in Rudňany there were three children integrated into Grade 1 after many years. In Smižany 15 Romani children were accepted into the religious primary school within a period of two years,

Primary school children in Rudňany where integrated classes used SbS methodology.

which was not the case before the project. In Jarovnice more work was still needed to support Romani parents in registering their children for the non-Romani primary school. Parents preferred to send their children to the Romani primary school since their older siblings attended that school and children felt safer amongst all Romani children. In addition, they were satisfied with the teachers there.

Comprehensive approach

The comprehensive approach of the project provided for "synergy" between official institutions, non-governmental organizations, and the Romani communities. As a result, kindergartens continue to use Step by Step methodology, involve parents in school activities and make kindergartens open for the community. With the support of the municipality in Rudňany for example, Roma teacher assistants were still functioning in the kindergartens in the 2006–2007 school year. In Jarovnice some 40 Romani children attended kindergarten and about 40 children were preparing for school in a home-based preschool program. About 80% of children completing these programs enroled in regular primary school, while many others who did not receive any support were enroled in "special" primary schools.

REFLECTION

Overall, the project led teachers to introduce Romani culture in the education process, to engage children in learning, to better develop the children's language and social skills, and to educate for social justice, tolerance and mutual respect. As a result, kindergarten attendance was improved and the number of the children integrated into Grade 1 of the primary school increased.[12]

A key component of the project was teacher training. This had a positive impact in terms of the way teachers approached working with children in the classroom and also improved the classroom environment itself. The educational activities employed in the training process, along with follow-up discussions, helped teachers to internalize and identify with the need for several changes. Of particular importance was a wider opening of the kindergarten to families, and the introduction of the parents in school work. Obviously, it demanded not only patience, but also the knowledge of parent-involvement strategies, and the art of communicating and empowering. Overall, the kindergarten teachers in the project were more often in contact with parents – especially mothers – than teachers in primary school.[13]

Working with children from socially disadvantaged environments was particularly demanding and led to teachers understanding that their outcomes may be long term. In this regard, the continued professional development of the teachers provided an opportunity for them to exchange experiences, provide mutual support and reassurance about successful methods. This helped increase and maintain motivation.

The work of the RTAs was another important component. One conclusion of the project was that it was important for them to keep in touch with families, but also to help in the educational process itself. In this regard, they should play a role in developing the children's identity and self confidence, and to be a role-model for them. Certainly, it is essential for them to support both the children and families.[14]

The teachers found one of the weaknesses of the project to be the education of the RTAs, along with insufficient preparation for their complex tasks. The assistants themselves pointed out that they needed to renew their knowledge and their formal education as well. According to their opinions, their work could have been improved mainly through education and more intensive engagement of Romani volunteers in the activities involving the improvement of the children's lives.

The REI project was challenging for all involved. The key to meeting such challenges was based on mutual cooperation of all participants. On the other hand the Roma themselves improved their self-awareness and attitudes toward providing a better life for their children through education. They were engaged more as volunteers and could also participate in different community programs to improve their own skills and knowledge. At the same time, anti-bias consciousness among teachers

was raised through long term intensive training and mentorship. While many challenges still remain, the experience provided a good basis for taking steps forward in the process of full integration of Romani children in the school system.

Author: Over the last ten years, Zita Baduríková has been active in teacher training, teaching theory of education, preschool and primary school pedagogy, and anti-bias education. She has also acted as a leader and member of various research projects (grants from Slovak Scientific Grant Agency); has collaborated long term with the Wide Open School Foundation on PHARE, OSI and Comenius projects; and is a member (and former president) of the Slovak World Organization for Early Childhood Education National Committee.

NOTES

1   ÚIPŠ (Institute of Information and Prognosis of Schools) (1996). *Štatistická ročenka školstva SR* (Statistic Yearbook of Schools in the Slovak Republic), Bratislava.

2   The state (Regulation of the Ministry of Education of the Slovak Republic 540/2004) emphasised a need for systematic preschool education, yet it also introduced fees for kindergarten attendance for five to six-year-old children, and for children starting school late. Recognizing the effect on disadvantaged children, the state decided to provide compensation to help children from poor families to attend kindergarten. This meant foregoing the fees for children from families on social welfare, or just a symbolic fee of about 7 Sk (€0.20) for the meals in kindergartens compared to 33 Sk (€1) for the others. The monthly fee for kindergarten is minimum 50 Sk (€1.5) and maximum 7.5% of the minimum cost of living, which changes every year.

3   Interview with the mayor of Smižany, ISSA 8th Annual Conference and Council Meeting, Bratislava 2006.

4   Information from the local office, Rudňany, 2005.

5   Census 2001.

6   The preschool activities were initiated by the Wide Open School Foundation in 1999.

7   Census 2001.

8   The project was in accordance with government (state) tendencies, including the Romani community integration program, which included activities to improve the education of Romani children. See: *Koncepcia integrovaného vzdelávania rómskych detí a mládeže, vrátane stredoškolského a vysokoškolského vzdelávania* (Concept of Integrated Education of Roma Children and Youth Including Secondary and Higher Education Development) and *Základné tézy koncepcie politiky vlády SR v integrácii rómskych komunít, Koncepcia výchovy a vzdelávania rómskych detí a žiakov* (Basic Thesis of the Slovak Republic Government Policy Concept about the Integration of Roma Communities). Both are available at: **www.vlada.gov.sk/orgovanova**.

9   Education for social justice and anti-bias education are used interchangedly, but are one and the same.

10   Comment of external observer, Eva Wagnerová.

11   All data was gathered in the ongoing external evaluation, which was an integral component of all REI projects. The Slovak external evaluation, *REI Annual Research and Evaluation Report – Slovakia,* NSD, 2005, can be found on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

12   See: *REI Annual Research and Evaluation Report – Slovakia,* NSD, 2005 available at: **http:www//osi.hu/esp/rei**.

13   *Ibid.*

14   *Ibid.*

3.3 Policy and Systemic Change

In summary, the studies give rise to a number of implications for policy and systemic change.

- Including Romani families in education facilitates access for students at all levels of education. Therefore, policy regarding access to education needs to consider the strong link between families and issues of educational access.
- Policy, systems, and/or programs are needed to assist Romani families understand the educational options available and the implications of making certain educational placement choices for their children.
- Policy, systems, and/or programs to assist Romani families in obtaining the necessary documentation to enrol their children in preschool or primary school are required. This may require work at the grassroots level within communities, such as home visits to facilitate documentation.
- Policy, systems, and/or programs to support Romani students in taking entrance exams for higher education are needed.

As with all educational programs to support school success for Romani students, these programs should be based on the principles of democratic school outlined in Chapter 2 and illustrated by a number of studies in this publication.[1] While standardization of policy and practice may, at times, be desirable, policy, systems and/or programs dealing with issues of access to education need to be flexible enough to accommodate the specific needs of communities and individuals. This also points to the importance of a community-based focus regarding policy, systems, and/or programs dealing with issues of access.

NOTES

[1] These include child-centered, activity-based learning, culturally appropriate materials, respectful attitudes within the classroom, meaningful and respectful parental involvement, and appropriate assessment.

CHAPTER 4
SUPPORTING EDUCATIONAL ACHIEVEMENT

4.1 Introduction

Instruction plays an essential role in the school success of Romani children. The documentation studies included in this chapter illustrate the stories of educators and program managers in their quest to create a climate in which Romani students can be successful. These include moving from a teacher-directed to a child-centered, activity-based paradigm. Classroom practices such as hands-on activities, critical thinking, problem solving, and respectful discussion can help build students' self-esteem and foster lifelong learning. The importance of professional development is clearly illustrated by some studies, while others take a different focus, such as the use of Roma teacher assistants.

In addition, instruction which supports student success is linked to students' own experiences. Supportive instruction also goes hand-in-hand with developmentally appropriate and culturally inclusive assessment. Assessment which focuses on the measuring of each student's specific achievements assists educators to provide individually appropriate instruction. Finally, an understanding of the "culture" of marginalization and poverty and how this impacts students' achievement is critical to the success of Romani students. Quite simply, the pedagogy and conditions that foster school success for marginalized students are those that foster success in all students.

Training is required to achieve pedagogical change. In order to achieve the desired results, educator professional development should be sustained and ongoing and should include a variety of supports such as mentoring. This is demonstrated by the Hungarian study included in this chapter. While professional development through providing in-service training teachers is highlighted, it should be remembered that these approaches need to appear in the training of pre-service teachers as well, thus making pedagogical changes sustainable over time.

4.2 Documentation Studies

- *Mateja Režek,* "Roma Teacher Assistants as a Key Condition for Successful Integration of Romani Children into Mainstream Education" (Slovenia);
- *Emil Buzov,* "The Summer Program: Enhancing Learning and Combatting School Leaving" (Bulgaria);
- *Suzana Nedevska,* "The Role of Out-of-School Support in Achieving Formal Educational Success" (Macedonia);
- *Margó Komaság,* "Child-Centered Education as a Tool for Integration" (Hungary);
- *Lidija Cvikić,* "Professional Development for Teachers of Children whose Mother-Tongue Language is Romani Language – an Example from Croatia" (Croatia).

4.2.1 Roma Teacher Assistants as a Key Condition for Successful Integration of Romani Children into Mainstream Education

By: Mateja Režek, MA, staff member, Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives at the Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana, Slovenia

- **Participants:** children aged three to nine years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, school management/governance, capacity building, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step, participating schools.

CONTEXT

From September 2002 until August 2005, the Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives Step by Step implemented a large-scale project under the name Integration of Roma Children in Mainstream Education.[1] The main goal of the project was to create a model of successful integration of Romani children into mainstream education. This model could later be used in other Slovenian primary schools where Romani children attend. The project took place in three preschools and primary schools in the Dolenjska region. As the project was holistically designed, it engaged the local community, and provided an opportunity for collaboration on a national level. At the preschool level, the project participants were three to six year olds, and in primary school the focus was on the first two grades and on retaining students in school.

In 2002, at the beginning of the project period, Slovenian governmental policy favoured inclusive education of minority groups, but, in practice, the norm was to segregate Romani children into separate preschool and primary school classrooms. Schools were given very little or no professional support from outside institutions that dealt with education. Likewise, teachers and professionals did not receive training in appropriate methodologies for the inclusion of Romani children. Curriculum standards for Roma were adapted and were of a much lower standard than the mainstream curriculum; the standards were equivalent to special education standards approved by the Ministry of Education (MOE). Special educational materials were produced for the education of Romani children that were supposed to be culturally relevant, though no Romani children or communities were represented in these materials.

For the most part, preschools and primary schools claimed that the education of Romani children was more successful if it took place in segregated classrooms. The rationale for segregation was the lack of knowledge among Romani children (Slovene language, academic skills, social skills, etc.) before entering the primary schools. They claimed that Romani children could not succeed in regular classrooms, so they should be placed in segregated classrooms to overcome the gap of knowledge and skills. In later years, they would be integrated successfully into regular classrooms. However, in reality, the majority of Romani children left primary school after three or four years of schooling. On the average, one or two children per year or even every second year finished Grade 8.[2]

This study focused on the Roma teacher assistant as one of the key conditions for successful integration. In particular, the study drew on the experience of a Roma teacher assistant named Jelka, and her work in one primary school in Semi , where Romani children from the Sovinek settlement attended school. At the beginning of the project, approximately 55 people lived in the Romani settlement; a precise number was difficult to determine because people constantly moved. The inhabitants of Sovinek were extremely impoverished, living mostly from collecting and selling mushrooms, herbs and old metal. The settlement had no electricity or running water.[3] There were some fountains, and occasionally firemen brought water in a tank. There were only three concrete houses, while the rest lived in camping trailers and wooden cottages. Garbage removal represented a major problem for the settlement, since the local government stopped financing it. Alcohol, drugs and weapons were also present in the settlement and generally the Roma from that community were unpopular amongst other Roma from the town and area. For this reason, there was considerable intermarriage.

The majority of adults from Sovinek were illiterate. There were approximately 28 children (aged from 1 to 15 years), of which 3 were attending preschool (5 year olds), 11 attended primary school, and 4 were attending the "special" school for the mentally disabled. The rest of the children stayed at home. The majority of children who entered preschool or primary school spoke the Romani language as their mother tongue, and were familiar with only a couple of Slovenian phrases.

Prior to this project, there were some attempts to improve access and integration of Roma into the educational system, though with little success. For example, preschool staff tried to organize periodic afternoon activities for preschool-aged children and their parents in the school, though there was no response. The activities were financed by the local government, but the preschool received no professional help. The primary school also had a "preparation class" for those children enroled in primary school without having attended any preschool. In the 2001–2002 school year, six children, aged seven to ten years, were included in the preparation class. The purpose of this class was to supplement language knowledge and social skills. The children in this class had separate lectures, but were socializing with other children during other activities, such as sports day, cultural day, etc. In higher grades, Roma were included in regular classes, but they worked according to an adjusted curriculum with lower learning goals. In these "inclusive" classes, Romani children were separated during math and Slovenian language lessons. These lessons sometimes took place in the same classroom, with an extra teacher, although they were mostly separated from the rest of the class.

The Romani children generally attended class until Grade 5, after which they stopped coming to school. In the 2001–2002 school year, there was only one exception – a Romani girl stopped in Grade 7. School attendance also differed from one season to another: in winter children attended school more regularly than in the warmer part of the year, when families gathered mushrooms, herbs, etc.

The general impression at the beginning of the project was that the school wanted to receive help. They recognized that the education of an increasing amount of Romani children would need to be improved as it would contribute to the long-term stability of the whole local community. School staff realized that segregated classes were not a solution for the problem, but they did not know how to deal with inclusion. At first, school administration and teachers were enthusiastic about the idea of working with a Roma teacher assistant. They believed the Roma teacher assistant would help them overcome language barriers and encourage parents to send their children to school more regularly. However, they were also sceptical as to how a Roma teacher assistant would turn out in practice, since there was a lot of rivalry among Roma in the settlement. According to them, it would be best if the Roma teacher assistant was not Roma.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To present the model of the Roma teacher assistant to children and parents of the majority population; to help Romani preschool and primary students overcome language and cultural barriers; to encourage Romani parents to send their children to school more regularly.

The process of appointing the Roma teacher assistant, Jelka, started in July 2003, so that she could be employed from 1 September 2003.

Informal background
The principal and the project leader decided to invite Jelka for the job of Roma teacher assistant because they knew her well and she fulfiled all the conditions: she showed interest, was Roma, finished primary school, spoke the Romani language and was literate. At the time she was unemployed and a single mother with four children. She had earlier approached the school looking for a job as a social worker, so the school knew that she was interested in working there. Jelka came from a village where both Roma and Slovenians lived. Some of the teachers from the primary school classes knew her as a parent, which was a good basis for their further cooperation.

Preparation of parents

The Slovenian and Romani parents were not really prepared for Jelka's arrival in the classroom. The school administration did not explain to the parents of the majority population that some Romani children would be included in the classroom in the coming school year and that a Roma teacher assistant would be working with the whole class. This was an intentional decision based on their previous bad experience concerning excessive explanations of Romani inclusion. Two years previously, when the school was implementing Step by Step methodology, they had informed parents that Roma children would be included in the classroom before the beginning of the school year. Parents then started to take their children out of the class.

The principal decided to downplay the differences, and avoided stressing that Romani children and a Roma teacher assistant would be introduced. At the same time, the school administration, together with preschool and primary school teachers, presented Jelka as extremely appropriate since Jelka was relatively well accepted by the parents (both Roma and Slovenian).

Jelka's contribution to classroom and work schedule

In the morning, Jelka waited for the children in front of the preschool or primary school. She accompanied the children into the washroom, helped them to get tidy, and then accompanied them into preschool or primary class. During lessons, she worked as an additional teacher helping according to the teacher's instructions. She worked with children in learning centers, prepared materials, and offered individual help to all children – not only Roma. She also led supplementary lessons for Romani children for an hour or more in the school to finish their homework before the van picked them up. She added elements of Romani culture to the classroom by writing in the Romani language, translating stories and songs into the Romani language and explaining Romani customs and habits.

The importance of her role was described in the external evaluation of the project,[4] which included:
- communicating with the Romani speaking children and parents;
- encouraging the use of the Romani language for Romani children in preschool and primary school;
- preserving the knowledge of the Romani language and encouraging the use of the Romani language among non-Romani children;
- helping people get acquainted with Romani history and culture;
- helping teachers understand special patterns of behavior originating from Romani culture and traditions.

Jelka worked five days a week, six hours per day in classrooms. In the first year of the project, her work was divided among three preschool classes, which included all Romani children in the school. Her presence in the classrooms was calculated according to the number of Romani children in each classroom. In the second year, to ease the transition to Grade 1, Jelka accompanied the same children from preschool into the primary school. The Romani children attended two classes in the primary school. Jelka's presence was divided between these two classes, and for one hour before going home she helped children with their homework and studies.

Jelka's work took place within the schools. She collaborated with other teachers at regular weekly lesson planning, where they mostly focused on her knowledge and experience to improve lessons and the classroom environment. She met parents only when they came to school, since visits to the Romani settlement were considered too dangerous, due to the level of violence present.

Professional development

In the context of the overall project, Integration of Romani Children into Mainstream Education, Jelka attended some training sessions that were offered for all preschool and primary school teachers on topics such as: Education for Social Justice (a three-day anti-bias training for adults), and School Improvement (three days). She also took part in regular monthly meetings with project leaders.

The framework for employment

Since the Roma teacher assistant was not an officially recognized post, finding the appropriate framework for employing Jelka proved challenging. In the first year, the principal made a legal decision which required both courage and inventiveness. Jelka's salary was split between the Ministry of Education and Sports (1/4), the local government of Semič (1/4) and the primary school's reserves (1/2). The Ministry offered its help only after the local government assured to pay for part of the expenses. The local government agreed to cover part of Jelka's salary after the principal presented her work as extremely necessary considering the large number of Romani children enroled in school.

Although Jelka was doing the work of a teacher assistant, she was officially employed part-time as a cleaner and for "taking care of the Romani children". Later, the school employed Jelka in the context of "public works" for two years. However, after two years, she was no longer allowed to be employed in this framework, as it did not cover permanent employment.

In 2006, the school principal therefore tried to find another solution which would enable Jelka's continued employment. She found it in a new call for registration of a national public works program based on a partnership of three regional employment office units. The project application required that she identify two other primary schools in the regions of different employment office units with whom she could collaborate in requesting support for Roma teacher assistants. In this way, they registered the Roma teacher assistant as part of a project of national interest, which provided for an extension of their employment for another two years.[5]

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Jelka has been employed as a Roma teacher assistant since 2003. Her cooperation with the school administration, preschool and primary school teachers, as well as with Romani and other parents has been described as extremely successful and exemplary. Romani as well as non-Romani children were aware of her role and had a positive attitude towards her presence.[6]

Jelka's presence contributed to the introduction of bilingual writing and elements of multiculturalism. Lessons and assistance were no longer provided exclusively in the Slovenian language, and one could find pictures, signs and inscriptions in Romani in the classrooms. Teachers gained a better understanding of Romani culture, customs and traditions, and there was more interaction among Romani and non-Romani children during play time (See Appendix on page 48).

We have a Romani teacher. She helps Romani children and other children as well.

I am very happy when she is with me. She helps me a lot.

I liked her from the beginning. Even though she is Roma I was never afraid of her, because she is very nice. She helps all children who need help.

Quotes from the children

Before the start of the project, Romani children were separated during certain subjects, such as mathematics and language, but integrated for other subjects such as physical education and art. Now the Romani children are fully included and have the same learning standards as other children.

Attitudes toward the role of Roma teacher assistants improved greatly during the project. In the beginning, about 30% of the teachers in the preschool and primary schools were sceptical about the role of the Roma teacher assistant in the classroom. In particular, they were concerned with the planning of everyday activities and the assessment of Romani children's progress. In part, their skepticism or low expectations could be attributed to the fact that the Roma teacher assistants had only completed primary school (or in other cases six grades or less). The second factor could also be that teachers were not used to teamwork in the classroom. However, in June 2004, after two years of experience, 80 to 85% of teachers agreed that Roma teacher assistants make an important contribution in the classroom.[7]

The introduction of a Roma teacher assistant substantially influenced the quality of inclusion and instruction among Romani children. Jelka added multicultural elements in all levels and areas of the educational process (language, classroom environment, introduction of customs and habits, culture, etc.).

One important factor in the positive impact was the school's persistence for introducing the Roma teacher assistant, especially the principal and some teachers. The fact that Jelka was from a nearby village, and that the teachers and administration already knew and liked her, meant that some form of mutual trust already existed. Although the educational system's conditions for the employment of the Roma teacher assistant did not really exist, the principal put in extra efforts to identify a way to employ Jelka, and later others. There is still a need to introduce an official solution to provide Roma teacher assistants with permanent employment as full time school staff.

In starting her new job, teachers were helpful to Jelka and guided her, while at the same time giving her enough space to contribute her own knowledge and information. Together they visited educational trainings, which helped increase knowledge and build a stronger bond between them. The project concluded that Roma teacher assistants should have, as a minimum, completed primary school and should attend different professional development trainings (such as Step by Step, anti-bias, etc.). As with other teachers, this could help to overcome certain biases and make their work more effective.

The principal believed that the continuous professional training of Roma teacher assistants was necessary, not only in the form of thematic seminars that lasted a couple of days, but also in the form of ongoing mentoring. In this regard, mentoring on professional issues could be performed through regular meetings among both experienced Roma teacher assistants and new ones. The mentor could attend lectures by the new Roma teacher assistant and provide follow-up guidance. This would help new assistants to gain certain knowledge about the pedagogical process, which is important for the teaching process, but not obtained in regular training.

One area needing improvement was Jelka's cooperation with the Romani community, since her work dealt only with the children and parents in the context of the preschool and primary school. In working more closely with parents from the community, it is hoped that there could be greater influence on parents to send their children to school on a more regular basis. Two factors to consider were identified as important when introducing Roma teacher assistants: a) to be a member of the Romani community or at least to have a good knowledge about and contacts with the community, and b) to have a more active role in cooperating with parents, such as visits to the Romani community with the intention of informing the parents about the importance of education, organizing and executing workshops, discussions and teacher-parent and children meetings.

In conclusion, it may be stressed that the introduction of the Roma teacher assistant meant Romani children were given the possibility to learn on an equal basis alongside their non-Romani school mates. The start of the child's education in the classroom was one where he or she could understand what was being discussed and hear familiar words and terms, rather than being in an entirely "foreign" atmosphere. The school became a more welcoming institution, and with this the chances for a successful educational experience also became greater.

Author: Over the last eight years, Mateja Režek has been involved in the fields of preschool and primary teacher training, learning/teaching of social concepts, and professional development of preschool and primary school teachers.

Roma teacher assistant's contribution to bilingualism and multiculturalism in the classroom

APPENDIX	Beginning of the project	End of school year
Language	• Classes were held exclusively in Slovenian.	• Classes were held in both Slovenian and Romani.
	• There was no effort devoted to translate the content of discussions, to read texts or to give instructions into their mother tongue.	• There was a Roma teacher assistant translating. There was a Romani coordinator in the class who took care that all instructions and texts were understood by all children. Teachers who did not have a Roma teacher assistant ensured understanding amongst all children, for instance by having older students translate. The Roma teacher assistant collaborated in forming the class plan and helping the teacher to understand the Romani children's way of life, parents' expectations and reasons for poorer attendance of children in school.
	• Children were taught to write and read in Slovenian, which meant that they were definitely not able to understand the meaning of Romani letters.	• Children were preparing for learning to write and read in the Romani language.
	• Not a single word or sign displayed in class was in Romani.	• Most of the words and signs displayed in class were in both languages (Slovenian and Romani).
	• All books and notebooks were only in Slovenian.	• Children and teachers regularly produced books in Slovenian and Romani. Roma teacher assistants and parents helped with translations.
	• There were not many signs or written words displayed in the classroom.	• There were lots of inscriptions and other written words in the classroom.
	• There were no posters in both languages.	• Some of the posters were bilingual.
	• There were no Slovenian–Romani dictionaries.	• Slovenian–Romani dictionaries were starting to appear.
Multicultural environment	• Only elements and symbols of the dominant culture appeared in the classroom.	• There were photographs of other cultures, including Romani culture, hanging on the wall. They had cassette tapes with Romani music.
	• Themes presented in class were experientially closer to children of the majority population.	• Themes with which Romani children could identify were also included. Presentations of Romani dances performed by children were organized.
	• Most preschool and school teachers had never visited a Romani settlement.	• Most of the preschool and school teachers had visited their students in the settlement.
	• Romani children played by themselves.	• More and more often Romani and non-Romani children were playing together.

Source: Nečak Luk, A.; Brejc, M.; Vonta, T. (2004) *Integration of Roma children into Mainstream Education in Slovenia, Annual Research and Evaluation Report,* Ljubljana, p. 18.

NOTES

1   This was the name of the Roma Education Initiative project in Slovenia.
2   EUMAP (2001). *Minority Protection in Slovenia,* Open Society Institute, Budapest, available at: **http://www.eumap.org/reports/2001/minority/sections/slovenia/minority_slovenia.pdf**.
3   The mayor wanted to hook the settlement up to electricity, but had problems related to the ownership of the land on which the electrical installation had to be built.
4   All REI projects included a mandatory ongoing external evaluation. The Slovenian external evaluation, Nečak Luk, A.; Brejc, M.; Vonta, T. (2004). *Integration of Roma Children into Mainstream Education in Slovenia, Annual Research and Evaluation Report,* Ljubljana, can be viewed on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.
5   The national public works program states that a job can be reported as a national project or interest, if the need for this job occurs in three regional units of the Employment Office.
6   Nečak Luk, A.; Brejc, M.; Vonta, T. (2004). *Integration of Roma children into Mainstream Education in Slovenia, Annual Research and Evaluation Report,* Ljubljana, p. 16, can be viewed on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.
7   *Ibid.*

4.2.2 The Summer Program:
Enhancing Learning and Combatting School Leaving

By: Emil Buzov, Executive Director, Step by Step Program Foundation, Bulgaria

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 7 to 14 years;
- **Supports:** educational achievement, social relations, family-community involvement, capacity building;
- **Partners:** participating REI schools in Lom, Roma Lom Foundation, and Bulgarian Step by Step Foundation.

CONTEXT

From 2002 to 2005, the Roma Education Initiative project (REI) was implemented in three settlements in Bulgaria, namely Blagoevgrad, Lom and Glojene. The towns varied in terms of population, types of ethnic groups and structure of educational institutions. Around 95% of the Roma in these towns lived in isolated Romani neighbourhoods, with unemployment rates estimated at 90% and an increasing rate of illiteracy among the young Romani population.[1] The towns had mixed kindergartens, primary schools, several general, specialized and vocational high schools, and a university or a university branch. In addition, each town had established a well running contact between the local Roma Center or NGO and the municipal administration and educational institutions.

photo by Emil Buzov

Mayor poses with children participating in the Summer Program, Glojene.

The direct participant groups of the project were students from Grades 1 to 8, the teaching staff and the parents. The indirect participant groups were the local communities and the school boards of trustees. The elementary schools (Grades 1 to 8) where the program was implemented were the Hristo Botev XI School in Blagoevgrad, Hristo Botev VI School in Lom, and Hristo Botev School in Glojene. The project was developed by the Open Society Foundation-Sofia, with the aim of promoting equal opportunities for Romani children and youth in the entire educational process and increasing their access to high quality education. The project goals focused on retaining children in school while providing quality education and adequate preparation for their social realization.[2]

According to research carried out in 2001, school leaving among Roma was a nation-wide phenomenon in Bulgaria, resulting from interrelated economic, social and educational factors.[3] The research also points to the critical stages in the educational process, for which school leaving rates among Romani pupils were highest.

The first critical stage was the transition from preschool to primary school education. In Bulgaria, kindergarten attendance was not compulsory and parents had to pay admission fees of about €20 to €50 per month,[4] which was often unaffordable for socially vulnerable Romani families. The lack of preschool preparation and proficiency in the Bulgarian language were additional reasons as to why Romani children often did not attend preschool. It was estimated that some 8 to 10% of Roma in Bulgaria spoke Romani as their mother tongue.[5] Some localities had introduced Roma teacher assistants and preparatory classes to work with these disadvantaged children, but this depended on whether a local NGO, and ultimately the municipality, had sufficient funds to pay for the human and material resources needed for the preparatory courses for assistants, and to pay for their salaries. These basic reasons contributed to the exclusion of Romani children in Grade 1 and their early school leaving.

The second critical point in formal education was the passage from early to upper primary education, between Grade 4 and 5. The reasons for this were manifold, and included an inability to cope with the material required to complete Grade 4, financial limitations, early marriages among Romani girls and a lack of family and community support to educate the children.

The next transitional educational stage with a high rate of school leaving occurred after the completion of basic education, or Grade 8. The students had to sit for entrance exams in order to continue their education in general, specialized or vocational high schools. The curriculum content was difficult and students usually required additional preparation and help from their parents or private instructors. For Romani students, this was particularly challenging, since their parents were often both poor and had low levels of education. Schools did not offer afternoon classes or other

Opening the Summer Program in Lom.

possibilities for assistance, and support for education was practically impossible among socially vulnerable Romani families. In short, Romani parents could not help their children with money or with knowledge.

The Roma Education Initiative project in Bulgaria employed a new, integrated approach, targeting the entire educational pipeline as a whole, while engaging a wide range of participants, such as teachers, school directors, parents, and students. The approach involved comprehensive partnership activities to improve the quality of education through community development and School Improvement. Among the activities were thirty-two teacher-training workshops, conducted over a period of two years, which included the introduction of child-centered teaching methodologies, second language approaches, Education for Social Justice, and Romani culture and history. For most of the participants, this was the first training they had participated in since finishing higher education, and they showed great enthusiasm. In addition to the teacher training, the project also introduced a Summer School Program, which is further elaborated below.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goals:
- prevent at-risk students from leaving school;
- allow students to catch up with their studies;
- help children further develop some basic life skills by forming interest groups (e.g. handicrafts, carpentry, music and dance, sports, mathematics, sciences, arts).

Nuts and bolts

The Summer Program was organized for Romani and non-Romani children from Grades 1 to 8. Some of the teachers who were trained as part of the Roma Education Initiative project also participated in the Summer School, and were chosen by the pedagogical council of the school. These teachers designed and prepared the materials and worked with students in different activities and in pursuing their interests throughout the program, while at the same time taking care of their prospective students for the upcoming academic year.

The Summer Program took place in three separate locations, in Lom, Glojene and Blagoevgrad in the three schools mentioned on the first page of this study. A total of 513 children, 20 teachers and 3 Roma teacher assistants participated. The activities were carried out in

Number of the participants in the Summer Program		Roma assistants	Teachers	Romani children	Non-Romani children	TOTAL CHILDREN
Grades	1-4	3	9	223	114	337
	5-8	0	11	135	41	176
	Total	3	20	358	155	513

the classrooms, sports halls, and outdoor areas surrounding the schools. The Summer Program was organized for two weeks in June, after the end of the school year for each of the years the REI project was implemented: June 2004 and 2005. The activities started at nine o'clock in the morning and finished at one o'clock in the afternoon.

The Summer Program was open to all interested students, although it targeted those with particular educational needs. The program allowed the schools to purchase new materials and equipment that were not usually part of their regular curricula. These included didactic games, sports equipment, story books, scientific literature, and materials for practical work in groups.

The new didactic games gave students a different perception of education and learning, while developing their logic skills to manage difficult tasks. Story books with fantastic characters and heroes captured the children's attention and opened their eyes to new worlds. They prepared essays on their favourite stories to improve their writing skills and their ability to retell stories in their own words.

The children could also learn together in various interest groups throughout the two-week period. For example, in the group for dance and music, the children had the option of learning about musical instruments, great musicians, techniques of singing national, classic and pop music, and various dance steps. Students interested in sciences had the opportunity to participate in scientific experiments in chemistry, biology, and physics. The handicraft and carpentry was especially interesting for the boys, but there were also girls that wanted to know more about the tools and how they worked. In the mathematics group, higher achieving students were encouraged to help their peers to overcome difficulties in solving various equations.

At the end of the Summer Program, the students prepared exhibitions of their paintings and products made in the handicraft and carpentry groups. The science group prepared experiments to show their parents, teachers and peers about the power and secrets of nature. The sports group organized football matches with their parents, and in the closing ceremony, a concert and a play were performed by the kids that took part in the groups for music, dance, and drama. The Step by Step Program Foundation also prepared special T-shirts and caps for the closing ceremony.

Engaging parents, Roma NGOs and authorities

It is important to note that both the children and parent groups were ethnically mixed, including both Romani and non-Romani participants. The Summer Program engaged parents in aspects of the activities, such as setting up the stage for performances and presenting their professional experiences. Parents were also invited to the schools for individual and group meetings to discuss their children's educational developments.

All the activities in the Summer Program were assisted and supported by local Roma NGOs and representatives of the Romani community, who participated in various interest group activities to assist the process. For example, the Roma-Lom Foundation made a financial contribution to the Summer Program, and its staff was included in the jury to nominate awards in the closing ceremonies.

photo by Emil Buzov

Children intent on learning, Glojene.

Representatives of the local authorities and regional education inspectorates were invited to visit the Summer Program and to attend the closing ceremonies, and they recognized the positive changes in the schools and in the attitudes of the teachers, parents and students.

Perfecting implementation challenges

The practice of monthly monitoring and mentoring support visits by external pedagogical experts with practicing teachers in REI schools during the implementation of the overall REI project proved to be an important component of the whole model. These pedagogical experts supported the efforts of the teachers and directors in achieving an optimal form of pedagogy.

During their work, especially in the first year, external evaluators of the program mentioned that teachers needed to pay more attention to the following:

* allocating sufficient time for questions;
* ensuring tasks were appropriate for the skill-level of the students;
* using play time more efficiently to stimulate interest in studying and for modelling behavioural skills, and
* giving students the opportunity to deliberate, ask questions and discover answers rather than providing comments and examples, or giving the answers.

Providing this feedback during the professional development of teachers in the Summer Program allowed teachers time to reflect on the suggestions, and in the end, they were quite surprised with their new insight, and agreed to make adjustments in the future.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Altogether, the Summer Program engaged 513 children from Grades 1 to 8 of whom 358 were Roma. According to data collected as part of a final evaluation,[6] participation in the Summer Program led to positive changes in the attitudes of the Romani and non-Romani students, while supporting their future educational development. A total of 20 teachers and 3 Roma teacher assistants were involved in the various activities, along with another 15 representatives of the Romani communities from the localities. Furthermore, 12 members of the schools' boards of trustees, who had received training as part of the REI on how to promote community interests, support their schools and create an appropriate environment for multi-ethnic students, also took part in the Summer Program. Many of the members of the boards of trustees were parents. They actively participated in the activities where their help was needed for implementation of the program.

For the first time I had the opportunity to work with a computer!

I'm so proud that I was the captain of the football team!

My picture was exhibited in the final conference of the project!

Quotations from students

The educational and fun activities of the Summer Program increased children's interest in school, thus contributing to an overall decrease in the number of students leaving school. As documented in the REI Bulgarian external evaluation, data demonstrated a decrease in school leaving over the course of the REI project, and the evaluation concluded that "interesting educational work and the equal opportunities for all students to participate in the educational process lead to a decrease in unmotivated absences".[7]

The Romani children from the primary school achieved better results as evidenced by achievement of mainstream curriculum standards. As documented in the *REI Final Report*, data suggested that, overall, although Romani students did not perform as well on curriculum-based language tests as did their majority-population peers, these differences were not universal and there were areas in mathematics where Romani children out-performed their peers. Overall, differences in mathematical achievement were less marked, though as the age/grade level increased, so did differences in achievement, pointing to the importance of early intervention and good pedagogy in the early years.[8]

The Summer Program also helped contribute to students having greater emotional security and self-esteem as was evidenced in the exit interviews of the external evaluation. In this way, they were better prepared to enter and complete

the next stage of education. Improved rates of school attendance and a decreased rate of Roma leaving school, especially in Grades 4 and 8, were evidence of the efficacy of the Summer Program in contributing to increased school attendance and ultimately, to integration into mainstream education.

The program also led to a more genuine interaction between and amongst adults and children of different ethnic groups. The Romani and Bulgarian children had fun together and shared their academic knowledge. The atmosphere was friendly and tolerant and the children formed good relationships. In fact, there were even cases where children who were involved in conflicts during the school year later started to understand each other and finally became friends through the Summer Program.

REFLECTION

The Summer School Program addressed children's needs by providing them with new, alternative ways to learn school material and discover their additional interests. Through play, the children enriched their knowledge in different areas, improved their reading skills, developed their attention span and mathematical skills, and increased their logical thinking. In the closing ceremony and related activities, the children took great pride and pleasure in showing their skills, talents and knowledge. The school was seen from a different point of view – not only as a place for studying, but also as a place where they could enjoy themselves and have fun.

The program also played an important role in encouraging Romani children to move on to higher levels of education by them with academic difficulties so that they could reach the level of knowledge of their peers. In doing so, they could feel comfortable in the classrooms and more confident to continue their studies.

The training for teachers and parents on overcoming biases, through Education for Social Justice Training, which was part of the academic year activity of the project, prompted the adults to see another point of view in their relationships with the children. By bringing together Romani and non-Romani parents and students in a positive, fun learning environment, the Summer Program also contributed to breaking down stereotypes and improving inter-ethnic relations.

The interest groups motivated students to participate in the program, and they were created to be more flexible than the regular school programs, while providing individually orientated tasks and attention to every student. All of the groups benefited from the necessary didactic materials for organizing quality educational processes and stimulating academic achievements.

As all the directors and teachers said: "The children and the teachers would like the Summer Program to become a tradition, to be conducted every year, and even during the whole summer".

Author: During the last 15 years, Emil Buzov has been very active in the education NGO sector with regards to creating school networks, developing teacher training systems including modules such as Education for Social Justice, Parent Involvement, and Classroom Management. He is the author of many monographs and articles and is a member of the International Step by Step Association (ISSA).

I felt very secure because most of my friends and classmates were with me during the program!

The school became a place as secure as my home, because my father was there very often!

Quotations from students

> **Daily program in Hristo Botev VI School in Lom**
>
> Activity centers – Bulgarian language, mathematics, history, geography, sports, fine arts, music, drama, and computers. All these activities were organized every day from 9:00 to 13:00.
>
> 9:00 – 10:00 – Introducing the theme of the day
> 10:30 – 12:30 – Practical exercises
> 12:30 – 13:00 – Questions, results and conclusions of the work during the day
>
> The children had the opportunity to participate every day in different centers and to choose the themes that appealed to them. At the end of the Summer Program all the activities finished with final events. For example:
> - final football match with participation of the parents, other students and visitors;
> - final exhibition with drawings;
> - final performance with participation of students from Grades 1 to 8.

NOTES

1   Denkov, D. (2001). "The Roma Schools in Bulgaria", Open Society Institute – Sofia, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/romaschools.bg.osf/en/index.html**.

2   In particular, the program goals were: 1) improving the desegregation policy at the municipal level, which involved the integration of Romani children in mixed schools; 2) supporting the process of integration by attracting, including and successfully retaining Romani children in school, hence increasing their chances of advancing to higher educational levels; 3) involving children who had left school and those outside the educational system through employing strategies such as community-based programs and improving the receiving schools where the children were integrated; 4) supporting Romani children to continue their education by increasing the number of Romani children enroled in mixed schools and improving their school performance.

3   Denkov, D. (2001). "The Roma Schools in Bulgaria", Open Society Institute – Sofia, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/romaschools.bg.osf/en/index.html**.

4   Rates vary from town to town, and are also dependent on the number of children in school, per family.

5   Denkov, D. (2001). "The Roma Schools in Bulgaria", Open Society Institute – Sofia, available at: h**ttp://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/romaschools.bg.osf/en/index.html**.

6   All REI projects were required to have ongoing external evaluation. The REI Bulgaria external evaluation can be found on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

7   Bulgarian REI evaluation, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

8   Proactive Information Services (2006). *REI Final Report*, Education Support Program, Budapest, available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

4.2.3 The Role of Out-of-School Support
in Achieving Formal Educational Success

By: Suzana Nedevska, pedagogue, NGO Center Romano Pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead), Prilep, Macedonia

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 5 to 18 years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, social relationships, family-community involvement;
- **Partners:** Romano Pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead) of the Aid for Handicapped and Poor, Roma-led NGO in Prilep, Dobre Jovanoski Primary School.

CONTEXT

Prilep is a city in the central part of the southern region of the Republic of Macedonia. Of the 76,878 citizens in Prilep, approximately 70,878 are Macedonian or of other nationalities. Approximately 4,433 or 16% are Roma, which constitute the largest ethnic group in Prilep. The majority of of Prilep's Roma live in the neighbourhood called Trizla 2, which is a part of the city, though geographically isolated. This neighbourhood is located in the north-western part of the city, and is one of the poorest neighbourhoods in Prilep. It is densely populated, the streets are narrow and there is little to no infrastructure. The water system is improvised and in some places there is no network for electricity. People live mostly off social welfare, growing tobacco, selling goods in markets, and by day labour. Lack of education is a significant issue that people from this neighbourhood face, and it is the biggest reason for the high unemployment rate. According to data from the city Employment Bureau, 1,910 Roma are unemployed, of whom 1,127 have not completed primary education; only 9 have finished high school, and 2 have some higher education.

The Romani students from Trizla 2 attend the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School which is located in the neighbourhood. Different members of Aid for Handicapped and Poor (AHP), a Roma-led NGO in Prilep, opened an educational center located just 200 meters from the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School. In October 2002 the Center for Educational Support, Romano pro Angle (Roma Step Ahead) was opened to meet the needs of Romani children and students from the neighbourhood, with a primary focus on education. Ultimately, the Center hopes to assist the Romani community to integrate into mainstream education and also into society at large. The Center focuses on Romani youth from preschool to secondary school age, together with their parents, and currently works with approximately 275 students from 5 to 18 years of age.

The necessity for the Center was sparked by low school continuance by many Romani children in the area. Despite efforts of the local school in taking necessary pedagogical measures and in following the law for including students into compulsory primary education, an increasing number of Romani children do not continue their education. Endemic poverty is certainly one of the largest factors, where families do not have the means to support children to be successful in school.[1] Moreover, many parents are illiterate, and may feel helpless in assisting their children's school success or home study.

According to data taken from the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School 24 out of 644 Romani students in the 2004-2005 school year left school in Grades 1 to 8. This often happened after having reached 15 years of age (the legal age at which they could leave school), or because they were not attending school regularly. In the 2005–2006 academic year, 6 Romani pupils left school after the first semester from a total number of 698 Romani students.

The Dobre Jovanoski Primary School and Center for Educational Support were partners in the Macedonian Roma Education Initiative project from January 2004 to June 2006.

The entrance to the Center.

Nuts and Bolts

Goal: To raise the level of education of Romani children and youth from the local community, Trizla 2, by providing opportunities to succeed with school work and to master school materials and curricula.

The Center organized after school, supplementary courses into primary activities and secondary activities which were implemented for pre-primary, primary and secondary school students in order to achieve the goals of the Center. Primary activities were conducted in cooperation with the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School and according to a teaching plan and the program in the school. Secondary activities (English Language, Computer Studies and Romani Language) were held in the Center, and helped students improve their general knowledge.

The Center had a core staff which consisted of six educators: One for preschool education, one for Grades 1 and 2, one for Grades 3 and 4, and three for Grades 5 to 8 and high school. Secondary activities were implemented by three assistants, one for each course. The educators were well trained, and had degrees in pedagogy.

Courses for beginners as well as for advanced learners were offered in order for Romani students at different levels to have access to learning opportunities and to allow for those who had not completed school to have access as well. One teacher would normally work with several groups of students at once, and each group consisted of between 10 and 13 students. This is not to say that five groups of students were studying simultaneously with the supervision of one teacher. One grade may have met two days a week, whereas the next grade might have met three days a week. Center teachers also worked individually with children when they were in need of extra help.

Teachers from both the Center and the primary school used a variety of methodologies in order to capture students' attention, such as dialogue, monologue, text method, and observation. They utilized group work, individual work, individualized attention, and pair work. Teachers had attended many seminars supported by the Roma Education Initative (REI), such as Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT); Education for Social Justice (anti-bias education); methodology and techniques 1 and 2; Let's open the circle – psychological and emotional development of children; Classroom without violence; and Cooperation with parents.

Cooperation between the Center and the primary school was an important part of the model. Such cooperation was frequent and initiated from both sides through conversations with the teachers, pedagogical and psychological services and the principal of the primary school, depending on the child's needs. Teachers informed the Center's instructors of students' strengths and challenges, which students needed more help, and the subjects to which the Center educators needed to pay greater attention. Cooperation was also promoted through seminars that both school and Center educators attended together, as well as frequent meetings with the school, and with the board of evaluation through the principal of the school.

Primary activities

Pre-primary education: These activities were implemented in the Center itself with the aim to include more Romani children between the ages of five and seven into preschool education in order to be prepared for enrolment into Grade 1. The focus of learning was acquiring elementary knowledge, habits and needs according to a curriculum. The preschool activities in the Center were for half a day and free, and they covered the state curriculum for this age. At this level, there were 40 children, (aged 5 or 6) divided into 3 groups.

Primary Grades 1 to 8: Assistance to primary school age children took place both within the Center and within the primary school. Since a primary aim of the Center was to support students staying in regular, mainstream school, some activities were organized at the primary school in order for children to become more familiar with the school as an institution. The following activities constituted the core of how the Center supported children in this age group:

- Homework support took place at Dobre Jovanoski Primary School after regular classes had finished. It was carried out by educators from the Center for two hours each day of the school week. Each educator had 5 to 6 groups, which consisted of 10 to 14 students each. Homework assistance also took place in the Center for two hours every school day to help students who had serious challenges with achievement in school.
- Individual assistance was provided at the Center for children who had difficulties in mastering the teaching material and who needed more help.

Secondary activities

Secondary activities consisted of several courses that were offered to various age-groups at different times of the week:

- English language: every school day for two hours a day;
- Romani language: four days a week for two hours a day;
- computer science: every school day for four hours a day.

The homework support was offered at the school in order not to distance the students from the school. However, since the school did not have enough space or proper conditions for all activities, some of them were held in the Center.

Tina's Story

This story focuses on a child called Tina,[2] who did not attend preschool and was not prepared academically for Grade 1, a situation that was very common among the Romani minority. The situation described here took place from the beginning of Grade 1 up until the end of Grade 2. It highlighted the importance of out-of-school individual help for certain students in allowing them the support they needed to succeed in mainstream education along with their peers.

In the beginning of the 2004–2005 school year, the student Tina was enroled in the first grade. She did not have much prior knowledge, she did not recognize letters, and she was only able to count from one to ten. She could not find her way and could not communicate with her peers in the new environment of being in school and in the first grade. The process of becoming literate was arduous, although she regularly attended my supplementary classes...

Comment from Tina's teacher

Tina was one of 62 students who attended the Center for Educational Support, Romano pro Angle, in Krizla 2, and who attended the homework assistance groups of the educator Suzana. Tina's background was one of misfortune: her mother had left her and her siblings and remarried, and Tina was left to live with her grandmother.

At the beginning of the 2004–2005 school year, Suzana evaluated the students she would be working with that academic year in her supplementary classes, and she noticed that Tina Dervisoska did not want to attend these classes. Suzana did not try to convince her, because

students attended such activities voluntarily. In the beginning of April 2004, Tina began to voluntarily attend the Center, but still not regularly. It was also clear that she did not want to socialize with other students after classes and to work in a group. She was shy and introverted; she wanted to work individually. At the time, Tina was able to recognize letters, but could not read. In mathematics, she could recognize numbers and was able to do additions, but she could not do subtractions. Suzana began to work individually with her for two hours every day. Tina began to attend classes more regularly and slowly began to read and to do mathematical operations more comfortably.

The teacher Suzana and little Tina in the Center.

At the beginning of the 2005–2006 school year, Suzana entered the Grade 2 classroom which Tina attended in order to take note of the students for the school year. The school teacher was present. Suzana asked who wanted to attend her Center's supplementary classes, and only Tina raised her hand. The school teacher was surprised. Then, other students began to sign up to attend the Center's classes. The school year began with working in groups, but as before, Tina still wanted to work on her own, so Suzana continued to work with her individually for the second year. Suzana, aware of Tina's past, made many efforts to make her feel comfortable. She listened to Tina and allowed her to express herself freely. When Suzana worked with Tina on a theme in school called "My Family", the topic was painful to the child who had lost her family, but the teacher allowed her to open up and to speak freely of her loss. Such attention seemed to have a dramatic impact on Tina's behaviour: she made friends with other children, became happier, and began to work with the group. Her school teacher also noticed the difference in behaviour.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

At the end of the 2005–2006 academic year, Tina was attending classes regularly and still received help from the Center's teacher, Suzana, in many subject areas. Even though Tina was by then able to do her homework alone, she still came to do it at the Center. At the end of Grade 1, on an academic scale in Macedonia that spans from one to five (failure to excellent), Tina scored a two in mathematics, Macedonian language, and nature and society. After the careful attention and work of the Center staff and Suzana, by the end of Grade 2 Tina was scoring threes in these subjects, had proved to be hard-working, and was attending school regularly. There are no issues with her attendance at school now.

According to data collected by the Center,[3] the biggest shift was shown in increased academic achievement among Grade 2 students in the "good" and "very good" categories, meaning that a greater number of children achieved higher academic success in the school year 2005–2006 than in the previous school year. At the same time, the number of children who finished the first semester of Grade 2 in the school year 2005–2006 with only satisfactory success decreased. In general, children's achievement improved in only one year.

Graph 1: Comparison of academic achievements for the (2004-2005 and 2005-2006) academic years of second grade students attending the Center
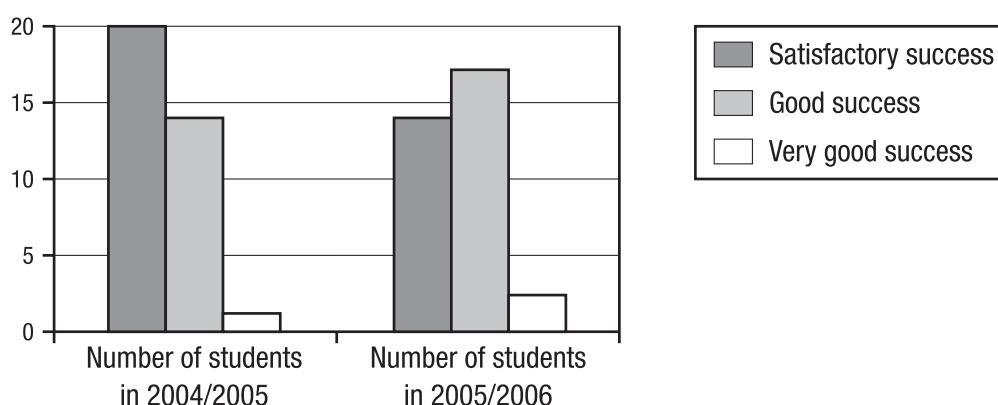
Source: Center for Educational Support Romano Pro Angle.

Findings from an external evaluation that was conducted as part of REI Macedonia, and which was included in a final REI Report, corroborated this. Findings indicated that the number of Romani students enroled in the lower primary grades who attended the Roma Education Center had a decreased rate of school leaving as compared to non-attendees (2.3% as compared to 6.3%). Findings also showed that 91% of students who benefited from the services of the Roma Education Center successfully completed their grade, as compared to 65% of other students. Absenteeism was also higher among non-REC students.[4]

REFLECTION

Tina was not the only child whose life was difficult, and who was confronted with multiple disadvantages. Good pedagogical intervention in the supplementary lessons that students received from the primary school and the Center for Educational Support seemed to have a positive influence on students in preparing them to successfully pass onto higher grades. Children's success, moreover, was not the result of only one person's efforts.

Tina's story also demonstrated how important preschool education was in children's future success in education. It required very specialized pedagogy to work with a child who was not able to hold his pen in his hand, or who could not sit at a desk for long stretches, making academic achievement almost impossible. From the Center's experience, it was important not to expect changes overnight, although an essential first step was to establish a good rapport between the teachers, students and parents. This helped pave the way for improvement, as well as positively influenced parents, who in turn, positively influenced children.

It was important that teachers should engage students to influence their self-confidence, a key factor to success. The Center engaged students by organizing free-time activities (drawing, playing computer games, etc.). Each activity involved playing various games. The Center also organized one-day field-trips once a month in the 2004–2005 academic year, and once every three months in the 2005–2006 academic year. In the future, the Center intends to offer more interesting lessons on computers, for example using programs such as Paint, Microsoft Word, Power Point and the Internet.

photo by Suzana Nedevska

Field trip to the ancient town of Stobi.

One reason why Tina may have started to attend the classes regularly was due to her childish curiosity. She watched the other children that were attending and wanted to find out what the Center had to offer. Another reason for Tina's regular attendance was because of the teacher Suzana's individual approach, and respect for her wishes and needs. Tina was also motivated to learn to read and write so that she could contact her mother through letters. In addition, it is likely that she experienced a sense of protection and nurturing in her interactions with the teacher.

My child attends the Center regularly, and the teachers help him. If he didn't go there, he wouldn't know anything.

Instead of being on the streets, he'd better go in to the Center, where he will learn something.

If you didn't give him books, he wouldn't go to school because we don't have money to buy them.

Comments about the Center made by parents

Note: The parents' statements are taken from the parents' meeting held in the Center each month.

Collaboration between the Center and the school positively influenced and helped in overcoming obstacles and barriers that Roma experienced in education. With the help of the Center, a great number of students had progressed and continued their education into higher grades. The Center thus had a direct influence on the children's academic achievements. One could say the help provided to students attracted them to the Center. Training offered by the Step by Step Foundation in various teaching techniques and methods helped raise the quality of practice at the Center.

Another influencing factor in the children's success was the existence of a "lobby group" attached to the Center, which consisted of five Roma who know the neighbourhood well, and who were well respected. They worked every day on site visiting families, encouraging students who did not attend school regularly to attend and to enrol in courses or preschool.

One weakness that should be noted involved the cooperation of parents. Building bridges and reaching out to Romani parents was difficult, and influencing their perceptions of school – which represented a majority institution – was a daunting prospect. Strategies used to overcome barriers involved holding various meetings and workshops with parents in collaboration with the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School. Another strategy was to create a memorandum for mutual cooperation between the Center and the primary school, consisting of lectures, workshops, and discussion sessions with parents on various subjects. This approach succeeded in increasing cooperation with parents. Another idea was to organize a parents' club in which parents who had knowledge or expertise in specific crafts or could act as volunteers in the school and the Center.

photo by Suzana Nedevska

The parents' meeting in the Center.

Children that lack parental protection and a healthy environment need help from society. Through the Center's assistance, Tina learned to socialize, something she was unable to do before as she did not attend preschool, and was able to develop her capabilities and deal with life's challenges more easily.

For others who might open such a community-based educational center, it is advisable to have a plan in advance, a suitable and pleasant environment in which to work, prepared educators who have finished the required and appropriate education, and good cooperation with the local school. Special attention should be paid to winning the trust of the parents, since they are the key to successful education. Last but not least, it is important to gain the trust of the students.

Author: Since 1990, Suzana Nedevska has been an active teacher and pedagogue, having been trained in a variety of methodologies. She has worked closely with the Romani community since 2002.

NOTES

1 According to the UNDP, the percentage of households living below the poverty line in Macedonia is in constant increase, reaching 30.2% in 2003. Macedonia has one of the highest unemployment rates in Europe, and unemployment rather than low income became one of the key factors of poverty and social exclusion. The long-term unemployment rate is increasing (31.2% in 2003 to 31.7% in 2004); the long-term unemployment share increased from 85.1% in 2003 to 85.4% in 2004. High unemployment rates are recorded among minority groups, with the highest rate of 78.5% found among the Romani population. See: **http://intra.rbec. undp.org/mdg_forum/Session3_FYRMacedonia_Summary.html**.

2 Fictitious names have been used to ensure anonymity.

3 The data in the graph are taken from the school registers in the Dobre Jovanoski Primary School. Such data are collected every school year in order to monitor student progress. These data are also given to other donors such as USAID and Pestalozzi.

4 These results and others can be found in the *REI Macedonia Annual Research and Evaluation Report Macedonia, 2005* and in the *Roma Education Program Evaluation Report, 2005-2006* both available at: **http://www.osi.hu/rei**.

4.2.4 Child-Centered Education as a Tool for Integration

By: Margó Komaság, teacher/psycho-pedagogue, Baross Gábor Primary School, Budapest, Hungary

- **Participants:** children aged 7 to 12 years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family-community involvement, civic involvement in project management;
- **Partners:** Budapest LIN, Baross Gábor Primary School in Budapest's Seventh District, the Committee for the Assessment of Learning Ability and Rehabilitation, the Seventh District Local Council.

CONTEXT

The Hungarian REI model was built on the concept of Local Integration Networks (LINs). These networks were designed to bring kindergartens, primary schools, secondary schools, local governments, and community organizations together to establish cooperative programs in order to reduce the segregation of Romani children[1] and to support integrated education and social integration of Romani children. Regional characteristics as well as local strengths and weaknesses were identified by the local partners and integrated into the program in order to meet local needs. The REI project was implemented between 2003 and 2005 under the coordination of the Ec-Pec Foundation, which was founded in 2001. The foundation promotes school integration of Roma and other disadvantaged groups in Hungary, through child-centered pedagogy.

The LIN in the Seventh District of Budapest involved the active participation of István Óvoda, Montessori Gimnázium and Baross Gábor Általános Iskola (a kindergarten, high school and primary school, respectively) and the Committee for the Assessment of Learning Ability and Rehabilitation.[2] The local council of the Seventh District of Budapest agreed to support the LIN by providing financial resources for the employment of a Roma family coordinator at the primary school to strengthen cooperation between the school and Romani parents.

The primary school previously operated the Step by Step program (SbS) in one of its first-year classes, although this was interrupted for a few years due to a lack of qualified SbS teachers. Joining the REI LIN in 2003 gave them the opportunity to relaunch SbS since the project emphasized cooperation between parents and educational institutions in the different phases of children's schooling, a core component of the SbS methodology. The social composition of the Step by Step group greatly deviated from the national average, and was the mirror image of the local society in the neighbourhood. The majority of the students came from situations of social disadvantage and/or belonged to the Romani minority. Their parents were unemployed or carried out seasonal work. Socially advantaged students were underrepresented when compared to national statistics. These factors were decisive for the Ec-Pec Foundation when deciding where to set up the LIN.

The other reason for reintroducing Step by Step was to help ease the transition from kindergarten to primary school. After leaving kindergarten, children had new teachers, expectations, pedagogic methods and schoolmates. For many, this could be very challenging. The SbS methodology helped children overcome these difficulties by involving families in the learning process, respecting the individual needs of the children and ensuring a stimulating and motivating learning environment. Just as kindergarten can influence the parents' choice of primary school, indeed primary school influences students' choices of higher education. Therefore, the project tried to positively influence students and to break the unquestioned tracking which perpetuated segregation.[3] The primary school's action plan included specific steps to realize this goal (see the Appendix on pages 66, 67).

This study looks specifically at the practices in a Grade 1 class of the Baross Gábor Primary School in Budapest's Seventh District.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To integrate Romani students aged 7–10 into mainstream quality education by offering high-quality pedagogical practice, and via direct collaboration and partnership in a LIN.

Preparatory meetings with parents and children

The work started in the spring of 2002, well before the start of school in September, by contacting and gathering information on the children who were registered to begin the first grade. The process engaged stakeholders such as the principal of the school, the director of the Ec-Pec Foundation, and the head teacher of the targeted class. One of the first tasks was meeting the parents and children, who were just about to start primary school. Two such meetings were organized, where children had the chance to play together at the school, and the parents could have a nice, relaxed chat with each other and the teachers.

During the meetings, project staff explored the background of the students, their motivations, main area of interests, how they related to schooling, and their general learning abilities, while the parents had a chance to voice their ideas and expectations for the upcoming term. These meetings were facilitated by the head teacher and provided an opportunity for project staff to learn as much as possible about the children and their families. This information was later used to inform the planning process for the school year. The Committee for the Assessment of Learning Ability and Rehabilitation undertook the task of assessing all the children who were starting school, to aid in the development of individualized plans for students.

Stimulating dialogue, evaluation and functional writing

Once school began, each day started by sitting down in a circle to share thoughts, experiences and issues, and to resolve conflicts. The teachers withdrew into the role of facilitators, as this was an excellent opportunity for the children to experience taking responsibility for their own decisions. This was followed by what was called the "morning challenge", which was stated on the board and read out loud by a Grade 2 student. During the "morning words of welcome" the children learned about their tasks for the day (reading, writing, mathematics), and they could also have a say in what they thought they should be improving on. During the first session, which lasted 90 minutes, children spent most of their time working in groups around tables pushed up against each other. If a student felt that he or she could get along better working individually, then he or she was given the opportunity to solve the problem alone. Finally, after everyone had finished their task, it was time for evaluation. Children evaluated their own and each other's work.

This method of evaluation, when the child compared her present results to her previous achievements, when she actually sensed her own improvement, created the motivational basis for lifelong learning. Evaluating each other's work, learning from each other's mistakes and in the end thanking the others for their help, was worth more than all the compliments and treats a teacher could give.[4]

I am happy that I have only made two mistakes in distinguishing "j" from "ly" in my spelling, because I made many more mistakes like this before.

Quotation from a student

Magyar Narancs XVII/22, June 2, 2005 and headline from the *Magyar Narancs* article.

Furthermore, when asked whether she was satisfied with her result, the girl answered "no", which indicated her intention to achieve even better results in the future.

Students also kept journals in the form of written dialogue between the teacher and the students. Through this they could share their more private thoughts or concerns with the teacher. In addition, the children experienced functional writing in an engaging way. These practices were not always typical at regular schools, where more emphasis was placed on transmitting the learning material than the individual needs of children.

Maintaining close links and cooperation with the kindergartens
There was close cooperation between the kindergarten and primary school from the beginning. The social educator of the kindergarten visited the children during their first few days at primary school, and several joint events were organized. During these events, students could spend time together with their former kindergarten teachers and peers, and help the younger ones in group activities. Children also performed Christmas plays in their kindergarten groups. These activities helped the children's transition from kindergarten by strengthening their relationship with the past, giving them emotional confidence, and making them proud of their own achievements.

Introduction of special projects to enhance learning
Methods in the classroom also included the introduction of various projects to link learning materials to certain themes, which built upon the practice of seeing the world in its complexity. The projects enabled teachers to program for children with differing abilities, motivation and interests. In the first project, entitled ME, children became familiar with body parts, family relations, and the common and individual characteristics found in everyone. To sum up the project, the children created a book entitled "US". Each page of this book was written by a different student. The book and its contents were presented to the parents. Over the course of the three-year project, a number of different themes were addressed, such as ships, animals, and Africa. Although the project started off with the personal interest of only a few individuals, it ended up with the enthusiastic involvement of the whole class, and assistance from the parents. There were instances when parents were the leaders of a project, for example when various professions and trades were discussed. On average, there were four such projects per school year.

Regular monitoring of progress and providing feedback to parents
Key methods also included monitoring the children's ability to learn and the pace of their development. Teaching staff monitored the development of the children through tests, classroom observations, regular discussions of children's achievements with parents, and through consultations with a speech specialist or a psychologist when needed. The results were regularly shared among staff members at the school, which also provided the opportunity to give feedback on each other's work. Alongside monitoring, staff also took special care to motivate the children and foster positive attitudes. Staff respected students' feelings and thoughts and took a personal interest in their lives.

Parent meetings were held regularly during the school year, where both families and children were present. These occasions provided an opportunity to discuss the achievements of each child in a confidential environment. They were very popular among the parents. Unlike traditional parent-teacher conferences, staff used communication activities such as play groups when parents, their children and teachers would get together. Furthermore, parents were welcome to share their feelings and ideas, and to discuss their expectations from the school.

Roma family coordinator to enhance relations with parents
The project also included a Roma family coordinator at the school, who played an important role in the integration process. She was selected by the principal of the school according to her experience and skills in working with Roma. Her role was to strengthen cooperation and communication between the school and Romani parents, assist Romani families to obtain social benefits, and support Romani children in their studies during the school day.

Challenges of desegregation
One year after the LIN began, the local council ran into financial difficulties, which led to the merging of this school with another primary school in the district.[5] Three kindergartens, including one that hosted the Step by Step program, also underwent partial merging. Apart from financial factors, the council was hoping to emphasize desegregation, since the two schools (and the three kindergartens) differed greatly in their social composition. The idea was to mix the population

of the two schools, which would produce a more heterogeneous population. The intervention, however, did not fulfil expectations since most socially advantaged families left the new school altogether, choosing to educate their children elsewhere.[6] This left the social composition of the school population virtually unchanged.

A different issue arose from merging the kindergartens. While the kindergartens shared management, they operated in separate buildings. The construction of a new building to house all three kindergartens was started and then postponed due to lack of funds. This led to segregation within the walls of an institution, with children from socially advantaged families going to one kindergarten (technically one of the buildings in the institution), while socially disadvantaged and Romani children were going to the other kindergarten (another building of the same institution). It was almost like having signs similar to those of some old theatres in London, saying "higher class entrance only".

The Ec-Pec Foundation organized a facilitated discussion to overcome the conflict due to the intra-institutional segregation caused by the administrative merging. Apart from the personnel working at the kindergartens,[7] representatives of parents and the city council were present at the meeting. The Ec-Pec Foundation asked the Partners Hungary Foundation, an NGO specializing in conflict management, to mediate the debate, since they were skilled in mediation, and represented an objective viewpoint. The discussion was strongly structured, and the issues and thoughts addressed during the meeting were summarized under five points (building, information flow, technical matters, professional aspects, segregation).

From the meeting it was concluded that "Completion of the building construction would most probably alleviate the issue of intra-institutional segregation. The construction would take 13 to 14 months, meaning that the new building of the kindergarten would be ready by the summer of 2006.[8] The city council would provide up-to-date information on the project whenever asked". It was also suggested by representatives of the Partners Hungary Foundation that this latter point should "not be left contingent, but should be made automatic and regular. There should be constant information flow between the kindergartens and the council, since it is the interest and duty of both parties".

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Over the three years of the project, no children left the class. In the first year, 16 children were enroled, and by the second year their number had increased to 22. This remained the same until the end of the third year. The absence of a control group made it impossible to compare their results with other children. However, the achievement level and school success of children in the SbS class was high from the beginning of the first year and remained the same until the end of the third year.

The change in the school's culture was not as pronounced, possibly because the original expectations of integration were not fulfiled. At the same time the positive effects of integration were felt in a different way. For example, at the beginning of the second year, six new students joined the Step by Step class. Most of them were non-Romani students, who completed their first year of schooling in special care groups.[9] After one and a half years in SbS, using both cooperative and individualized teaching methods, all six children caught up with the rest of the class, though naturally individual differences still existed. Moreover, two of the students from the special care groups could attend "talent care groups" for children with exceptional skills in certain areas.

Project results indicated that anti-bias thinking and working influenced teachers and gave children a better chance to succeed. The efforts seemed to pay off. The children were happy to learn and were communicative. They trusted the adults in the school and felt that they were there to help. The Step by Step class had an impact on the whole school, especially peer classes. Visitors and colleagues were always surprised at how open and natural the children were, and at the ease with which they asked for help when needed, even from visitors they had never met.

Regular parent meetings were also transformed from a rigid, official, mandatory task into a constructive dialogue among the adults involved in the education of the children. This meant a new kind of challenge for the teachers. In the traditional schooling system, it used to be enough to get involved solely in the process of teaching students. In a Step by Step class,

educators are not only faced with the challenge of students' educational achievement, but also involved in their social background. They come into contact with the values and belief systems of each household. This raises the issue of teacher competence. As with students, families need individual treatment, and determining the boundaries of each family has to become a routine. This requires a level of sensitivity from the teacher. Not all teachers are aware of these competencies, but they can be improved by certain training, regular mentoring, and reflection on these issues.

REFLECTION

Project staff stressed the importance of parental presence at school. However, experience proved that it was often difficult to involve parents in school affairs, especially those of socially disadvantaged families. The issue was complex, although it could be partly explained by low parental self-esteem. Apart from the aforementioned projects, other events (e.g. school outings; joint cooking; or decorating, painting, and cleaning the classroom) proved to be an excellent way to improve the relationship between the school and parents. It provided a sense of unity and being part of a team involved in the education of their children.

"It is not the colour of our skin, but what is hidden within which matters".

Statement on the wall in the Baross Gábor Primary School

Keeping in touch with the family could be complex and time consuming. The project benefited greatly from the coordinators, whose work was vital to the Step by Step program. They helped teachers communicate with the families, while assisting with social issues. If their tight schedule allowed, they also fulfiled a teacher's assistant role in the classroom. It took time for teachers to understand that parents often felt uncertain or insecure within the education system. In one instance, for example, the parents did not understand the letter they got from the local city council. They assumed they would be unable to pay for the school lunches, since they were no longer entitled to the regular social assistance. If the school's relationship with the parents had not been close, the parents would not have felt able to admit that their children would be unable to attend school because they could not afford their meals. However, thanks to the good relationship with families and active participation of the coordinator, the parents were supported in reapplying for social assistance, and the children could continue their education. This interaction with parents also helped to demonstrate the necessity of basic competencies such as reading comprehension.

Step by Step left its mark not only on the way the class accepted newcomers and on the way things were taught, but also on the classroom environment. Students became quite used to visitors observing their work regularly.[10] For teachers accustomed to the traditional, frontal teaching methods used in Hungary, the classroom set-up might have seemed odd at first, particularly with regard to the way the furniture and the learning aids were arranged to facilitate teamwork and individualized learning, and the fact that students may have been doing different activities simultaneously.

The intervention was unique in the way that it managed to bring together stakeholders intent on the integration of Romani children, who may have failed to do so under a different model. The project stressed the importance of collaboration amongst institutions and Romani families. It was of critical importance to understand the parents' point of view and their reluctance to engage with educators. It was the teachers' task, together with the Romani family coordinator, to foster communication with parents, regardless of any initial reluctance from them.

The project also highlighted the importance of alternatives to traditional pedagogy which could support success, particularly by fostering responsible learning among socially disadvantaged children. In addition, teachers had to consider the socio-cultural situation of children in order to foster their identity.

Finally, it was ascertained that parts of the Local Integration Network in the Seventh District of Budapest functioned well. The process was about learning from mistakes, and trying hard to make the right deductions in order to constantly work better with children. Although three years was not enough time to abolish social biases, it was enough time to generate positive experiences.

Author: In the past ten years, Margó Komaság has been working mainly with disadvantaged children. She initially taught at a school in the village of Csenyéte, where there is a large Romani community, and has also taught in the primary school of a children's home. She has worked using the SbS methodology for more than ten years.

APPENDIX

SCHEDULE FOR JOINING THE LOCAL INTEGRATION SOCIETY
Elementary School

Academic year 2004 – 2005

Goals:
- successful completion of elementary education;
- preparing for higher-level education, successful training for a job;
- integrating the two schools into one institute (on the level of personnel and students);
- integrating the students from Osvát utcai School into the classes;
- supporting children with the need for special attention;
- revising teaching methodology;
- organizing social events in the school and building up a new, unified set of traditions.

Tasks:
- facilitating the regular student attendance;
- setting up the conditions for successful learning;
- adapting and implementing the Step by Step program in the higher years in an ascending manner;
- directing Romani students into educational institutes which prepare them for the A-levels (Montessori High School);
- organizing trainings for teachers;
- solving issues arising from the merger of the two schools;
- cooperating with parents in order to achieve goals;
- supporting parents, setting up a partnership with the Single Parent Fund, organizing joint parents' meetings.

Organizing and implementing training for new methodologies:
- training supporting the adaptation of successful programs such as Step by Step;
- cooperative trainings;
- Sindelar method.

Awareness training:
- training to foster change of teachers' attitudes;
- school–parents relations (anti-bias training).

Establishing a new system for assessing and evaluating:
- conducting entrance and exit assessments;
- setting down the criteria for the written form of evaluation in the Step by Step classes with the help of the Specialist and Rehabilitation Committee.

Specific tasks which need further harmonization during the year:
- helping Step by Step classes, constant observation of the educational work, identifying young people willing to function as mentors;
- familiarizing fellow teachers with the Step by Step program, making it possible for them to visit in the Step by Step classes all year round;

- familiarizing undergraduate student teachers with the Step by Step program, collaborating with the institutes responsible for undergraduate training of teachers, integrating Step by Step into their curriculum and serving as a reference school for Step by Step implementation;
- establishing a Step by Step team, professional coordination and popularizing of the Step by Step program;
- integrating the students from the Osvát utcai School, constant monitoring of their progress, providing support and helping them overcome any issues arising;
- assisting students in their final year to choose a profession, helping those who intend to enter higher education in choosing the right institute of higher education and making sure students can succeed with entry exams (organizing visits to the institutions of interest, extracurricular training for preparing for the entry exams, mentor teachers, informing the parents);
- evaluating the program every two months and making the necessary adjustments.

NOTES

1 According to Havas and Liskó (2004) between the 2000–2001 and 2003–2004 school years the number of Roma-dominated primary schools in Hungary dramatically increased from 126 to 178. Havas, G. & Liskó, I. (2004). "Szegregáció a roma tanulók általános iskolai oktatásában, Kutatási zárótanulmány", (Segregation in the Education of Roma Students in Primary Schools, Final Research Report), Research Institute of Higher Education (Felsőoktatási Kutatóintézet, kézirat), unpublished.

2 These committees are operated by local councils in order to measure and improve the learning skills of local kindergarten and primary school students. Its members include psychologists and pedagogic experts.

3 The use of the word "track" is meant to indicate regular and consistent patterns of sending children from one type of school to another because it is an accepted, unquestioned, common practice.

4 See Farkas, E. "Roma Diákok Integrációja: Egy Paddal Előrébb" (The integration of Roma students: One row closer), *Magyar Narancs* 17 (22), pp. 6-7.

5 Before the merger, the school discussed in this study was called Hernád Nr 3 Primary School, but after it was merged with Baross Gábor Primary School, the whole institution was given the name of the latter.

6 At the time of the intervention, parents were not obliged to choose a school in their local district. According to the 2006 modification of the Law on Education, they can only enrol their children at schools in their own district.

7 The joint institute of István utcai kindergarten was created by joining together the István utcai, Murányi 29, and Murányi 8 kindergartens.

8 In 2006 the construction was still not fully realized. The delay was due to legal and administrative difficulties facing the council.

9 Special care groups are created for helping students with lower than average results to catch up with their studies. Talent care groups are for improving the skills of children who are exceptionally talented in a certain area. These activities take place twice a week in small groups, in addition to the classwork facilitated by specialists. The children are assigned to these groups according to the decision of the head teacher and other specialists.

10 Visitors included teachers from all over the country and sometimes abroad, and students from the Faculty of Elementary and Nursery School Teachers' Training at the University of Eötvös Lóránd.

4.2.5 Professional Development for Teachers of Children whose Mother-Tongue Language is Romani – an Example from Croatia

By: Lidija Cvikić, B.A., Research fellow at the University of Zagreb, Department of Croatian Language and Literature

- **Participants:** children aged 7 to 12 years (indirectly), adult learners/teachers (directly);
- **Supports:** educational achievement, capacity building, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** University of Zagreb, eight primary schools from Međimurje County.

CONTEXT

One of the most widely discussed issues regarding the education of Romani children from Croatia centers on these students' Croatian language knowledge. Many Romani students do not have a good command of the Croatian language as they enter school. Knowledge of the Croatian language is necessary for them to have an equal chance in school. The official number of the Romani population in the Republic of Croatia is 9,463,[1] which constitutes 0.21% of the total population. However, it is important to note that the unofficial estimates are much higher, at about 30,000 to 40,000 people.

In its National Program for the Roma, adopted in October 2003, the Croatian government recognized the exclusion of Romani children from mainstream education as one of the main challenges to be addressed.[2] Difficulties with the Croatian language and a socially and materially disadvantaged situation were among the key reasons mentioned. Although the real number of Romani children excluded from the educational system is unknown, it is estimated that about one third of the Romani population has never been included in any form of education. According to the same document, in the school year 2002–2003 only 1,900 Romani children were included in the state educational system.[3]

According to the 2001 Census, 7,860 people spoke the Romani language as their mother tongue. In terms of language use, the Roma in Croatia are heterogeneous in that they speak Romani, Bayashi (an archaic Romani dialect) and Albanian. There is no relation between nationality and mother-tongue language in the Census, so there is no official estimate to distinguish the languages used among Roma in the country. Although national minorities in Croatia have a constitutional right to be educated from preschool age in their mother-tongue language, due to various reasons, there is still no such education at any level for the Romani minority.[4]

In 2003 the Open Society Institute - Croatia (OSI-Croatia) started the pilot project entitled Comprehensive Roma Education Program. The project consisted of several components including: Step by Step training for preschool and primary school teachers, anti-bias training and workshops on health care, as well as other interventions. The whole project was approved and supported by the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports of the Republic of Croatia. Moreover, the aims and measures of the project were also in accordance with The National Program for the Roma. In particular, the National Program included several measures to improve the education of Romani children: inclusion in mainstream kindergartens with a primary aim to learn Croatian language; testing the linguistic, psychological and physical status of Romani children; training of teachers to work with children from socially or economically disadvantaged environments; introduction of Roma teacher assistants to aid teacher–student communication; printing of a Roma-Croatian picture dictionary for children, and producing/translating picture books into the Romani language.[5]

OSI-Croatia also decided the project should have a special emphasis on language learning. At the time, there was no other program that dealt with the Romani language as a mother tongue or proposed that Croatian should be taught as a second language. Therefore, experts in different linguistic and educational fields (linguistics, first language acquisition, second language acquisition, Croatian language teaching, etc.) from the University of Zagreb were invited to join the pilot project. The language team created a sub-project named Croatian as a Second Language – Croatian for Roma. Even though it was an integral part of the pilot project, it had its own timeframe (2003–2004) and funding, and was treated as an individual project. Furthermore, the language team did not participate in any other parts of the pilot project.

Goal:

To provide teachers with additional education and skills by creating and conducting educational workshops for preschool and primary school teachers, focusing on teaching Croatian as a second language among Romani children.

The main aims of the project were:
- providing teachers with additional theoretical and practical knowledge on the acquisition of Croatian as a first and second language;
- improving skills for teaching Croatian as a second language (in mixed classroom settings);
- creating additional teaching materials designed especially for students of Croatian language with Romani as a first language.

The project Croatian as a Second Language – Croatian for Roma began in early 2003, and involved eight primary schools from the county of Međimurje. These schools were also included in the overall OSI-Croatia pilot project. All the schools had a significant percentage of Romani students and most of the teachers had been teaching in the same school for a long time. Some of them were originally from the area. These facts were considered important for several reasons. Firstly, most of these teachers had not been exposed to courses about second language learning or teaching, or multilingualism and multiculturalism, in their educational curricula. It should be noted that such courses are still lacking in the curriculum for primary school teachers in Croatia. Secondly, since most teachers had been living in the area for a long period of time, they were familiar with the socio-economic status of the whole community, the relations between majority and minority inhabitants, and the specifics of the Romani minority and their way of life.

Seminars for primary and preschool teachers

The project involved the organization of five seminars over a period of two years. Four of the seminars were organized for primary and preschool teachers, and one for students of the teacher training college in Čakovec. The first seminar was held in May 2003. Since the pilot project had just started, there was considerable interest in the seminar. It was attended by 54 participants: 8 preschool teachers, 15 Roma teacher assistants, 28 primary school teachers and 3 educational specialists. A representative of one of the Romani associations attended the workshop as well. The first seminar introduced the participants to some basic notions of first and second language acquisition, multiculturalism and multilingualism. The following topics were covered:
- multiculturalism and multilingualism;
- the role of kindergarten in the development of language skills and the elementary skills needed for developing writing and reading abilities;
- the relation between first and second language learning and acquisition;
- Croatian as a non-native language in the primary school;
- the Croatian language and the Romani language – do their similarities help or hinder language development?
- vocabulary learning and teaching;
- second language learning activities and games.

The seminar was held on Friday afternoon and Saturday morning. It was organized in such a way that each lecture was followed by a workshop. The lecturers or workshop moderators were specialists in a particular field.

At the beginning of the seminar, it became clear that the participants had very high expectations. The teachers were faced with various difficulties in their work, such as large classes, students with different language competences in the same class, insufficient teaching equipment, and social and economic issues affecting their students. They came to the seminar with hopes of immediate help and solutions for most of their issues. At the beginning of the seminar, a number of the participants did not understand that the language team was limited to providing professional help and support in the area of teaching Croatian as a second language. The language team didn't have any political, economic or social power to change the existing situation. It could only provide the teachers with new knowledge and skills.

The workshop was attended by Roma teacher assistants and Romani representatives as well. During the discussion, different questions concerning the status of the Romani minority in Međimurje County and their relation with the majority inhabitants were raised. It was evident that there was a certain degree of disagreement between Romani and non-Romani participants, as well as among Romani representatives themselves. Due to the large number of participants, the diversity of the group and the presence of Romani representatives who were not actively involved in the teaching process, the seminar facilitator had a demanding task of keeping the discussion within the framework of language learning and teaching. These factors led the organizers to hold future seminars for smaller groups of participants who were actively involved in teaching. Furthermore, it was decided that preschool and primary school teachers should be in separate groups due to their specific needs.

The second seminar was held in October 2003. Since it was intended for the teachers who could not participate in the first seminar, the agenda was mostly the same. However, based on the teachers' evaluation of the first seminar, the theoretical part of the seminar (lectures) was shortened, and the practical part (workshops) was lengthened. This resulted in teachers taking part in the workshops more actively. The third seminar was a follow-up to the first. It went into the aforementioned topics in more depth, and included more teaching activities. This was again repeated for teachers who could not attend this session.

Finally, since several faculty members from the teacher training college in Čakovec were actively involved in the OSI-Croatia pilot project, the organizers decided to hold a seminar for students of the college. According to the language team, that seminar was the most successful of the whole project and the students were active, creative and enthusiastic. One of the reasons for this was that the students were still inexperienced and relatively unprepared for their future work and all the problems they might encounter. On the other hand, teachers who had been working with Romani children for years had already learned from their everyday experiences how to deal with some problems and how to create a supportive learning environment. The less experienced students were therefore found to be more open to suggestions and willing to acquire new knowledge and skills.

Production of a handbook for teachers of Romani-speaking children
The project also produced a book based on the seminars. The book *Drugi jezik hrvatski* (Second language – Croatian)[6] (Cvikić, 2006) consisted of two parts, one theoretical and the other practical, and could be considered a handbook for teachers of Romani-speaking children. The first part of the handbook included chapters about the acquisition of Croatian as a first and second language, bilingualism as a social and individual phenomenon, as well as principles of teaching second language grammar, vocabulary, and so on. One of the chapters dealt specifically with the language and education of Romani children.

In order to illustrate the positive influence of systematic and formal language instruction on second language vocabulary and grammar acquisition, the results of a research on the acquisition of Croatian language amongst a group of Romani children from the county of Međimurje were also presented.[7] For the purpose of research, a special language test was created.[8] The test consisted of seven different parts for which the results of monolingual Croatian speakers of the same age were available. The test was conducted in three groups of Romani preschool children; one of them attended preschool for a longer period of time than the other two. The results showed that none of the groups acquired the vocabulary or grammatical structures of the Croatian language to the level which would make them independent language users. However, the group of children that attended preschool longer than the other two tended to have better results in all areas of the test. Results showed the importance of longer, systematic language learning in a formal setting as well as the need for specific teaching materials and more effective methods for teaching Croatian to Romani children.

Perhaps one of the most valuable parts of the book was the description of the Bayashi Romani language[9] and the inclusion of a short Croatian-Bayashi-Croatian dictionary, both written on the basis of a Bayashi language variety spoken in the Croatian region of Baranja.[10] This was presumably the first attempt to describe linguistically the grammatical features of the Bayashi Romani language. The book also proposed a spelling system for the Bayashi language, which is still not

standardized in Croatia. The grammatical description and short dictionary were based on spoken language from three Bayashi Romani from Beli Manastir.

The second part of the book consisted of teaching materials that could be used in a language class for both native and non-native speakers. The materials would help develop children's language and communicative competence in Croatian, and would also assist second language learners with the acquisition of Croatian grammar and vocabulary. Many of the proposed activities were already used for teaching Croatian as a second language amongst Hungarian, German and English speakers.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

Many language learning activities for the classroom were presented at the seminar. Teachers recognized their usefulness and applicability and it became obvious that the main goal of the project was to help teachers improve the teaching process and thereby solve some of their issues. Teachers started to participate in the workshops actively; they asked questions and suggested topics for future seminars (for example, language impairment, dyslexia and dysgraphia).

The project was evaluated as useful, interesting and helpful, both in terms of gaining new knowledge and having the opportunity to meet colleagues with the same problems and to share experiences. Teachers enriched the seminars with their experiences and effective solutions, as well as useful teaching tips and activities. The members of the language team also learned about specific problems confronting teachers. For example, they discovered that it was not unusual for Romani children to start primary school at an older age than their classmates.

When the OSI-Croatia pilot project finished in 2003 a similar project was launched in the city of Beli Manastir (county of Osijek-Baranja), since the need for additional education of primary school teachers was identified there.[11] Lessons from the first project were taken into account. For example, a few new topics were introduced in the seminars (language impairment, dyslexia and dysgraphia) and some workshops were based on the ALCT[12] methodology. The ratio between lectures and workshops was changed. Since the mother tongue of the majority of Romani children in Beli Manastir was Bayashi, a specialist in Romani language joined the language team.

At the end of each project (in Međimurje and in Beli Manastir) the participants received a copy of the draft version of the handbook for use in the classroom. According to private conversations with a few teachers, some of them used the materials and found them beneficial. The final version of the handbook is to be published in 2007.

REFLECTION

Every seminar in the project Croatian as a Second Language – Croatian for Roma was evaluated by the participants. While all of them found such seminars to be useful and successful, they also emphasized the need for longer, more systematic work providing further education among teachers. Still, the organization of such projects is important since they enrich the teachers with new knowledge, teaching methods, materials and tips. They also make a whole community more sensitive to the issue of bilingualism/biculturalism and second language learning. This should lead to more effective education of Romani children.

It is important to make the process of learning the majority (or official) language as individualized as possible. When creating such a project, one should take into account all the specificities of the Romani-language community, the language to be learned (or that is taught) and all the specifics teachers have in their classrooms.

For effective participation and learning among teachers, it is important that all the participants are willing and motivated to learn and take part. Therefore it should not be mandatory for anyone to participate. One of the shortcomings of the project was the lack of follow-up after the seminars to measure effectiveness and the sustainable impact in the classroom. The teachers did not have a chance to be mentored in their work and the project creators did not have a chance to see how the new skills and materials were implemented in the classroom.

Contrary to our experience, it was concluded that it might be better not to make such activities part of a larger project. Some of the teachers who participated in the OSI-Croatia pilot project were overwhelmed with all the workshops and seminars they attended. Therefore, it might be preferable to have more frequent, smaller projects over a longer period of time, rather than one large project. This would provide both the organizers and participants with more time to prepare, conduct and follow up on the project, thus contributing to more visible results, monitored over a longer period of time.

Nonetheless, the experiences and lessons learned in these projects can be useful for experts in other countries. The content and methods of the project as well as the handbook produced may serve as an important resource in other Slavic language-speaking countries. As a first initiative addressing the fact that many Roma do not speak Croatian as their mother tongue, it represented an important step in improving the inclusion of Roma in the educational system. In closing, it may be said that creating and conducting such a project is not an easy and quick task, but its results can be invaluable for the education of Romani children.

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NOTES

1   Census 2001, available at: **www.dsz.hr**.
2   The National Program for the Roma was drafted with the broad participation of ministries, Romani associations, Members of Parliament representing national minorities, and international experts. The aim of the program is "to help the Roma in a systematic manner to improve their life conditions and to become involved in the social life and the decision-making processes of the local and broader communities, while maintaining their own identity, culture and tradition". The report is available at: **http://www.vlada.hr**.
3   *National Program for the Roma,* p. 34, available at: **http://www.vlada.hr**.
4   On the education of the Romani minority in Croatia, see Hrvatic, 2005; 2000; 1997.
5   *National Program for the Roma,* pp. 35–36.
6   The Croatian title Drugi jezik hrvatski is also a word play. "Drugi" can mean "second" (as in Croatian second language) and also "other" (as in another Croatian language). The word order is stylistically marked and can be perceived as an utterance made by a non-native speaker.
7   The research was conducted for the purpose of the pilot project evaluation.
8   See Kuvac and Cvikić 2003.
9   The question as to whether Bayashi should be considered a language or a dialect is not discussed in this paper.
10 Bayashi is also spoken in some other parts of Croatia (i.e. Međimurje County) and some phonological and lexical differences in the language of speakers from different regions can be expected.
11 The project was supported under the Matra KAP projects of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands.
12 Active Learning for Critical Thinking.

4.3 Policy and Systemic Change

In summary, the studies in Chapter 4 imply the following policy and systemic changes:

- To supplement quality schooling, programs to foster the academic and social/emotional development of marginalized students should also be delivered out of school by community-based organizations. However, the conditions that foster success within the school system should also exist in any out-of-school program. The experience of the Macedonian REI team indicates that schools and community-based organizations can work in partnership to support the success of Romani students.
- Policy, systems, and/or programs need to be developed and implemented to support the sustained training and mentoring of educators as they move from a teacher-directed to a child-centered paradigm. Where appropriate, this training should fit within the framework of credentialing and salary augmentation appropriate to the educational jurisdiction. Within the region, credentialing lends legitimacy and, consequently, enhances the engagement of educators in professional development.
- Many Romani students are second language learners. This necessitates professional development regarding programming, including professional development opportunities for those currently involved in education as well as those in pre-service training.
- The experiences of the Slovenian REI team highlight the role of the Roma teacher assistant as an important factor in school success for Romani students. Therefore, official frameworks for the sustained employment of RTAs need to be established.
- Roma teacher assistants also need to participate in sustained training, support, and mentoring in child-centered, activity-based pedagogy as well as pedagogy for second language learners. Particularly, RTAs need to have professional development opportunities that allow them to explore their heritage and enrich their knowledge of Romani culture.
- Establishing policy, systems, and/or programs to foster the school success of Romani children will help keep these students in school. However, changes in pedagogy have to be harmonized with the issues of access to higher education elaborated in the previous chapter in order to ensure Romani students are successfully included at all levels of education.

CHAPTER 5
FAMILY AND COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT
AND CAPACITY BUILDING

5.1 Introduction

Education which is focused on the needs and strengths of the whole child must begin with a respectful partnership between the school and the family. Families are the locus of children's lives, making it imperative that educators and schools wishing to move toward democratic and inclusive education begin by forging relationships with families. The link between education among family members and students' learning is highlighted by the Croatian REI team.

The documentation studies included in this chapter illustrate innovative and sustainable ways to foster parental and community involvement. They also demonstrate that getting families involved in education is not enough. Increasing community and familial capacity is essential and contributes to the sustainability of the initiatives illustrated here.

5.2 Documentation Studies

- *Božidar Nikolić*, "School Mini-Project: School with an Open Heart – a Model for Improving the Cooperation Between School and Family" (Serbia);
- *Jasna Štalman*, "Promoting Vocational Skills and Lifelong Learning among Parents of School-aged Children" (Croatia).

5.2.1 School Mini-Project: School with an Open Heart –
a Model for Improving the Cooperation Between School and Family

By: Božidar Nikolić, President of Educational-Culture Union of Roma – Romanipen, Kragujevac, Serbia

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 7 to 14 years and adults;
- **Supports:** social relations, family-community involvement, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Roma Information Center (RIC), participating school in Kragujevac.

CONTEXT

As a result of social turmoil, financial impoverishment and rooted prejudices in Serbia during the last 15 years, many groups are marginalized, and perhaps most people in Serbia belong to this group. Nevertheless, Roma, as a specific ethnic community, represent the most marginalized group, and their issues are stressed in all levels of social life. Some of the basic characteristics of marginalized Romani families[1] are:

- little or no social power
- isolation from mainstream society (work, education, culture)
- prejudices and biases directed at them
- poverty and material issues (financial, housing)
- larger society does not take care of them or offer necessary help
- low level of self-respect and aspiration
- closed against other groups and move in a narrow circle of similar people.

It is estimated that more than 60% of Romani families live in poverty or on the edge of poverty, while that percentage is considerably lower for the majority population (20%).[2] In the field of education, data are even more devastating. More precisely according to the 1991 census, 78.7% of Roma had not completed primary education, only 4.1% had completed secondary school and 0.2% had completed an advanced degree.

Often, the difficulties Roma faced lead to a denial of identity. For example, it became clear at the beginning of the implementation of the Equal Chances: Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Educational System project (hereafter referred to as Equal Chances),[3] that the majority of Roma living in the Kragujevac region (many of whom had settled from Kosovo) did not declare themselves as Roma. This information was derived from local research[4] conducted by the Roma Informational Center – a Roma NGO from Kragujevac, and from polls[5] that were conducted by Roma teacher assistants (hereafter RTAs) during the project.

Considering these characteristics, it is understandable that a Romani child who comes from this environment, and who encounters formal education for the first time, would have some difficulties on all levels, beginning with the socialization process to participate in learning. Issues which appear in the initial stages of education, and which are not addressed, may lead to reduced engagement in education not only in the child but also in his or her family. The prevailing paradigm places responsibility for unsuccessful education with the family, while educational institutions stand aside protected by the system.

Taking into consideration the alarming state of education for Roma children in Serbia, at the beginning of 2002, the Equal Chances project was initated. The project was comprehensive, aiming to create a national educational framework and strategy and to develop an all-inclusive model of education for Romani children ages 5 to 18. The project organized a set of interventions aiming to initiate changes in schools. It also fostered professional development to improve teaching methods. The project was implemented in kindergartens, elementary schools and secondary schools in Niš and Kragujevac, and was carried out with financial support from the Open Society Institute – Budapest, and the Fund for an Open Society – Serbia. The primary implementing partner organization that was responsible for the educational work was the Center

for Interactive Pedagogy (hereafter CIP) from Belgrade, who worked in collaboration with local Roma NGOs. The project was implemented between 2002 and 2005.

Reality at the school level

In Kragujevac, the project was implemented in one school with approximately 750 students in the vicinity of one of the larger Romani settlements, inhabited by approximately 200 Romani families, mainly from Kosovo. Of the 750 students, according to school records and surveys conducted by the RTAs, approximately 150 were Roma. What is interesting to note, however, according to data collected by the Ministry of Education and Sport of the Republic of Serbia in all elementary schools during the 2004-2005 school year,[6] is that more than 90% of Romani students in this school declared themselves as Serbs, confirming previous research regarding the process of assimilation in Kragujevac.

At the school level, the concept of an educational program connected with the integration of Romani children was approved by the teaching staff, although there was considerable apprehension because it was the first time the school had undertaken this kind of alternative educational program. Due to lack of experience, training, or familiarization with methodological changes, there were many issues related to the implementation of Equal Chances from the very beginning; particularly negative interpersonal relationships between school staff (no team work), negative attitudes of some staff towards the Equal Chances project, as well as negative attitudes toward RTAs and in carrying out activities with parents (a combination of school and extracurricular activities). In addition, there were many changes in school leadership (during the three years of implementation three principals were replaced), and changes in the school's choice for coordination of the project, which influenced the teaching staff's attitude toward the project. Ineffective school-level coordination caused issues in organizing project activities, such as additional teaching, which was often postponed. RTAs had significant difficulties with organizing their activities. There were also infrastructural challenges to contend with (insufficient number of classrooms, insufficient equipment with teaching aids).

At the beginning of Equal Chances, the role of the RTA was perceived by the school's teaching staff as inferior, and without importance (except in regards to paying visits to Romani families, which were approved by everybody unanimously). The role of the RTA in the teaching process was obviously misunderstood by teachers, so their expectations from RTAs were undefined. They considered that RTAs were to observe students' work and behaviour, and they did not receive concrete assignments to work with children during class.[7]

In one elementary school in Kragujevac, data from the external evaluation[8] at the end of the first year of implementation (2003-2004) revealed Romani parent participation was still low. Teachers' records showed that a very small percentage of Romani parents regularly came to school, and when they did come, communication happened mostly indirectly, through consultation with the RTA.[9]

The school staff, and RTAs, underwent obligatory training as part of Equal Chances activities from September 2002 to June 2003. They were trained in: child-centered pedagogy (Step by Step methodology); Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT); Education for Social Justice (Neither black nor white).[10] Training on improvement of cooperation with students' families initiated the eventual development of the school mini-project.

In this context, a school team (five school representatives and four RTAs) created the school mini-project, which was implemented over four months, from March to June, 2005. The school mini-project was called School with an Open Heart and embodied how to engender cooperation between the school and marginalized families, with the ultimate aim of improving school achievement for Romani children.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To include marginalized Romani families in various school and extracurricular activities as equal participants in the creation and supervision of their children's education.

In order to successfully undertake the implementation of the school mini-project, and in order to work independently on all aspects, the teaching staff, together with their collaborating RTAs, underwent training in project development and implementation. The training also included improving cooperation between the school and family and writing project proposals. The idea to conduct this training came from the Center for Interactive Pedagogy's (CIP) analysis of the annual external evaluation, RTAs' work reports, and on the overall situation in the school (i.e. no team work in solving issues connected with the education of Romani children). The two-day training was carried out in January 2005 by the CIP during the school's winter break. At the end a decision was made – on the trainers' recommendation – to begin a school mini-project. There was considerable hesitation and fear regarding how the other parents would accept this, and that undertaking a mini-project would create further division. However, there were some who believed that any innovation could only bring improvement.

The project development phase began right after the end of training in February 2005. A school team was created to oversee implementation. The school received 50,000 dinars (approximately €620), to implement the project, funds that were primarily used for equipment and for honoraria to school staff – including RTAs – for their extra work. Four team meetings were held, and an implementation plan was created, which was reviewed by CIP. For the first time since the beginning of the project, decisions about conducting activities were discussed as a team, and all final decisions were made based on the agreement of the whole shool team, including the active involvement of the RTAs. Creating a team around the mini-project really began to strengthen the relationship and cooperation between teaching staff and RTAs. Within this framework, the assistants became the creators of activities, and plans for project activities were based on their suggestions and ideas.

The project consisted of four phases, all of which had separate thematic units, promoting certain values as part of the fundamental overall goal of the project. These included improving relationships: school/family, teacher/family, student/school, as well as between students and families. Furthermore, the project sought to change families' perspectives toward education. The project was to be carried out in the last quarter of the school year, from March to June, 2005. At the end of each month, one of the planned activities was implemented, while the preparation of activities for the next phase carried on. Four activities were planned:

Family Album	March 2005
My Hearth	April 2005
Trip to my Neighbourhood	May 2005
Festival of Friendship	June 2005

Family Album

The first activity, Family Album, was extremely important to the project's further implementation because its fundamental goal was to better acquaint parents with their children's schooling by having them work collaboratively and by sharing information considered to be significant for their family. In a group setting, parents discussed the differences in cultural heritage, traditions, and family customs. All activities in creating family albums took place in the school classroom, twice a month, and lasted one school class (45 minutes). Romani parents fully participated in all activities.

that the richness of differences should be cherished in the school community and that the school should be a place where everyone feels respect and belonging. Children should feel like they are at home in school. The mosaic was finished in March during the last workshop after which it was placed on a school wall where it stayed until the final mini-project activity.

My Hearth

My Hearth was in essence attached to the first exercise, but it presented a wider concept of the family story, stressing families' geographical affiliation and origin. Members of students' extended families – such as grandparents – also took part in these activities, and gave a complete picture from their point of view of how significant it is to preserve one's roots, traditional family customs, and to build one's own family identity. RTAs added to and complemented the stories and illustrations of Romani families from an historical-demographical perspective by presenting information about Romani history, their original homeland, migrations, cultural heritage, and by emphasizing similarities and differences between traditions and customs from the past and their presence in modern life. Parents and children had an active role in mapping their birth places and living places with their places of historical origin. This was done on maps that had been made in advance by parents and children. Children also made little flags with symbols which had some personal meaning for marking spots on the maps. This activity also took place in the classroom twice a month for 45 minutes.

The final product of this workshop was a large map spotted with many flags with different traits and symbols representing environments such as the local environment of the school, where families have settled. Altogether this had a very cosmopolitan spirit which emphasized multiculturalism and diversity.

Trip to my Neighbourhood

In May, the Trip to my Neighbourhood was planned as an educational field trip for children, parents, teachers and RTAs to the church property that was close to the school. The goal was to put religion, as another important part of one's family identity, in the context of the community and to promote faith, love, tolerance, mutual respect, and help to others.

The Family Album creatively presented – in a book form or however the family chose – the family and its milieu to the others in the workshop. It was made of various materials such as paper and collage. Albums were very illustrative, with a lot of family pictures and stories about the most significant events in the family, customs and traditions.

At the end of this activity, a mosaic of all family albums was made, and teachers and RTAs emphasized in final speeches

Examples from the Family Album activity.

Scene from the Trip to my Neighborhood activity.

Taking into consideration that there are differences in religion in the local environment (Orthodox Christianity and Islam), this activity really got parents' attention because it was determined – through previous conversations – that there are religious customs which are the same within each religion. It is for this reason that this activity was chosen, on the RTAs' proposal, to raise awareness and consciousness within the Romani community of their own identity, especially among the Romani Muslims, who had settled from Kosovo, and experienced stress in relation to assimilation.

The activity was organized right after an important religious holiday, St George's Day, which is celebrated by a great number of Roma. Wreaths for St George's Day were made by children during this activity, and masks were also made for the final project activity. In a relaxed atmosphere and with an open dialogue, parents exchanged experiences in carrying out many religious rituals, emphasizing similarities and differences. Together they came to the conclusion that by respecting all religions, people would see commonalities and disregard differences.

Festival of Friendship

Finally, on 16 June, a Festival of Friendship was held on the last day of the 2004–2005 school year. It was organized by the school team who had implemented the entire School with an Open Heart project. The festival was a day-time event which lasted five hours and was attended by guests from the local community, members of the parents' school council, parents, teachers, and students. The principal of the school gave an opening speech. With the presence of many parents and children, this activity was a final closing celebration, and there was an exhibition of all the work made during the project's implementation: family albums and maps. In addition, children performed one act from the play *Pokondirena tikva* by Jovan Sterija Popovic which lasted 30 minutes. The leading roles were played by two Romani girls. When the play was finished, another group of students performed a modern dance.

Scene from the Festival of Friendship.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

During its implementation, the mini-project succeeded in gathering a large number of parents as active participants in all project activities, in developing new healthier relationships among parents themselves, and in increasing between parents and school staff, a level of enthusiasm for school among students and parents from marginalized families. Before the Equal Chances project, the school had significant issues in cooperating with Romani families. In the very early stages of Equal Chances implementation, data showed that in the lower grades (1 to 4), the proportion of school visits by non-Romani as compared with Romani parents was 3:1 in favour of non-Romani parents. That difference in upper grades (5 to 8) was even more pronounced – being 5:1. The school was clearly struggling with achieving real parent participation in school. Through the mini

The Roma teacher assistants proved they deserve the entrusted role in this project. They knew what was expected from them in implementing this school activity, and with their versatile help, an excellent project plan was created and they had a leading role in that plan, promoting themselves and their people as equal participants in school activities.

Comment from school teacher

project, according to the school team's evaluation, about 200 parents from all 9 classes of the lower primary grades (from 1 to 4) participated in all activities, including 60 Romani parents which represents 30% of all parents participating in the project.[11]

Through participatory project planning and implementation, another goal of the Equal Chances project was achieved – taking over full responsibility and leadership by Romani representatives in the creation and organization of programs made to promote the Romani way of life, culture, tradition and customs in order to overcome prejudices and sterotypes, and also to raise awareness within the Romani community of their own identity.

The positive approach in working with children and parents is one of the bright sides of this school activity. We hope that in the future this school team, consisting of school teaching staff and RTAs, will work on further improving the relationship between school and family, especially attitudes toward Romani families, through this kind or similar kinds of school and extracurricular activities. I would especially praise the engagement of RTAs in the organization and implementation of project activities, because they gave a special seal to this project in their own way.

Comment from school principal

Despite all the issues encountered in implementing Equal Chances in this school, the mini-project helped to bring a more progressive reputation to the school as an educational institution that was open to cooperation with the local community on all levels. In fact, one of the local TV stations made several news reports about the school.

The consciousness and attitudes of school staff improved in many areas. The issues in educating Romani children began to be perceived from different angles, with teachers recognizing that concrete solutions for achieving integrated education had to be found. So, changed attitudes led to better cooperation among school staff which led to better cooperation with families.

As a result, parents started to become involved in how things worked in school; they wanted to involve themselves in school boards, became engaged in the implementation of educational programs, and worked directly with teachers. With more active participation of parents in various school activities, there was no more need for regular visits to families by RTAs. Thus, the majority of the RTAs' duties were performed within the school, in working with children and parents.

Before the mini-project, the RTAs' job consisted of ten hours a week in the Romani community, after the project it was reduced to five to six hours a week. RTAs began to dedicate one hour a day only to visiting families whose children had issues. One result was very positive, since parents (Romani and non-Romani) came to accept RTAs as supports for their children, no matter who they were. Their role and reputation within the school increased, and they were accepted as equal partners.

The following school year, 2005–2006, the principal also assigned one RTA the task of creating a team to implement the successive mini-project. The RTA chose the aim of the mini-project, developed an implementation plan, and other members of the team assisted him to implement the project. Moreover, many suggestions made by the RTA were accepted by his partner teachers, such as lesson plans, organizing the classrooms, and creating workshops during extracurricular activities. That form of respecting the RTA's opinions, and their higher level of participation in all school activities, gave a special tone to the mini-project; it improved the status of the RTA, whose more complex role improved the overall implementation of Equal Chances.

The experience in implementing the mini-project also helped improve practice in the classroom. Elements connected with parents' participation in the teaching process became an integral part of regular teaching activities. On the last working day of the week some parents participated in regular class group activities, and helped children in doing schoolwork in art, nature

and society. Unfortunately, these activities only took place in classes that were using the Step by Step methodology. However, there was some residual impact in other classrooms that were still using the more traditional methods. Plenty of working material was created that could be used to work individually with children, namely, elements of Romani cultural and heritage embedded in the family albums could be used to create individual educational plans.

This project opened the door for planning other types of activities which are in alignment with the fundamental goals of Equal Chances. For example, the following school year 2005–2006, other informal cooperation with parents was initiated; for example a "Roma coffee" took place in order to open the lines of communication with Romani parents. The follow-up school mini-project was related to promoting Romani culture and tradition. A theatre production titled Bibia's Love, which was the original work of one RTA, continued the possibility for Romani students, together with other children in the school, to work cooperatively on affirming Romani culture. Twenty-three children took part in the play, nine of whom were Roma. CIP paid for continuation of the mini-project in 2004–2005 with help from Norwegian People Help.

REFLECTION

In hindsight, the mini-project seemed to bring freshness to the implementation of the Equal Chances project, which had encountered serious obstacles in some aspects of its implementation. As such, the mini-project opened new perspectives regarding how to accomplish the basic Equal Chances goals in a more creative, imaginative, fun and useful way for children and parents. Progress was made in opening doors where they were once closed. The welcoming of parents as part of the teaching process was an indicator that a combination of school and extracurricular activities – with interesting subject matter – could really influence attitudes toward school. Old-fashioned methods of engaging parents and encouraging them to collaborate with the school, for instance through information giving and smaller activities with a few families, does not really project schools as being institutions open for wider collaboration with the local community.

The fact that the school decided to implement the mini-project a second year shows their readiness to develop an awareness of multiculturalism both generally and in the school environment. It also showed school staff was capable of carrying out this type of activity with parents. An issue arose, unfortunately, with regards to finances. How could a school support similar activities without it being part of a larger project that was financially supported by donors? One possible solution was to include the school mini-project in the school's yearly plans, which was partly financed by the ministry and partly from local budgets. In an environment such as Kragujevac where there are strategies in place for the improvement of Romani education, it might be possible to rely on local action plans related to that area, and activities can be initiated.

For the first time in Serbia, RTAs were introduced into the primary school setting, and over three years of the project, they played a very important role in its implementation, as a bond between Romani families and the school, but also as a direct support to children in the educational process. In addition to this, their role was to find (in collaboration with teachers) new models for improving cooperation between schools and Romani families, which would contribute to Romani children's school achievements. Accepting the Romani family as a very important factor in creating a positive atmosphere and in developing Romani students' engagement in education was very significant because it gives a new perspective to marginalized Romani families.

The role and responsibility of the school in educating children coming from disadvantaged environments has to be much larger and more appropriate. The teaching program must be appropriate to the needs of Romani children, and raising the Romani family's engagement in education should be a task for the teaching staff and school's professional service. Using a child-centered methodology made improving cooperation with marginalized families easier. Building on that base, one way to achieve better cooperation between schools and Romani families was by acquainting school staff with the Romani way of life: Romani language, culture, traditions and customs. This can be done by including Romani parents in some kind of school or extracurricular activity, and by the school's cooperating with Romani associations and representatives of the Romani community. There are many kinds of activities which could broker the relationship between school and the Romani family; this, in turn, will raise the communities' integrity, self-respect and motivation for the education of their children.

Romani parents and their active participation was the most important element in the whole project. Informing parents about activities while focusing on their role in the process was extremely important in integrating them as an integral, equal part of the school while not using authoritarian methods. A level of informality was important in establishing a comfortable atmosphere, and good communication was achieved through participation of RTAs, with whom families feel more free to express their issues regarding the school. Such an atmosphere was present during school project activities, so parents felt comfortable and relaxed as if they were working with their children in their own homes.

Finally, the openness of schools in cooperating with the Roma NGO sector is very important. It provides the opportunity to pool resources from various places, to glean positive examples of practice leading to an all-inclusive goal: high-quality, full emancipation of the Romani population. This is especially true for children in the most important segment of their social life – education.

Some suggestions for improving the implementation of a school mini-project are to:
- create a positive atmosphere in the school for including marginalized families.
- create an implementation plan. Those activities would be closely connected to the participant group's expectations.
- directly involve the beneficiaries (parents, children) in the organizational process of the mini-project by giving them responsibility.
- take into consideration the specifics of the environment where activities will be implemented when choosing the model for inclusion, choice of activities, and the way to motivate parents.
- build a good level of communication between parents and the school (teaching staff) and help teachers to understand each parent individually in order to best know which segments of the schooling process would be best for each person.

Author: Božidar Nikolić works as a primary school Roma teacher assistant and as a mentor to training RTAs locally and nationally. He has been active in the education of Romani children for the last seven years, and is a trainer in several disciplines.

NOTES

1 Mihajlovic, M. (2000). "Cooperation with marginalized families – Characteristics of marginalized families", *Introduction to compensational education,* Society for Improvement of Roma Settlements, Belgrade, p. 94.

2 According to the census conducted in 1991, and to other research on Roma conducted over the last few years (from 2000 to 2006), 31.5% of the Roma population did not have permanent jobs, while 46% of the majority population was economically active with only 7.4% of them being unemployed. The proportion of Roma who receive state support is also very high, at 66%, while that figure is only 6% for the majority population. The average income for Roma is only 25 euros a month, which is a third of the average salary in Serbia. See: Sindik, N., Vladisavljev, N.; Kiers, J. (2004). *Report on Council of Europe Project: "Roma access to Employment in Serbia and Montenegro (Serbia)",* available at: **http://www.coe.int/T/DG3/ RomaTravellers/stabilitypact/activities/SaM/ romaacesssemploymentsam_en.asp/**

3 Equal Chances is the name of the project that was implemented in Serbia in the framework of the Roma Education Initiative.

4 Ilic, R. & Ilic, E. (2000). *Roma in Kragujevac,* RIC, Kragujevac.

5 Aiming to obtain a database of all Romani school children, RTAs worked on that database during the project activity – cooperation with family and local community.

6 Questionnaire – survey for elementary schools students and students' parents in Serbia, MPS (school year 2004–2005). Amongst others was a question about national belonging.

7 These statement is taken from monthly reports written by RTAs about their engagement in the Equal Chances project (January, school year 2002–2003).

8 All REI projects included ongoing external evaluation. All Final Evaluation reports can be found on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

9 Data were taken from teachers' regular collection of arrivals of all students' parents to regular parents' meetings or extra visits to school. This data can be found in every grade book of the homeroom teacher.

10 These include OSI network education programs plus the FOSS-funded Neither Black nor White program, which advocates anti-bias education.

11 Records about participation of Romani families in the project are made according to the free estimate of the school team, because of incomplete documentation, as well as the mentioned issues with assimilation. Part of the report on project activities in Grades 1, 3 and 4 does not exist (it was lost), so data are probably not entirely precise.

5.2.2 Promoting Vocational Skills and
Life-long Learning among Parents of School-aged Children

By: Jasna Štalman, team leader, Grawe Hrvatska Insurance Company, Beli Manastir, Croatia

- **Participants:** adults ranging in age from 18 to 45+ years;
- **Supports:** social relations, capacity building;
- **Partners:** Roma Society in Beli Manastir, the Open Society Institute – Croatia, Center for Political Development of Small Business (CEPOR).

CONTEXT

The Baranja region of Croatia falls into the group of geographically, politically, and socially vulnerable areas, with a high rate of unemployment. Although almost all citizens have difficulties finding employment, this is especially difficult for people with a low educational status, the long-term unemployed, young people without work experience and the elderly. The Romani population is generally part of this hard-to-employ category, due to a lack of competitive skills (technical and higher education, work experience, etc.) and ever-present prejudices.

The project in this study concerned the Romani settlement of Palača in Beli Manastir, Baranja region. According to Roma NGO sources, unemployment among the Romani population in Beli Manastir exceeded 90%, and the majority lived off social assistance.[1] Before the war in 1991, a significant number of Roma were employed in the agricultural and food industry.[2] Social relations between the Roma and the rest of society were generally better than now. Although the Roma lived in separate settlements and were placed in separate classes in the school, they were not completely isolated and there were no major negative incidents or criminal acts against the Romani community.

The roots of the renewed discriminatory relationship were prejudice, along with political resolutions made by the non-minority population during the war and in the years immediately thereafter. The majority of people, including the Roma, who were in the Baranja area during the war (while Baranja was under Serbian rule), were not welcome by those who repatriated after reintegration. They received unequal treatment, and it was often more difficult for them to find employment.

Currently, a very small number of Roma are employed, which leads to a number of issues. Besides the basic hurdles to employment (low educational levels, and unrecognized qualifications and skills), prejudices on behalf of employers are also evident. Although they had a right to education, the majority of Roma did not have the opportunity to attend school to learn a trade, and education was not traditionally recognized as a priority. Furthermore, as very few owned property, most had to work from an early age, often beside their parents in the agricultural fields. Girls traditionally married young and bore children, or stayed at home doing chores and taking care of younger siblings, while their parents were at work.

In 2004, the Open Society Institute – Croatia launched the pilot project named the Comprehensive Roma Education Program. In working with the children from the Romani settlement, the difficulties confronted when they returned to their community from school (no heating, not enough food, no conditions for maintaining personal hygiene) led to the idea of identifying ways to engage the parents of school children in an adult education program. The sub-project Education to Vocation, Vocation to Employment started in September 2005 and was completed in October 2006. It was coordinated by the Roma Society in Beli Manastir and the Open Society Institute – Croatia in Zagreb.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To increase employment opportunities among unemployed, disadvantaged Roma by providing new skills in an adult educational program.

The educational program took into consideration jobs and trades that were traditionally carried out by Roma, while introducing the idea of tourism as a new resource, in view of making and distributing tourist products and Baranja-Roma specific souvenirs. The project worked within the framework and in alignment with the goals of the Croatian National Program for Roma[3] which aimed to increase the employment rate amongst Roma by improving their skills and qualifications. For the participants, obtaining a formal credential was the first step towards obtaining a job.

Initial survey of resources and identification of trades

At the start of the project, it was important to learn what the Roma were doing, what they wanted to do, their educational attainment levels, hobbies, and what they wanted to learn. To do so, the Roma Society of Beli Manastir in Baranja (hereafter referred to as "the Roma Society") and the project leader surveyed approximately 100 Roma from Beli Manastir. In analyzing the responses, it was concluded that the training should not be too lengthy. Taking into consideration resources and experiences with the Romani community, along with the regional market potential, the project focused on both traditional Romani trades (weaving baskets and fishing nets), traditional occupations of the Baranja region (sewing and tailoring), and the regional potential for developing Romani cultural tourism (pottery).

Great importance was placed on Romani traditions, which was a positive element for the Romani community. The value of the courses offered was threefold: traditional crafts were revived, the participants could learn and/or perfect their skills in these trades that had begun to fade over the years, and the participants would be ready to work independently or as part of the tourism industry. Indeed, many Roma already carried out these activities, but usually on a part-time basis and in the grey economy. Through these courses, seminars, and workshops, they could obtain skills and credentials which would allow them to carry out such services in a fully legitimate way.

Romani and non-Romani beneficiaries

Priority enrolment was granted to the parents whose children were in preschool or elementary school. Also accepted were disadvantaged Roma without children or the means to pay for the courses themselves, but who had the desire to learn in order to increase their chances of finding a job or at least to be able to sew or make things for their own families. Disadvantaged non-Roma were also included in order to encourage synergy, a feeling of equality, and the idea that all present were confronted with similar problems related to unemployment and poverty. The ratio of Roma to non-Roma was 70% to 30% in the sewing course; half and half in the pottery course; 60% to 40% in fishing net-making; and 80% to 20% in basket-weaving.

Application process and contractual agreements

Project organizers held a meeting during which interested persons could obtain basic information about the project. Following this, individual meetings were held with each potential course participant during which the participants filled out a form containing basic data and describing their motivation and needs regarding the particular course. Organizers were careful to explain what the course entailed, what participants would gain from it, and what was expected of them.

In the next meeting a contract was signed between the Roma Society and participants. The Roma Society committed to fulfil all the obligations and services provided in the project, and the course attendees committed to complete the course. It was agreed that should participants drop out without a valid reason, they would have to pay for the course, in an amount specified beforehand. This type of contractual agreement was something new for many participants, and at the beginning of the second meeting several people backed out of the project. This was viewed as positive, because it meant that those who remained understood the value of the project. In subsequent courses, the same participants actually requested contracts. This way of working created feelings of greater self-importance and self-respect.

Vocational courses on sewing and tailoring

In the Croatian school system, there were vocational courses that lasted three years, for which an elementary school education was a prerequisite. The course offered to the participants did not require any previous education, and, upon

completion, the students received an official certificate that could be recorded in their work history. This had great implications since the participants lacked the formal education to access mainstream vocational courses.

The courses were organized with co-funding from the Center for Policies of Small Business Development (CEPOR), which donated all the necessities for sixteen participants. This included tuition costs, all the tools and materials, and transportation to and from the Bagatin Trade School in Osijek, where instruction took place twice a week. There were also weekly practical sessions in the Community Center in Beli Manastir. The formal instructor was a professional employee of the Bagatin Trade School. The practical sessions were overseen by an instructor's assistant of Romani origin. At the end of the course, the participants were given all the tools and clothes they made (two blouses, two dresses, and two pairs of pants). The sixteen participants (of whom eleven were Roma) successfully completed the course in two groups, the first from September 2005 to February 2006, and the second from February 2006 to June 2006.

In addition to hands-on courses, the project also included educational workshops. For example, the women attending the sewing courses participated in a panel discussion on empowering women. The invited guest was Sanja Sarnavaka, president of the women's group B.A.B.E. in Zagreb.

Courses on pottery making, and basket and fishing-net weaving

The development of continental tourism in Baranja is on the rise, and the idea behind this part of the project was to increase skills for producing tourist products among Roma. In this way, they could become directly or indirectly employed in the tourism sector. These activities were financed by the Royal Norwegian Embassy.

Courses began in February 2006 and lasted eight months. The following courses were provided simultaneously: pottery making (basic and advanced) in the Asztalos ceramics workshop in Beli Manastir, under the guidance of a skilled ceramics and pottery artisan, and courses on basket and fishing-net weaving in the Beli Manastir Community Center, organized by the Roma Society. Both courses were attended twice a week. The pottery course was attended by eight students, and four also took the advanced course. The course on weaving baskets and fishing nets was attended by seven students. They were instructed by a well respected basket and net maker, and the course assistants were Roma.

The educational program on tourism involved one seminar and two day-long interactive workshops. The sessions were entrusted to a team of experts from the Institute for Tourism in Zagreb, under the leadership of Dr Renata Tomljenović.

Positive media coverage

The project was well documented in the mass media. Croatian television showed five different programs about the project: three of them on a program for national minorities called *Prizma,* one on the evening show *Brisanom prostoru,* one on the program *Good Morning Croatia,* and another on the afternoon program *Life Alive.* In addition to television, three radio programs were recorded for Radio Osijek and Croatian Radio. A program about the entire project was broadcast on the local radio during a program for Roma called *Djelem, Djelem.*

Journalists were informed about all aspects of the project, and articles appeared in a number of publications.[4] The project was also presented in the book *Framework for Rural Development*, printed by the non-governmental organization Slap from Osijek, and at the 2nd International Symposium on the Corridor 5c highway linking Central Europe to the Adriatic Sea.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

All participants successfully completed the courses. Three of the participants (one Romani man, one Romani woman, and one non-Romani woman) were given special awards for completing three different courses. All graduates were given Certificates of Appreciation for their participation in the project.

Unfortunately, completion of the course did not lead to full-time employment for any of the participants. However, one of the graduates became a course assistant for another group, and another was promised part-time work with a craftsman. Out of the sixteen who completed the sewing course, two purchased sewing machines for home use and could use them for informal income. Indeed, most of the women preferred to work from home or take on part-time work.

Participation in the course also encouraged some individuals to continue their education. For example, a young woman and man returned to complete their elementary schooling, and another started high school. The positive experiences of the project were shared within the community, and the participants' friends, relatives and neighbours were inspired to sign up for future courses.

Each course was evaluated positively by the participants in terms of course content, the work of the teachers, project leader, and assistants. In response to the question whether the courses should be repeated or whether something new should be introduced, the participants answered positively, particularly asking for computer science courses.

REFLECTION

At the beginning of the project, there were doubts and suspicions among potential participants. They struggled to see the value of the courses and suspected that others only wanted to profit from them. However, after the first round of courses, people began to stop project staff on the streets to ask when the next course was starting.

At the beginning of the project, it was important to explain exactly what the participants could gain in the material sense (such as products and tools), that they would be partners in something concrete (respected through contracts), and that upon completion of the course they would get titles to enter into the work books at the Bureau of Employment. This helped to overcome initial difficulties in attracting the first participants. As soon as they were convinced that no one was trying to mislead them, the obstacles were removed. In this regard, the project reinstated the lost trust among Roma for the potential goodness of various projects and research and for institutions and people in general. The formal signing of contracts was also strategic in promoting mutual responsibilities, respect and self-esteem.

The project also integrated disadvantaged non-Roma into the project for inter-ethnic synergy. In doing so, mutual distrust was mitigated in a work environment among people that had the same prior issues. At the end of the project, the sewing groups decided to celebrate having completed their course by going to a restaurant. The dinner was only for the course attendees and not their spouses. They all sat together at one table, relaxed and happy. For some of them, it was the first time they had been with non-Roma in a restaurant, where they were treated and served equally. They became friends, and asked each other questions such as: "Now that we are done with this course, will you still greet me in the street?"

Course attendees were also engaged in decision-making processes, which gave them a feeling of self-importance. For example, they decided whether to make an exhibition of their works, how to celebrate the end of the courses, who would speak on television and radio programs, and whose photographs would be displayed. The positive learning experience and use of methods such as decision making, mutual respect through contracts, and multi-ethnic learning environments contributed to more positive attitudes towards social initiatives and programs among local Roma In this way, it may be said that the project helped to reinforce the value of formal knowledge and a diploma.

The project also succeeded in engaging different institutions, as well as non-Roma, in activities to improve the living conditions among Roma. For example, the local government of Beli Manastir supported the project by lending sewing machines and providing training from the Business Center. Likewise, the Faculty of Economics Graduate Department of Business in Osijek donated seven computers to the Roma Society, and the county of Jagodnjak, with a large population of Roma, expressed interest in collaborating with the Roma Society to address problems confronting local Roma.

In closing, it must be emphasized, that although the project did not result in formal employment, it did contribute to greater self-respect, discovery of new talents and a sense of increased self-esteem. At the same time, the project strengthened awareness about the value of Roma's own traditions and culture. It improved communication between the Roma and other citizens of Beli Manastir through cooperative learning and work, and led to greater motivation for the education of children and adults. By working with the parents of children in preschool and elementary school projects, there was greater participation and stronger inclusion of Romani children into these activities as well.

In the meanwhile, it is hoped that further continuation and development of educational and life-long learning initiatives will increase entrepreneurial opportunities among Roma, such as those related to the development of continental tourism in Baranja.

Author: A long-time resident of Beli Manastir, with an interest in enterprise development, Jasna Štalman was the project leader for CEPOR, which worked in collaboration with the Roma Society of Beli Manastir on this project.

NOTES

1   Statistics from the Roma Union of Beli Manastir, Baranja.
2   The Labour Bureau does not keep records of ethnicity or nationality, so there are no official statistics regarding the employment of Roma.
3   Government of the Republic of Croatia, Office for National Minorities, *National Program for the Roma:* working material, Zagreb, March 2003, available at: **http://www.hidra.hr/Dokumenti/SDRH/Nacionalni_porgram_za_Rome.pdf** (in Croatian); Government of the Republic of Croatia, Office for National Minorities, *National Program for the Roma,* Zagreb, October 2003, available at: **http://www.vlada.hr/ default.asp?gl=200304100000003**.
4   Articles appeared in publications *Glas Slavonije, Vecernji list, Osjecki dom, Baranjski dom* and *Novosti.*

5.3 Policy and Systemic Change

In summary, the documentation studies in this chapter give rise to a number of implications for policy and systemic change.
- Meaningful parental involvement does not just happen. Educators at all levels, teachers, schools directors, Roma teacher assistants, pedagogues, and government officials need to be trained on the value and importance of family involvement in supporting school success for Romani students.
- Policies, systems, and/or programs focusing on enhancing school success for Romani children need to include respectful partnerships with Romani families. In order to achieve this, anti-bias training and an understanding of Romani culture and history should be provided to all school staff.
- Similar to the implications in the previous chapter, Roma teacher assistants have a significant role to play in enhancing the involvement of Romani families in education at all levels. Policies, systems and/or programs to support RTAs will promote the inclusion of Romani families in education.
- As many Roma in the region do not have the primary education needed for traditional vocational training programs, policies, systems and/or programs that seek to create more seamless access to vocational training are needed.
- The experiences of the Croatian REI team highlight the importance of graduating from vocational training with a credential. Within the region, credentialing lends legitimacy which, in turn, should help to enhance employment opportunities.

CHAPTER 6
MULTICULTURALISM,
ROMIPEN AND ANTI – BIAS EDUCATION

6.1 Introduction

Educators are members of society and are influenced by widely held social values and beliefs. Therefore, they must be constantly aware of social attitudes and their impact on students' academic success and social/emotional well-being. The documentation studies included in this chapter emphasize the importance of inclusive and respectful attitudes as contributing to the success of Romani students. They also highlight the need to educate educators about inclusive practice, as well as Romani history and culture.

In addition, the creation of educational materials inclusive of Roma promotes student success. Not only is students' self-esteem enhanced by seeing themselves reflected in what they use at school, but also it is an opportunity for others to gain an appreciation of Romani history and culture. An inclusive learning environment ensures all students are reflected in the materials used. The Serbian REI team emphasized the importance of producing materials incorporating Romani history and culture.

6.2 Documentation Studies

- *Tatjana Vonta,* "Changing Teachers' Practices for the Integration of Romani Children" (Slovenia);
- *Refika Mustafić,* "Ciganeska: an Introduction to Romani History, Language and Culture" (Serbia).

6.2.1 Changing Teachers' Practices for the Integration of Romani Children

By: Tatjana Vonta, Ph.D., Head, Developmental Research Center for Pedagogical Initiatives at the Educational Research Institute, Ljubljana and Assistant Professor at the Faculty of Education, Koper

- **Participants:** adults;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family-community involvement, capacity building, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step, participating schools.

CONTEXT

The school stands and falls with its teacher. (Adolf Disterweg 1790–1866)

The project Integration of Romani Children into Mainstream Education (REI Slovenia) was implemented by the Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives Step by Step, at the Educational Research Institute in Ljubljana, Slovenia under the auspices of the Roma Education Initiative (REI) from September 2002 until August 2005.

At the start of the project, the education of Romani children in Slovenia was hampered by several issues. Firstly, the majority of Romani children came to Grade 1 without knowledge of the Slovenian language and without prior preschool education. At the same time, teachers did not receive appropriate support and training on bilingual, multicultural and inclusive education during their pre-service and in-service training. Drop-out rates were very high and most Romani students finished their education at Grades 5 or 6 with literacy skills on the level of Grades 2 or 3. This was due, mostly, to the fact that standards for Romani children to pass classes were lower than for other students. In general the standards applied to Roma were comparable to those for children with mental disabilities in "special schools". Historically, in all schools where the project was implemented, only one Romani student per year or every other year finished the obligatory eight grades.

Slovene official policy called for integration[1] but in practice, some schools still operated segregated classrooms. This was done with the conviction that in segregated classrooms children would overcome language and social skills issues more easily, and build the skills necessary for school success. Schools even received additional money from the Ministry of Education (MOE) for operating these classrooms. As was the practice, schools would send a description of the issue to the MOE, and the MOE would decide on a case-by-case basis how much money the school would receive for additional professional help, which was, actually only for the salary of teachers of segregated classrooms. Such segregation appeared in different forms, for instance separate buildings for Romani classes, separate classrooms for Romani children, and special groups of Romani students during academic lessons.

General attitudes of teachers and non-Romani parents towards integration were negative, especially in the Dolenjska, Posavje and Bela Krajina regions where the project took place.[2] At the same time there were increasing political demands from both outside and inside the country, from some political parties and civil society representatives in Slovenia to address the Romani situation, namely high unemployment, illiteracy and lack of formal education and extreme poverty.[3] In this framework, equity in education was also one of the main issues demanding appropriate action.

The Integration of Romani Children into Mainstream Education project was designed holistically, focusing on activities in preschools, primary schools and other educational organizations (e.g. education centers for adult education) in Romani settlements. The three participating municipalities in the Dolenjska, Posavje and Bela Krajina regions were also included. The approach included cooperation with governmental and non-governmental institutions and individuals who were in any way connected to Romani issues. This was considered key to the project's success, since integration of Romani children required an approach beyond the school level only.

The staff and students of three schools in the Dolenjska, Posavje and Bela Krajina regions were involved in the project. School A was situated in a relatively large village and attended by children from the surrounding villages and settlements,

including children from a nearby Romani settlement. A preschool operated within the school, and the school employed 30 teachers. During the REI project, no Romani children attended preschool; activities for them were carried out in the Romani settlement. Before the REI project, Romani children in school A and C were integrated into regular primary classes during the first three to four years, though teachers placed Romani students into separate, special classes when it came to academic subjects, separating Romani children from other children.

School B was one of two schools in a smaller town attended by children from the town's surroundings and nearby Romani settlements. A preschool also operated in school B, and the school employed 60 teachers. During the REI-supported project, some Romani children were attending this preschool. Before the project, integration of Romani children into regular classrooms relied on traditional pedagogic approaches. This was one of the reasons for the lack of success and the belief that segregated education was more successful. However, in this school Romani children did not only attend a separate classroom, but a separate wooden building. This was meant only for Romani children and stood next to the neat and proper school building, meant for other children.

School C was also situated in a larger village and included Romani children from different nearby settlements. The school had 27 teachers. Before the beginning of the project, Romani children were integrated into regular classes but when issues arose they were placed in separate classes for academic subjects.[4]

During the project, all schools in Slovenia were implementing the national reforms based on similar goals and principles as the Step by Step (SbS) methodology. The main difference between the two approaches lies on the implementation and operative level, with Step by Step placing greater emphasis on democratic values and application of democratic principles during the process of education. All teachers in the first triad of primary school were trained in the framework of the reforms.

In school A, preschool and primary school teachers had begun implementing Step by Step methodology several years before the project and the national reforms. Later, they also employed methods of active learning and teaching for critical thinking. In addition to attending seminars and workshops, they carried out regular weekly meetings among preschool and primary school teachers and they were active in networking among preschool teachers, primary school teachers and school directors in the Step by Step network.[5] Before the project, teachers in school B had only taken part in trainings related to the national reforms and had no experience whatsoever with Step by Step methodology. School C had been implementing Step by Step methodology for several years, though cooperation with Step by Step was canceled with the implementation of the new national curriculum. It is believed that this is due to the fact that Step by Step methodology requires more engagement of teachers than the national curriculum.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To change the practice of teachers in participating REI schools, to introduce systematic professional development to support teaching strategies and opportunities among teachers for mutual learning and exchange of practices to support the integration of Romani children into mainstream education.

With this in mind, the project introduced innovations, calling for a change in teachers and their work. In this case, the basic change in the teaching and learning culture was a shift from teacher-centered approaches to child-centered approaches. The project was built upon the premise that quality changes in the education of Romani children can only be achieved in quality schools. According to Fullan[6] reliable changes can only be achieved by changing the teaching and learning culture and by changing the culture of the whole school. The project also replaced the adjusted, lower standards of knowledge, which were used for Romani children before the project, with uniform standards.

The project paid special attention to approaches for foreign language learning and for the introduction of Roma teacher assistants into class work. The pedagogic framework was provided using Step by Step methodology and the ISSA pedagogical standards.[7]

Activities for professional development

The majority of professional development activities were held in schools. In some cases teachers from all three sites were brought together at one of the schools. There was an attempt to unite professional development and lifelong learning processes in the context of the school where teachers work. All teachers received a certain amount of points for each training session attended, according to the national professional development regulations. The points helped to promote them in their professional rank. In addition, preschool teachers and those in the first triad of the primary school who implemented the integration model in their classrooms received additional points for each year they cooperated in the project. For the teachers it was a good opportunity to gain points. Indeed, for the majority of them, it was the main motivation for being involved in the project.

1. Training workshops

The project tried to involve all teachers and supporting staff in different training seminars, but it must be recognized that teachers implementing the integrated model were burdened with more reporting and five times more training than their colleagues in the same schools. On average, those teachers received one additional day of training per month delivered by the Slovenian Step by Step core team. However, other teachers in preschools and upper grades in all three sites received training in specific themes, such as: Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking, anti-bias for adults, Romani culture, and School Improvement, amongst others.

The Center did not have mechanisms to motivate teachers for training and professional development other than points for participation. At the beginning of the project, all schools were asked to sign a letter of intent where the obligations of schools and the Center were defined. School directors informed staff about it and usually tried to find some way to support the project and to motivate teachers.

For teachers implementing the integration model

One anti-bias training session: This training sought to sensitize teachers for social justice, to make them aware of their own biases and to offer them tools to overcome them. The emphasis was on how to recognize biases in everyday life and how to include these contexts into class work. In this way participants could come to understand that the dominant culture can stimulate myths and stereotypes, which are harmful for the child's learning. By developing tools and methods that would connect the child with Romani society, conditions would be created to make Romani children feel welcome in school.

One session on Romani culture and history: The training on Romani history and culture was done by a Romani representative who is a student of philosophy and sociology at the University of Ljubljana. His training touched upon the reasons and directions of the Roma's migratory patterns in history and how and when they came to Slovenia. It also touched upon some characteristics of culture, traditions and language. At the end he talked about the Romani situation in contemporary society and pointed out some differences in their understanding of life.

Two training sessions on bilingualism: Here the focus was on understanding the need to deepen children's knowledge of their mother tongue. This was a requirement for developing and learning a second language. It is also required for a holistic approach to literacy instruction and helps with context and meaning.

Six training sessions on child-centered approaches in inclusive classrooms: In this segment, the following basic concepts of Step by Step methodology were addressed:
- using child-centered methods that focus on the individual needs of every child in the context of holistic development;
- understanding the influences of the physical and social environment on a child's learning, and the need to create a functionally and culturally adequate environment for Roma and other children that would stimulate choices and children's independent learning;
- considering the individual dimensions of each child and adult when entering a specific learning situation;
- creating partnerships with parents and identifying adequate methods for the active involvement of parents and community representatives in the life of the classroom and the school;

- planning educational work based on systematic monitoring of the child's progress;
- seeing the teacher as stimulator of the child's learning, with the responsibility to create a community of students and acceptance of lifelong learning.

Five training sessions on active methods of teaching and learning:
These involved methods to stimulate the possibilities for choices, independence, cooperative learning, taking responsibility and developing critical thinking in the process of learning.

For school administration:
The second block of training was meant for the schools' administrative workers. All training for teachers implementing the model was also open for administrative workers, but they only participated partially. Overall, administrative staff from school A participated in these trainings more frequently than others. All administrative staff were trained for improving the quality of the school by creating conditions for the integration of Romani children. Different meetings and activities for school directors within the Step by Step network were organized four times per year, giving them the opportunity to exchange their experiences with other school directors. The head of the SbS Center, who was at the same time the REI project manager, facilitated these meetings.

For other teachers:
The third set of training was meant for other teachers at the participating schools. In this way, almost all of the teachers in higher grades received training on Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking, in view of implementing active learning methods in their subjects.

2. Network Connections
During the project, all teachers implementing the model were also included in the activities of the Step by Step school network, which organizes professional meetings with other teachers in order to exchange and upgrade experiences and gain new knowledge. During the project, they had at least four such opportunities. Most of the teacher meetings in the network focused on the topics of quality standards, teaching literacy, critical reflection and keeping a professional portfolio.

3. Monitoring and Mentoring
Monitoring involved meetings with teachers and supporting school staff (school directors, deputy directors, coordinators, school pedagogues, psychologists, etc.) to discuss plans and reports on activities carried out. Mentoring activities focused on quality improvements in the teaching processes in the classrooms. The mentoring process was mainly provided on an individual level. On average, each teacher received individual support from a mentor approximately four times in one school year. The mentoring work was based on direct monitoring in classrooms with the help of the ISSA standards. Both monitoring and mentoring processes were provided by master teacher trainers from the Center.

Teachers from school A received the largest amount of individual professional help. Some teachers from school B received less individual professional help than teachers in schools A and C. It was more difficult to establish a mentoring contact with them because they regarded the master teacher trainers as an external control rather than a positive support. A possible reason for this phenomenon is the fact that teachers in schools A and C had some experiences working with master teacher trainers before the project started. At the same time, it should be understood that opening the doors of the classrooms for an outsider was something new for the teachers. In the past they only had classroom visits from inspectors. It was difficult for them to understand that somebody would visit their classroom and observe them at work with the intention of helping them in developing their teaching skills. In schools A and C teachers had more experiences with these kinds of visits during the implementation of SbS methodology. This kind of mentoring was also used to involve Roma teacher assistants into classroom life. Some aspects of the Roma teacher assistants' work was also discussed in group mentoring meetings.

Group mentoring meetings offered another mode of mentoring, which involved the mentors and the whole teams of teachers and Roma teacher assistants, and administrative workers at the school level implementing the model. These meetings usually

took place on a monthly basis. However, contact among mentors, school administration and the school's project leaders was made on a weekly basis, sometimes only by phone. In such meetings, different issues related to the education of all Romani children, and not only in classes implementing the integration model, were discussed. In all three schools, this contact was based on the feeling of mutual help, although it took one year to develop this feeling of cooperation at school B. In most cases, success with the planned activities or solving some issues together helped to create more positive relationships.

School mentoring was also provided. Mentors were regularly and frequently present at schools, on average, more than twice a month. According to mentors, such visits should have been more frequent – at least once a week.

Mentors also played an active role in connecting the school with the non-Romani and Romani communities. This took a lot of their time. On average, there were about 30 such meetings in each community during the project. Therefore, mentoring support was used more intensively than originally planned at the beginning of the project. It was also thought that Roma teacher assistants would represent a bridge between the school and Romani communities. In reality, however, the Roma teacher assistants changed often during the project, since they were employed as public workers in the framework of the Regional Employment Office and their work was limited to several months. In addition, some Roma teacher assistants had conflicts with one part of the Romani community or, in some cases, schools didn't have Roma teacher assistants. In cases where Roma teacher assistants were involved, the mentors helped them and teachers to plan and analyze activities.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In all sites, segregated classes were closed down, and in most classes the quality of teaching was improved. According to the evaluation with ISSA pedagogical standards, all teachers involved in the project, except one in primary school B, changed their practice. Likewise, all Romani children in all three schools were integrated into Grades 1 to 4.[8]

In terms of the quality of teachers' work, at the end of the first year, teachers from school A received the highest scores on ISSA standards, and their results also continued to improve in the second year. Teachers from school C made the biggest progress in terms of quality when measured from the first to second year, while teachers from school B made almost no progress between the two assessments. In general, it could be said that those teachers who scored highly at the beginning of the project made better progress throughout the project than teachers who did not.[9]

Reasons for this may be a lack of knowledge and skills hindering progress, and individual teacher's reluctance to engage in professional development. Part of the responsibility can be given to existing school culture, which does not encourage teachers in their professional development. The old paradigm of school management is still deeply entrenched in schools, despite training. The final reason for such results is probably the general attitude of teachers in school B regarding the model of integration, of the project and of Step by Step methodology, which required greater engagement than the implementation of national reforms.

There was a connection between teachers' achievement on ISSA standards and the progress of Romani students in their classrooms. Teachers who were least successful on ISSA standards had more difficulties supporting the development of children in different fields than teachers with a higher quality. It should be noted, about half of the children who had teachers who scored highly actually made progress in less than half of all developmental fields. This indicates children's progress is not only dependent on the quality of the teacher. It is likely that the Roma teacher assistant also contributed to the progress.[10] Other important results and changes at the school level are shown in Appendix 2 on page 97.

The project brought teachers, who felt the problem and the need to change the education of Roma, closer together.

Comment made by project participant

Toward the end of the first year of the project, the project organizers thought it important to have an idea of the teachers' opinions (in schools A and B)[11] on their personal and professional development. The project manager held focus group

discussions with teachers and administrative staff from the two schools. The results showed that teachers from school A changed their expectations of Romani children, and felt they had become more tolerant, with a greater connection to the children, their parents and other teachers. They also understood the importance of knowing the language for a child's progress. They learned to appreciate small achievements, to think from the point of view of a Romani child, to understand the importance of the mentor's help and of professional development, especially if it was in the school's vision.

Reasons given for their progress were: team spirit, mentorship, the fact that they internalized the methodology and were being praised by the mentors, and that they became a model for other teachers, especially in the SbS network activities. According to teachers in school B, the project contributed to an understanding of a child's perspective of the learning process. They also stated that the project helped them to be innovative, as well as gain new knowledge in spite of issues and to transfer this knowledge into their teaching practice. They also learned about language learning and active methods of teaching. The project contributed to them overcoming their biases and to better understanding the need for integration. They are now more open to new things and feel better connected among themselves and with parents.

We talk differently with each other and we started connecting ourselves to other institutions during the project.

Comment from a teacher

At these meetings project organizers also sought suggestions for improving the project. In school A, teachers stated they did not have a clear picture of the expectations. The fact is that during the project, many activities and obligations were added and changed and that caused them problems. They also regretted that they did not continue with implementation in higher grades after the project ended and that they were left alone in their work.

In school B, they warned about too many new aspects included in the project, which represented too many challenges for them. They felt the expectations were not clear at the beginning, and that organizers should have taken into account that they did not know what such a project really meant. Additionally, they felt that they should have been included in more decisions concerning the project. They especially cautioned regarding decisions about the educational framework for Romani children,[12] because they believed that the project leaders had no experience with the education of Roma. It was also stated that more time should be spent on preparing the school and the parents for changes, and that there were too many training sessions in a short period of time. Likewise, the project should have lasted longer since it ended just when the school and project mentors became fully adjusted to each other and started cooperating well.

One of the teachers mentioned, "It is important to reach a consensus with the school's management and to be ready for change," while another stated, "the project should be supported by those who have the power". The last statement is definitely aimed at school management and the school's policy. This school also highlighted the issue of sustainability after the project ended. Unfortunately the project was not able to involve Roma teacher assistants in these meetings, since all who were involved in the project had to leave the schools due to the system of their employment.

REFLECTION

The project showed that child-centered approaches provide a pedagogic basis for inclusive classrooms, which in turn contributes to quality education and academic success for Romani children in a desegregated environment. It was also observed that Romani children made better progress in classes using the child-centered methodology. The external evaluation confirmed this trend.[13] This also supports the thesis that the integration of Romani children is only possible in classes where the teacher employs very high quality child-centered approaches and has a humanistic attitude towards all children.

Likewise, the project supported the notion that the culture of teaching and learning can only be changed when it is accompanied by a change in the school's culture. The school management and teachers form the school culture, while management can do the most by creating conditions and forming stimulating relationships. Indeed, the project showed that a school's positive attitude towards changes is an important factor of success. The school's attitude may be influenced

by the past experience with a specific pedagogic concept, the general attitudes in the hosting environment, as well as the school's policy. In terms of the wider concept of school politics, professional development in Slovenia still stimulates the teachers on the basis of what they do mainly outside the classroom and not in the classroom.[14] In any case, success requires supportive conditions on the school level, which should be created before the beginning of the project. These conditions can influence the success of activities and help to avoid misunderstandings.

In addition, it is important that adequate attention be given to informing teachers about what implementation of the project means. This would help to prepare for the challenges of action research and the many adaptations those carrying out the implementation must undergo. Such initiatives should also identify how to involve teachers more pro-actively in the project, rather than just at the execution level. While some teachers felt left-out, those who had a better understanding of child-centered approaches and were already realizing them were more actively involved.

There is no doubt that the success of such innovations is facilitated by creating conditions for professional development, which go beyond knowledge transfer in seminars to include other systematic ways for creating educational opportunities among teachers. The project may have been more successful if other ways of educating teachers were introduced, especially on the school level. For example, a school with a good team of mentors would have a great influence on the process. In this project, mentors were truly valuable, but they were at least 100 km away from the schools, which made communication more burdensome and caused some complications.

The project also showed that teachers require a certain amount of time for the implementation of the child-centered approach, which was a complete innovation for them. Here it is important to note that the training sessions were not only about understanding and getting to know the new approaches, but about changing teaching practices. For some teachers this was also an innovation, especially in comparison to old paradigms of teacher trainings, where only the attendance mattered and it was not important how you used the materials covered in your classroom. The new approach definitely requires more efforts from the teacher, including the capability to reflect on one's own teaching practice and the willingness to accept help and support from the school or from the outside.

For other schools looking to carry out this kind of project, support could be even more efficient if a mentor and later a team of mentors at their own school were to be identified so that the teachers had constant support in changing their teaching practices. The teachers would also need to be open to such a team. The level of trust could be even lower than that which was encountered during this project, especially if the school culture does not support mutual professional help among colleagues. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that establishing a team of mentors is a difficult and long-lasting process, but it would allow the process to reach more teachers, and provide for a more sustainable support system.

At the end of the project, one of the teachers said the following to a mentor: "I realized what the Step by Step methodology means. Until now, you were the scapegoat for all our problems. But what will happen in the future?" This made the Center realize that teachers need more time to be able to implement child-centered approaches and, in turn, how important the motivation of teachers and the autonomy of their decisions are for their cooperation. In the end, the project implementers confess that in the desire to achieve good results they sometimes forgot about how important time is for changes. The pressure to achieve good results was spread from the international level to the national project level, to mentors, schools and to teachers. It is hoped it did not spread to the children as well. It seems that everyone in this chain noticed how challenging the work was.

In conclusion, the project proved that children were more successful in those schools where a number of different factors supporting integration were present. These factors are multilateral and mutually dependent, and include staff that are motivated for change, open to lifelong learning and successful at employing child-centered approaches. Staff must also be sensitive to social justice, acquainted with Romani culture and with team work, and have the support of the administrative workers and Roma teacher assistants in classrooms. To sum up, successful integration of Roma requires the best teachers and a supportive school environment.

Author: Over the last ten years, Tatjana Vonta has been actively involved in the conceptualization, implementation and evaluation of humanistic approaches in early childhood education settings with special attention on quality of education and supporting activities for empowering professional development processes of reflective teachers.

APPENDIX 1

Baseline context of project sites

APPENDIX 1	Site A	Site B	Site C
Romani population in Romani settlements	• 160	• 250	• 70
Children in preschool	• 84	• 157	• 120
Students in primary school	• 313	• 522	• 362
Percentage of Romani students in primary school	• 10.5	• 10.7	• 11
Segregation of Romani children before the project in preschool	• No	• Yes	• No
Segregation of Romani students before the project in primary school	• External differentiation in upper grades by academic subjects	• Segregation in separate classrooms and even separate buildings from first grade on	• External differentiation in upper grades by academic subjects
Implementation of Step by Step methodology in preschool	• Yes	• No	• Yes
Implementation of Step by Step methodology in first triad	• Yes	• No	• No
Training on active methods of teaching and learning for critical thinking	• Yes, almost all teachers	• No	• Yes, some teachers
Implementation of new curricula in primary school for which teachers were trained	• No	• Yes	• Yes
Romani children in preschool	• Only some occasionally	• Only some occasionally	• Only some occasionally
Programs for preschool children in Romani communities	• No	• No	• No
Prejudice towards abilities of Romani children	• Very evident	• Very evident	• Very evident
Experiences with integration	• Very bad	• Very bad	• Very bad
School attendance	• Low	• Low	• Low
School leaving rate	• Very high	• Very high	• Very high
Number of Romani students who finished all grades of compulsory schooling each school year	• Half	• None	• One
Involvement and cooperation of teachers and schools with Romani parents	• From time to time	• No	• No

Changes on the school level during project implementation

APPENDIX 2	At the beginning of the project	At the end of the project
School attendance	• Irregular	• Still irregular but according to teachers' opinions much better than before the project. It is interesting that Grade 2 children attended school more regularly. It is evident that parents and children need time to adapt to new requirements.
Parent involvement	• Not much cooperation with Romani parents and school. Romani parents did not seem interested in cooperation and the majority of teachers never visited Romani settlements where their children lived.	• Parents' involvement took place in schools and Romani communities. There still seemed to be reluctance on behalf of Romani parents, but some of them visited teachers or got involved in classroom activities. All Grade 1 and 2 teachers visited their children and parents in their homes.
Romani language and culture in the school environment	• Some teachers knew a few Romani words and used them in communication with Romani children.	• In almost all classrooms there were labels in two languages; posters in two languages; Roma teacher assistants speaking the Romani language; pictures from Romani settlements; Romani music, and other symbols from Romani culture. Some children from the majority population used some Romani words. Some thematic units were connected with the Romani way of life, and materials from other cultures were included in the classrooms.
Interaction among children	• Romani children play and sit together	• Romani children were still likely to stick together but there were more and more mixed play groups. The first friendships among Romani and non-Romani children were starting.
Roma teacher assistants	• None	• In two schools (A and C) Roma teacher assistants were involved in classroom activities and team work with teachers. Children (Roma and non-Roma) as well as teachers were accommodating and accepting of them.
Team work	• Only in one school (school A)	• In all three schools team meetings with teachers are regularly provided.
Opinions of majority parents towards integration	• Very negative	• This continued to be very negative with only few seeing the benefits of integration.
Opinions of Romani parents towards integration	• Very negative	• This continued to be very negative.

NOTES

1   In 2003, for example, the MOE put out a call for research on integration in education with financial support, and mantled the first commission to prepare a policy document on integration that same year.

2   In contrast, people were more open in the Prekmurje region, for example, since integration processes had already been introduced 50 years ago, though with little impact. This was due mostly to the fact that integration relied on traditional teaching methods, with very little attention to bilingual and multicultural dimensions of teaching, and changes were oriented only towards the school.

3   According to the document "Vlada republike Slovenije, Urad za narodnosti; Osnovne informacije o italijannski narodni skupnosti, madžarski narodni skupnosti, romski etnični skupnosti" (Government of the Republic of Slovenia: Basic information on the Italian national community, Hungarian national community and Roma ethnical community), 2006, p. 25, 98% of Roma in Slovenia are unemployed. Sources that document the illiteracy rate are: Janko Spreizer, J. & Novljan, G. (1998). "Funkcionalna pismenost-skrb vseh" (Functional literacy – our common concern) in: Novljan, S. & Grosman M. (eds.). *Branje - skrb vseh.* Bralno društvo Slovenije, Ljubljana, pp. 27–40; Klopčič, V. (2004). *Evropa, Slovenija in Romi.* (Europe, Slovenia and Roma), Inštitut za narodnostna vprašanja, Ljubljana, p. 10.

4   A baseline context of the schools participating in the project is in Appendix 1 on page 96.

5   The purpose of the SbS network of schools in Slovenia is to foster regular cooperation, exchange of experience and upgrading knowledge and skills related to child-centered approaches in education.

6   Fullan, M.G. (1990). "Staff Development, Innovation and Institutional Development" in Joyce, B. (ed.). *Changing School Culture Through Staff Development, ASCD.*

7   ISSA pedagogical standards can be viewed on the website of the International Step by Step Association available at: **http://www.issa.nl**.

8   Results can be read in the REI Slovenia external evaluation, Nečak Lük, A.; Brejc, M.; Vonta, T. (2005). *Integration of Roma Children into Mainstream Education in Slovenia,* on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

9   The quality of teachers' work was assessed twice annually by mentors who were trained for observation, scoring and using the ISSA pedagogical standards for improving the quality of teachers. In this way their professional development and the effects of the project

activities in terms of changing the learning and teaching cultures was monitored. The procedure was based on direct observation in classrooms, an interview after the observation and an insight into the obligatory pedagogic documentation like plans of activities, documentation of children's work and development etc. After the first observation each year, the mentors and teachers worked together to prepare a plan for professional growth.

10 The Roma teacher assistant was present in classrooms in school A and partially also in school C (part time). In school B, they only managed to find a Roma teacher assistant for preschool, where the general attitude towards Romani integration was better than in the primary school.

11 Schools were chosen where teachers achieved the highest and the lowest level of changes in their teaching strategies measured by ISSA pedagogical standards.

12 It is believed that the teachers in that school thought project leaders should listen to them on how to organize education for Romani children, though they did not elaborate their ideas. In fact, those teachers never totally reconciled with integration based on a child-centered approach which demands from the teacher an internalized approach to individualization and differentiations. Resistance remained because the teachers had had such bad experiences with integration in the past, and did not have enough time to master this approach. Near the end of the REI project, the MOE established an official model with external segregation of Romani children from the first grade on. In this model, Romani children were separated from the majority children in academic subjects.

13 All results included in this study can be found in the REI Slovenia external evaluation available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.

14 It is interesting to note that six months after the project ended, teachers from school A took part in the certification for the ISSA international certificate of quality (International Certification of Excellence) and have reached it in three cases, while such motivation was not noticed in other schools.

6.2.2 Ciganeska: an Introduction to Romani History, Language and Culture

By: Refika Mustafić, Executive Director, Roma Education Center, Niš, Serbia

- **Participants:** adults 18 years of age and older;
- **Supports:** social relations, capacity building, multiculturalism and Romipen;
- **Partners:** Roma Education Center – Niš and participating schools in Niš.

CONTEXT

The Roma Education Center (REC) of Niš was a key partner in the Serbian Roma Education Initiative (REI) project.[1] Amongst other activities, the Center offered workshops with the theme Ciganeska: the history, language and culture of the Roma. The workshops were presented in participating schools in Niš, a city in the south of Serbia with approximately 300,000 inhabitants, 10% of whom are Roma. Of the approximately 30,000 Roma, less than 1% (0.9%) are literate.[2]

In 1999, The Roma Education Center in Niš was registered as an NGO with the following goals: Romani development and emancipation, countering stereotypes, promotion of human rights and improvement of the legal position of Roma, raising cultural consciousness and awareness about the position of Roma, researching the social relationships of the Roma, fostering communication among the Roma in order to develop and strengthen their identity in all areas of social life, and improvement of the education of Romani youth. The NGO was founded by young, educated, highly motivated Roma leaders who had a clear vision of what they wanted to achieve.

REC is an integrated and ethnically mixed organization, located in Niš' Romani neighbourhood. Despite its location, REC serves the entire Romani community of Niš, since children from all existing *mahalas*[3] visit the Center. REC offers transportation services for those who live far away. In addition, REC collaborates with the local Ministry of Education and Science, with whom they have worked on many activities such as affirmative action and strategy development.

At the beginning of Equal Chances in late 2002, the project implementers realized that there were gaps in the project design and believed that there was a need to more closely integrate Romani culture. The idea was to make the lives of Romani children more familiar to their teachers, allowing teachers to be more flexible, understanding, tolerant and friendly towards the children. At that time neither the Roma Education Center nor the other Equal Chances partners knew what shape such a training workshop should take. The introduction of Ciganeska into the project arose from the need among school staff, administration, pedagogues, psychologists, principals, and most importantly, the professors and teachers, to learn something about the Romani children with whom they were working. In the town of Niš 10% of the population was Roma, and yet it was believed that 90% or more of Romani children were not properly integrated into the state educational system. This indicated to project implementers that something within the education system was very wrong. Stereotypes, biases, discrimination, diminished expectations, a lack of governmental understanding and tolerance, and racism abounded.

Ciganeska was written by REC staff (aged 25 to 35) who were dedicated to social justice and to the children who attend the Center. They had worked as teachers in the Center, offering after-school classes. Thus, REC's staff was skilled in working with Romani children and Romani language and culture. Non-Romani teachers had to learn the Romani language as members of the REC staff. This was achieved through interaction with Romani families – through understanding their issues and becoming familiar with the culture and customs of the Romani community.

The Equal Chances project and Ciganeska sought out two primary schools (one of which was predominantly Roma), and one secondary school which had a significant number of Romani children (more than 80% of all Romani secondary school children in Niš had been educated there). In the predominantly Romani primary school, which could have been considered a segregated school, near the Romani neighborhood called Beogradmala, the teachers themselves were also economically disadvantaged, creating a situation where teachers lacked skills to work with children in need.

"Hate graffiti" was found on school walls saying, "We will start action by cleansing the youngest Gypsies". Such statements illustrated how Roma lived under the rules of the majority and the education system reflected this situation. This left little room within the education system for any culture other than the majority and created an atmosphere of misunderstanding and segregation. An attempt was needed to counter socially prevalent misunderstandings and biases in Serbia and to attempt to bridge the gap between the two cultures that lived separately, but side by side. By introducing Ciganeska, the Center wanted to engender positive change among workshop participants as a step toward a more tolerant future. On a more practical level, the workshop provided an introduction to Romani people in order to foster tolerance and understanding among teachers of Romani students.

Moreover, in 2003 the National Strategy for Improving Roma Education in the Republic of Serbia, an official state document created by the Ministry of Education and Science, stated "the Roma do not have the conditions to cherish and express their national identity, to cherish their cultural identity ...educational institutions are not ready to include Roma in education..".[4] As a result, the goals and tasks of the Strategy included: the development of tolerance and the respect of differences; the provision of educational programs which met the needs of Romani children and youth; the provision of qualified staff to work with Romani children; to raise awareness among the professional public and broader social community; the development of educational surroundings based on tolerance and intercultural values; the nourishment of cultural identity, particularly among children and youth; the creation of experts for Romani language and culture; and the integration of elements of Romani culture among those who work with children, etc.[5] Though "recognized" on the state level, the Strategy was never officially adopted, and its implementation depended on the good will of people in positions of power.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: to increase tolerance and understanding among school staff, especially teachers working with Romani children.

Ciganeska workshops

Ciganeska was a series of workshops, each lasting one and a half hours. It provided a new perspective on Romani life and ways of thinking, and included examples from Romani life in order to explain children's specific behaviours in school. With understanding comes awareness, and with awareness comes tolerance. The Center tried to describe children's particular lifestyles or particular codes of behaviour, and to apply that in practice while pointing out its value as much as possible. All workshops were held in the schools where Equal Chances was implemented. This was considered important, as schools had traditionally been locations for professional seminars.

Ciganeska training was offered over the course of the academic year to the schools' educational community. Teachers, school administration, Roma teacher assistants and adults were targeted. Each entered the workshops with different attitudes and levels of awareness. Each workshop had a maximum of 20 people, and it was often difficult to keep attendance steady due to varying degrees of interest.

> **Ciganeska workshop themes**
> 1. Opening workshop
> 2. From myth to history parts 1 and 2
> 3. The history of the Roma parts 1, 2, and 3 (The origin of the Roma, Migrations of the Roma, the Roma in Serbia)
> 4. The concept of marime (the concept of dirty and clean)
> 5. Romani Criss – the system of justice
> 6. The Romani language
> 7. From myth to the national movement
> 8. The art of the Roma
> 9. Traditional Romani crafts and folk customs
> 10. Romani literature
> 11. The culture of the Roma
> 12. The educational culture of the Roma part 1 and 2
> 13. Religion
> 14. Music and dance
> 15. Romani family values.

At the end of the hour and a half session, 15 minutes were given for discussion, comments, questions, and suggestions, as a sort of unwritten evaluation. At the end of the module, which was especially created for each school (the module depended on time, the number of workshops for a certain school and the issues that were most important to talk about),

a more formal evaluation was delivered where the participants answered questions such as: What did you like/dislike? What would you change? Which workshop could you use in your daily teaching? In addition, some space was left for comments. The teachers were not obliged to sign the evaluation.

Participation was mandatory for the staff of schools who participated in Equal Chances, and this was included in a contract which the schools signed. However, full participation by all staff for all sessions was not achieved. Staff was not as engaged in the process because they did not receive any official or written certification that they could use professionally, or for accumulating additional points for higher salaries. This was due to the fact that no state body on the federal or municipal level recognized the need for such a workshop.

Themes and methods

The themes were introduced gradually over time, beginning with basic facts about the lives of Romani families as a way of explaining certain behaviours and ways of thinking. It was important to stress that certain Roma customs were flexible and not written in stone; not all Roma people were the same. Workshops also provided a variety of information from old and traditional to new and modern themes.

For example, the workshop dealing with Romani Criss (the Romani law court system) explored the unwritten rules of what was forbidden, the old system of right and wrong, punishments for bad deeds, and who made decisions about punishments. The workshop also discussed how the law court system influenced the Romani value system. Participants learned about collectivity among Romani people, their fear of being ostracized and the traditional Romani practice of respecting elders. The workshop was conducted by telling a story, and by showing graphics and pictures, which was effective in capturing the audience's attention.

Another workshop on Romani family values discussed the fear of punishment today, the expectation of punishment, and again, respect for elders. This second workshop actually discussed the same issues as those covered in Romani Criss, but in a more contemporary way and using examples from the present. Participants may have noticed the parallels between the old and current law systems and gained insight into Romani children's behaviour. In this way teachers could be more flexible in their reactions to those behaviours. Role play was used by two workshop leaders to represent both Romani and Serbian culture. Each person chose a theme or issue and explained it in terms of his or her culture or family The other person went through the same issue but in a Romani way. The participants often recognized their own families in one of the other cultures. The issues chosen for this workshop were: How do we express love, happiness, respect, and hate? What do we think about education and why do we have certain opinions? What makes us rich and what make us poor? Gender issues were also discussed. The workshops were delivered with passion and directly related to personal experience.

> **Workshop on the culture of the Roma**
> - traditions such as dyeing hands with Henna;
> - traditional Romani oral myths;
> - comparisons with other national mythologies including use in teaching techniques;
> - reading, analysis and distribution of literature;
> - questions and answers.

Another interesting example was when the Serbian trainer explained to the participants that there were three different H's in the Czech language, which Serbians could not tell apart. They were then given a test in which they had to fill in the correct H. They were unable to differentiate between the H's. This example was used to explain the Romani children's experience with the two C's in Serbian. Teachers thus gained personal insight into how Romani children felt when trying to learn Serbian.

Workshops were sometimes delivered interactively, and sometimes as lectures. Teachers were involved at the beginning of each workshop in different ways. For example, sometimes sweets were offered to participants when they entered the room, and it was explained that Roma often welcomed guests to weddings or other celebrations by giving them sweets. It was customary that each of the workshops be followed by music that was appropriate to the topic. Sometimes incense was burnt to represent tradition acquired from India, or candles were lit as they were during certain customs (such as wedding

ceremonies); sometimes participants' fingers were dyed with henna, or a blanket was laid on the floor, and participants would sit down and pretend to sell trinkets just like old Romani women at a wedding. Sometimes peanuts, sunflower, pumpkin or sesame seeds, or apples fried with sugar in a copper pan were offered. Friends of REC would often participate, children would play musical instruments, and sometimes a fortune-teller's tent was constructed where Romani women would tell fortunes. The trainers tried to wear colourful Romani clothes, pantaloons, or other items particular to Roma.

As is clear from the above descriptions, these workshops were unique, in that they took the form of a "show", and were thus entertaining for participants. In order to prepare for all questions and situations that might arise, trainers would rehearse their workshop delivery in front of colleagues. Co-workers tried to prepare trainers by asking unpleasant questions and making derogatory comments, thus readying them for the possibility of similar comments during workshop delivery. It should be noted that remarks that were made in schools were never as unpleasant as those made during rehearsal sessions.

Photograph from the culture of the Roma workshop.

Ciganeska offered many themes which teachers were able to use in the classroom and helped teachers to provide a more diversified portfolio to their students. The national curriculum and textbooks in Serbia did not include anything about Roma literature. If teachers wished to enhance their classes by including Romani content, the workshops provided materials such as myths, legends, riddles and poems from the Romani oral tradition. Unfortunately, there was little space in the Serbian curriculum for teachers to include other materials or resources in their teaching; however, those teachers that were enthusiastic could make the time.

Challenges

The process of delivering the workshops to reluctant schools and teachers proved a challenge to the whole initiative. Attendance at the workshops, as far as could be gleaned, was perceived as an unpleasant obligation which teachers tried to avoid whenever possible. As a result, presenters tried to make them as interesting as possible, and to hand out concrete, practical materials that teachers could use in their lessons. At the beginning, workshops were not well received, and presenters needed to reassess their expectations.

One of the school principals told the Center that staff lacked motivation in general. They would do what was compulsory but were not willing to do anything extra. The principal explained that this was a common situation in Serbia. The school psychologist told the Center that the concept and meaning of the project was not presented to the school staff in an appropriate way, and that they were not properly informed regarding the time, place and need to participate in the workshops.

After several workshops, the Center was invited to the school council to discuss the workshops. The Center knew in advance that the atmosphere of the meeting was going to be tense because the number of professors attending the workshops had been decreasing. The Center offered no certificates because the program had no credentials, since at the time the Ministry of Education and Science was in transition. Salaries were low, teacher morale was low, and the whole country functioned according to an unwritten code: "I do what I have to do, I do only the things I am paid for and as much as I am paid. I am paid poorly, so I do as I am told by those in power". However, the Center felt a need to advocate for issues of tolerance and equality. The major points made at the meeting were:
- The workshops were not necessary unless they had a particular value in everyday practice. All agreed that family was very important, so it was decided that a workshop about traditional values in Romani families would be included.
- It was the Center's duty and responsibility to convince Romani parents to attend meetings.

- School staff felt that they were not consulted regarding what they wanted to cover in the workshops; rather an already prepared "package" was presented to them.
- School staff did not feel that they had to adjust their approach to teaching of Romani students. They believed Romani children and their parents were responsible for any existing problems in their education.

Although the feedback was disappointing, REC staff listened to the teachers and staff. The school staff tried to persuade them that Romani children had no particular needs and that any problems that arose from Romani students were related to or the fault of their families, and not the teachers' approach. The overall message was that the workshops were not necessary for the staff. The REC director tried to explain that the project had many layers and that the workshops were aimed at the school as an institution. The support of the school was as important as the support of parents. However, this point of view appeared to be disregarded. And so, for the first several months, the issues of working with a reluctant audience presented considerable challenges to the implementation of Ciganeska.

Evaluation

A formative evaluation gave REC feedback on workshops, which enabled them to improve their work. Surprisingly, the results of this formative evaluation were more positive than REC had anticipated. Participants responded that they liked the pleasant atmosphere, the facilitators' way of communicating, the useful information, the new way of looking at issues, the selection of themes, and the workshop tools that they could use in their everyday teaching process. They reported that they did not like the monotony, the word "non-Roma", the smoking, the fact that not all school staff attended, poor school organization, ineffective advertising of the workshops in the school itself, and the lack of engagement by workshop participants. They recommended increased exchanging of information and discussion, higher participation of teachers, and that the length of the workshop be shortened to one hour.

Great, super, go on! Don't give up your work no matter how some people behave!
Don't give up, be persistant, that is the only way to change this world, to break stereotypes and prejude about Roma.

Participant comments on formative evaluation

The fact that we are different enriches the relationship between two nations and gives us the beauty of life. You are the best!

Participant comments on formative evaluation

With the evaluation feedback as well as that from the school council meeting, REC began rethinking a new set of workshops.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

After only eight workshops, the results of the final evaluation were surprising, taking into consideration the less than positive beginnings of the workshops. More than 95% of participants were thrilled by the workshops and were happy to take part in them. Participant satisfaction was high and almost every evaluation ended in comments such as: "Go on! Don't give up!" Despite the positive results, however, only one school that was part of the Equal Chances project was interested in continuing the workshops when the project ended.

As a result of Ciganeska, some teachers began to think about the issue of educating Roma for the first time. In particular, some participants questioned their belief that Romani students could not be a success at school. Some provided new opportunities for students, some felt guilty as they became aware of the results of their previous treatment of Roma, and others admitted, "We are not so different".

REC staff learned a number of things from the implementation of Ciganeska. Firstly, the negative attitudes of some staff can influence an entire school. Secondly, people who are not ready for change should not be included in such projects, even if they have an important position in the school. Only those who want to participate and who are open to change should be included.

Furthermore, the Fund for an Open Society - Serbia, recognizing Ciganeska as an example of good practice, enabled REC to print 100 copies of Ciganeska as a book of around 200 pages in Serbian, recognizing this as part of the "trial and error" of those first years of Equal Chances. REC distributed it to their colleagues around the country who were dealing with the same issue. The book was universal and represented the base of Romani culture in general, which meant that it was applicable in many countries around the world. It also drew attention to the possibility of differences from country to country, while at the same time, it found collective cultural patterns.

REC hopes that the printed Ciganeska can be translated into Romani and English, so that it may become a resource for others. In so doing, it is hoped that it will become a groundbreaking textbook on Romani history, culture and tradition.

REC also intends to get accreditation for the workshops, making them more attractive for teachers to attend. Currently, the Center conducts workshops in other schools in Niš, which are financed by the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation, as part of the Equal Chances: Integration of Roma Children into Secondary School project, which grew out of the Equal Chances project.

REFLECTION

At that beginning of the project, in an atmosphere of reluctant participation, it seemed nothing would ever change. In retrospect, however, there were some changes. The final evaluations revealed that the workshops had an impact on participants on a personal level. They started to ask themselves questions and to examine biases. Furthermore, participants began asking if they had different expectations for Romani children. In short, a process of self-reflection and self-questioning began. Questioning is just the beginning of change.

The Director of REC learned that persistence pays off, and that there should be an advocate to work on the school level to push for changes. Likewise, the school principal is a role-model and an extremely important motivator for school staff.

REC was very surprised by the positive responses in the final evaluation. Perhaps only a small number of teachers had been touched and changed, and they were the ones responsible for filling in the final evaluation. Maybe, since the evaluation was anonymous, it allowed people to express themselves freely. Perhaps teachers needed time to understand the points that were raised early on in the school council meeting.

Recently, REC held interviews with the teachers, psychologists and pedagogues of the high schools where they have been conducting Ciganeska. The high school teachers said that they would like REC to expand the program to reach the non-Romani parents in order to raise awareness. However, there also seemed to be some misunderstanding related to how questions were posed. Many participants took the questions personally, and responded negatively to Ciganeska's supposed "influence" on their teaching. When questions were depersonalized, however, responses pointed to ways in which the teachers were in fact able to make use of the acquired knowledge from the workshops.

This is such a good thing because the basis of it is tolerance of everything and respect for others, the acknowledgement of different things and in that way the overcoming of conflicts ...and that is what is needed by all people, even by the people of the same national and social background. This is a great thing.

Comment from Peztallozi participant

There is no recipe for success, except perhaps persistence. What is important is that one must always consider the children and their needs first, because they struggle to speak for themselves. REC also recommends making personal contact with people, and working first and foremost with schools and people that are willing to respond and change.

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1   The Serbian team refer to this project as Equal Chances, the name which is used in this study.
2   According to the last census there were approximately 7,000 Roma in Niš, pointing to the unreliability of statistics for Roma. The cited numbers were taken from the local (Niš) strategy for Roma education which also stated that the numbers were not reliable due to a great number of migratory Roma. The numbers are created from local Roma NGO sources.
3   *Mahala* can be translated as "Romani neighbourhood" or "Romani ghetto" in English.
4   *National Strategy for Improving Roma Education in the Republic of Serbia* (Predlog strategije za unapredjivanje obrazovanja Roma u Republici Srbiji), Ministry of Education and Sports the Republic of Serbia, June 2003, pp. 11–15, available at: **http://www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/str-improv-roma-educ-rep-ser-yug-srb-enl-t02.pdf**.
5   *Ibid.*

6.3 Policy and Systemic Change

In summary, the documentation studies in Chapter 6 imply the following policy and systemic changes.

- The importance of providing an inclusive environment is essential to the school success of Romani students. All those involved in education (teachers, school directors, Roma teacher assistants, pedagogues, and government officials) should be provided with anti-bias training. This should be for educators currently involved in school systems as well as for pre-service teachers.

- Establish policy, systems, and/or programs to allow all those involved in the educational system to learn more about Romani culture and history. As stated in Chapter 4, this training should fit within the paradigm of credentialing and salary augmentation appropriate to the educational jurisdiction. Within the region, credentialing lends legitimacy and, consequently, enhances the engagement of educators in professional development.

- The creation of materials reflective of Romani culture is vital to the creation of an inclusive learning environment. In addition, policy and systems need to be established for the distribution of these materials to ensure educators and Romani students have access to inclusive materials.

CHAPTER 7
COMPLEX APPROACHES TO INFLUENCE SYSTEMIC CHANGE

7.1 Introduction

Improving outcomes for Romani students and moving toward an inclusive educational environment is complex, involving principles of democratic schooling and confronting social justice issues. As a result, actions taken to address this issue require a multifaceted approach. These documentation studies highlight the importance of cooperation amongst many actors at a number of levels: government departments, non-governmental and community-based organizations, municipalities, service providers, and families.

Meeting the educational needs of Romani children in the region requires a comprehensive and holistic approach that includes access to quality, equitable, and democratic school environments, the provision of child-centered, activity-based learning, and developmentally and culturally appropriate materials and assessment. All this should occur in an atmosphere free from bias, where everyone feels valued and safe.

Success in school is not only facilitated by educators and pedagogy, but also requires education – and other – systems to provide infrastructure, transportation, child-care and preschool education, health care, social services, as well as labour opportunities and employment. The documentation studies included in this chapter illustrate that the more comprehensive the approach taken, the more cooperation will be required. However, the more all-inclusive the approach, the more sustained the outcomes will be, as such an approach attempts to meet the needs of the child in a holistic way.

While multi-system and multi-organization processes are important, the Croatian REI documentation study presented in this chapter highlights the importance of individuals from different organizations and institutions in fostering inclusive educational environments. Changing the beliefs of individuals paves the way for systems and policy change.

7.2 Documentation Studies

- *Milena Mihajlović,* "From Practice to Policy and from Policy to Practice: Supporting Educational Reform in the Republic of Serbia" (Serbia);
- *Emese Ibolya,* "Local Integration Networks as a Tool to Facilitate Transition at Critical Periods in the Education System" (Hungary);
- *Jagoda Novak,* "Quality Education for Roma: Systematic Changes or Mission Impossible?" (Croatia);
- *Ramis Osmanovski,* "Increasing High School Enrolment among Roma through Campaigning and Affirmative Action" (Macedonia).

7.2.1 From Practice to Policy and from Policy to Practice: Supporting Educational Reform in the Republic of Serbia

By: Milena Mihajlović, Executive Director, CIP, Center for Interactive Pedagogy, Belgrade, Serbia

- **Participants**: children and youth aged 4 to 18 years (indirectly);
- **Supports:** direct policy influence;
- **Partners:** Foundation for an Open Society-Serbia (FOSS), Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), Roma Education Center – NIŠ (REC), Roma Information Center Kragujevac (RIC), Ministry of Education and Science.

CONTEXT

The Equal Chances: Integration of Roma Children and Youth in the Educational System (hereafter Equal Chances) project of the Fund for an Open Society of Serbia (FOSS) implemented from the 2002–2003 to the 2004–2005 academic year within the framework of OSI's Roma Education Initiative.[1] The main implementing partner was the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP), and the primary Romani local partners were the Roma Education Center (REC) in Niš and the Roma Information Center (RIC) in Kragujevac.

The project implementers created and tested a comprehensive model for the quality education and inclusion of Romani children by operating at the local and national levels, including working with educational institutions, and by involving all stakeholders and supporters of the educational process (the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOE), regional MOE departments, local governments, schools, Roma NGOs, students and their families, etc.). The project activities were implemented at the local level in Niš and Kragujevac, at the preschool, primary and secondary school levels.

Educational status of Roma in Serbia

The last decade of the 20th century brought many challenges and difficulties upon Serbia – the wars and international sanctions resulted in economic impoverishment and rising nationalism. The status of Roma, who had always been marginalized and the most impoverished category of the population, deteriorated further.

The MOE and schools do not collect official data based on students' ethnicity. However, they have started to collect such data as of 2002. NGO research shows[2] that only 1 to 7% of Romani children are included in preschool, both formal and informal, whereas Romani children below 3 years of age are not included at all. Participation in primary education is less than 30%, and the rate of students permanently leaving school is very high, especially in Grade 5, when subject teaching begins. A small number of Roma who reach secondary school or university usually come from families who are more integrated into Serbian society, and who have a better economic and educational position.

Educational achievements		Without Primary School	Primary School	Secondary School	Higher Education
Education Structure 2002 Census (%)	General population	33.0	25.0	32.2	8.9
	Serbs	33.8	24.0	32.5	8.9
	Roma	62.7	27.1	8.1	0.9

Source: Republican Statistical Institute (2002).
Census of Population, Households and Apartments in 2002,
Final Census Results by Age and Sex, Belgrade.

Features of the centralized educational system, such as uniformity in programs and methods, and excessive regulation of goals and curriculum keep the focus on the school system and not on individual students; the emphasis has been on quantity and not on quality and efficiency, which have not been characteristics conducive to greater Roma participation in education. The system has lacked an inclusive approach to education; the institutions have not adapted to the needs of children and families in vulnerable groups either in terms of organization or curriculum. The curricula, textbooks and classes rarely touch on minority cultures, and have usually generated new stereotypes and prejudices instead of promoting intercultural values.

For over a decade, national and international organizations such as the Fund for an Open Society, UNICEF, CIP, and a few Roma NGOs, addressed the education of Roma within the frameworks of both formal and informal education. They achieved significant results and gained diverse experiences, though data were not systematically gathered, integrated or available.[3] As these activities were not part of a defined national policy for improving the education of Roma, their effects were limited in scope and duration, and the schools, MOE and regional MOE departments merely played a passive role in the "NGO projects".

A number of initiatives relevant to improving the status of Roma were conducted between 2002 and 2006. After the political changes in 2000 – when a democratic government replaced the Milosevic regime – the new democratic authorities embarked on reforming most of the country's social system with the aim of reintegrating the country into Europe and the world. Readiness to incorporate the Roma issue in the processes of general social reforms was expressed in the new political context (for specific actions see Appendix 1 on page 115). These actions and documents addressed the education of Roma and differed from the views of various ministries and other state institutions, which was of key importance in view of the complexity of the problem. The establishment of competent bodies, and the increasingly important and active participation of the Romani community, have created the initial prerequisites for improving the overall status of Roma, including education.

Volatile political situation

The influence of the project on the development of policies on the education of Roma in Serbia unfolded in a changing political and educational context; the mutual influences are difficult to present in a simple or linear manner.

Major political changes occurred during the implementation of the project (and are still taking place). The state changed its name twice, and recently divided into two. The project was thus implemented in the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (2002–2003); in Serbia and Montenegro (2003–2006) and in the Republic of Serbia (2006). The Prime Minister of Serbia was assassinated in 2003. Two governments changed in Belgrade, as did the local authorities in the two cities where Equal Chances was implemented. The MOE was headed by three ministers. Heads of the regional MOE departments in both cities were also replaced as were principals of most schools that took part in the project at least once. The reform of education had reached its climax, slowed down and its course remained unclear. The Decade of Roma Inclusion began.[4]

The education reform was launched in 2001 to improve the quality education for all and to develop an efficient educational system. The elaboration of a clear national policy on Improving the Education of National Minorities and Vulnerable Groups was to have been addressed in Stage 2 of the reform, as of 2003. The reform documents especially highlighted Roma as a socially and educationally vulnerable group. Stage 2 of the reform, however, did not happen, because of the political changes. In 2004, the new minister and management of the MOE stopped the reform and changed the Law on the Foundations of the Educational System. In 2005, the minister and course of the reform were changed again. Some parts of the 2001 educational reform began again and a new law is in the process of being created.

Stakeholders' and participants' attitudes towards the project were influenced by all these changes; at one point, it was perceived as fully integrated in the educational reform; at another as not in keeping with "reformist" moves. Attitudes towards NGOs also changed; at one time they were partners in the reform, at another, cooperation with them was unacceptable.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goals:
* Create a national educational framework and model including Romani children between 5 and 18 years of age into the educational system.
* Improve the quality of the educational process in institutions.
* Consolidate Roma NGOs and capacity building of Romani staff.

The project Equal Chances was unique in Serbia in that no other project has combined work on key elements of the sustainable process of Roma inclusion.

These elements were:
- integration of community-based Romani preschools and the persistent promotion of the urgent need to provide preschool education for all, especially Romani children;
- proving the success of Step by Step child-centered methodology in environments with minority issues;
- setting standards for the work of Roma teacher assistants, both in regard to practical experiences and in advocating for implementation on the national level;
- proving that representatives of Romani communities (Roma NGOs) can work in a systematic manner with educational institutions and staff towards better conditions for Romani children.

NATIONAL POLICY LEVEL[5]

Draft strategy for the improvement of education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia

The Equal Chances project was launched in 2002 with the support of the Ministry of Education and Sports (MOE). The ministry recognized the project as an important and quality endeavour which was in alignment with the reformist goals it was helping to achieve.

The project planned the creation of a national educational framework and the implementing partners and the MOE began discussing the design of a national document. Although MOE officials maintained that the reforms were broad enough to improve the education of Roma, they recognized the situation on the ground required a special strategy as soon as possible. That strategy was the Draft Strategy for the Improvement of Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia and was to be an expansion of the Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma (finished in 2002; see Appendix 1 on page 115).

Process of creation

In cooperation with the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights (MHMR), the MOE established an expert team to formulate this strategic document. The team was made up of representatives of the Romani community, experts in education and/or Romani issues working in NGOs, international organizations, the MOE and the Philosophy Faculty at the University of Belgrade. Some of them had been included in the MHMR expert team, and some were new. Representatives from the Project Equal Chances implementing partners, FOSS, CIP, RIC and REC took an active part in the design of the document. Activities on formulating the strategies were supported via the project in terms of organization and funding. The expert team began work in September 2002, had several meetings together and also worked often in smaller groups for different levels and types of education (preschool, primary school, secondary school, higher education, adult education, and special education). The expert team cooperated well and worked in a good atmosphere. After a few months the First Draft Strategy was finished, structured according to levels of education and containing sets of specific activities and recommendations to the Ministry.

The MOE expert consultant for Educational Reform at that time helped the team better understand the purpose of the document and amend its approach to drafting the strategy. After two meetings with him, the team realised it had to put itself in the shoes of the MOE and draft the document with respect to the MOE's standpoint and not from that of NGOs advising the MOE. The second and final Draft Strategy was based upon the competences of the MOE and recommended the engagement of other relevant institutions. This, amongst other things, meant that the strategy could not plan for support to Roma NGOs, although many team members were from the third sector, and were aware of the importance of their role.

As members of the team, the implementers of the Equal Chances project incorporated the experience from their local activities into the document. Representatives of CIP, RIC and REC were active in all stages of drafting, and the FOSS representative was active in the process of negotiation between ministries as well. In the period between 2003 and

2004, the team had time to pilot an approach and various activities within the Equal Chances project and to incorporate the experience gained into the Common Action Plan (see below). In particular this included the role of Roma teacher assistants, preparations and support to schools for introducing inclusive education, the development of school plans to improve education of Romani students, and improvement of cooperation with the students' families, amongst others.

Difficulties the team faced – reliable data, inter-ministerial cooperation and practical implementation

The following were major obstacles in formulating the Draft Strategy: a lack of reliable data on the Romani population and its participation in education; the complexity of the problem which necessitated the MOE's cooperation with other sectors (as the strategic documents and reforms were being developed in parallel, it was not fully clear who would cooperate with whom on this issue). In addition, not enough information or clarity on how the planned measures would be implemented and evaluated in practice (some of the ideas and proposed activities were new, and nobody had experience in their implementation) were also obstacles.

The expert team followed the changes as they unfolded, strove to draft a document that would be both comprehensive and clear. The work was hard, and in a short period the team worked towards understanding what a strategy document was in general, to gather all experience, knowledge and data in the field of education of Roma, and to create a vision of the educational system which one dreams of, but at the same time to think concretely about how to achieve that vision.

Status of the document and influence

The National Council of the Roma National Community and NGOs advocated in the MOE and government for approval of the document. The Draft Strategy, however, as of August 2006 was still not approved, and probably never will be. The reason is perhaps the unclear relationship between this document and the Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma, and the responsibilities of involved official bodies in this period: the MOE was a republic institution responsible for education, the Ministry for Human and Minority Rights was a federal institution responsible for Roma issues, but not for education. In 2006, the Republic of Serbia became an independent country. Meanwhile, based on the Draft Strategy, the Common Action Plan for Improving Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia (hereafter referred to as Common Action Plan) was drafted within the preparations for the Decade of Roma Inclusion and adopted in 2004 by the MOE and the Serbian government. So, the need for the approval of the Draft Strategy was not perceived as being important after that. Now, on the Serbian government's website, the Common Action Plan for Improving Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia is presented as a part of the Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma.

Center for Interactive Pedagogy (CIP)
Publication titled: *Collection of research studies done by Romani students.*

Departing from the Draft Strategy which provides general guidelines, the Common Action Plan[6] within its four goals defines in detail: the groups of measures; measures and specific activities at all educational levels; benchmarks; implementers of the activities; monitoring; links with other issues; and deadlines and budget.

The Common Action Plan was drafted by the expert team of the Human and National Minority Rights Ministry and the Coordination Board Supervising the Implementation of the Common Action Plan, comprising representatives of the MOE, the National Council of the Roma National Community, the Roma National Strategy Secretariat, NGOs, international organizations/donors and the Institute of Psychology. Implementers of the Equal Chances Project from FOSS, CIP and REC took an active part in the elaboration of this document as well. The activities and budget were elaborated based on the estimate that there are 450,000 Roma in Serbia. The plan was written with respect to the MOE and envisages and recommends the involvement and cooperation of all relevant bodies and institutions.[7]

The previous work of the Equal Chances expert team also had an impact on two other developments, as representatives of the project were included in two new groups. In 2005 the NGO, Minority Rights Center, initiated the Roma Education Board in order to represent and monitor the implementation of the Decade Action plans for education, employment and health care of Roma, in which CEP and FOSS were active. Later in 2005, the League for the Decade of Roma was founded, also aimed at monitoring the Action Plans. The Roma Education Board became a part of the league.

LOCAL POLICY LEVEL

Local strategies for improving education of Roma in Niš and Kragujevac

The 2002 to 2004 period was marked by good cooperation between the MOE, school administrations, regional MOE departments, the local authorities of both cities and the Equal Chances implementing partners. The relevant institutions' support to the project was not merely formal; they actively took part in and contributed to its implementation.

Process of creation

The Equal Chances project initiated and supported the elaboration of local strategies in Niš and Kragujevac. The two city governments had appointed members of the local teams to elaborate local strategies among the representatives of relevant institutions (schools, MOE, National Employment Centers, City Assemblies, and Social Work Centers), Roma and other NGOs as well as interested individuals.

The local teams in both cities were provided with training and expert assistance by CIP within the project. The Romani partner organizations, REC and RIC, actively participated in the teams and in drafting the documents. Their knowledge and experience in the field, databases and energy significantly contributed to the creation of these two high-quality strategies. In Kragujevac, RIC took the lead on organizing and facilitating meetings. In Niš, a well-known Romani leader who was in a high position in the local government was appointed by local authorities. Each team made its own plan of activities, and divided responsibilities based on professional capacities and experience of members. Refreshment and other costs for team meetings and small fees for team members were provided from the project.

Difficulties the team faced – determining strategy versus action plan

As was the case with the Draft Strategy, the teams lacked understanding and experience on what comprised a local strategy. The team grappled with the dilemma of how the local strategy ought to differ from the national strategy (i.e. how precise and specific this long-term general strategic document relevant to the local community ought to be without turning into an action plan). The only experience that could be applied was that of the authors of the Local Strategy of Cultural Development of the City of Kragujevac, probably the only local strategy completed in Serbia at the time. This document was created by the local government of Kragujevac and local NGOs within the project Policies for Culture.[8]

Status of the document and influence

In both towns, the City Assembly adopted the Local Strategy for the Development of Roma Education, in 2004. The teams that drafted the strategies were formed by the City Assembly, which would monitor the implementation of goals and/or provide a Local Action Plan. To implement goals, it is necessary to elaborate plans in detail, and the local strategies were of a general nature and did not include an action plan and budget estimate. It was also necessary to obtain more precise data on the local Romani population.

After adopting the Local Strategy, the Niš Assembly Executive Council appointed members of the team to implement the strategy and design the Local Action Plan. The Kragujevac authorities were to have followed suit. Unfortunately, the political changes in 2005 in both city governments led to a halt in these activities.

The experiences that the partners in Niš and Kragujevac had gathered, however, and that they presented at expert gatherings in Serbia over the course of the project, increased awareness of the need for a more active role on a local level in developing their own strategic documents and implementation plans.

For example, after the adoption of the Common Action Plan at the beginning of the Decade of Roma Inclusion, the local NGO, Roma for Democracy, and other NGOs[9] and representatives of relevant state institutions in Valjevo elaborated a Local Action Plan for the Education of Roma. This was the first local action plan ever to exist which had a budget. This demonstrated that political will was still the most important factor in making change. The local government and local department of the MOE were open and ready to cooperate with Roma, and to do something concrete. The Equal Chances team shared their experiences, issues and lessons learned, and they used the existing, but not implemented, local strategies from Niš and Kragujevac to guide their work. This experience was very important to the Equal Chances team. They were very disappointed that their own strategies had not been implemented, but at the same time, they were able to teach others to create something similar, which brought back the purpose to the hard work they had already invested. Also, taking their work further and deeper, they tried to find a way to assure that future strategies would be implemented obligatorily as a part of Local Community Development Plans.

Practical school level

The Equal Chances project was launched when the education reform was intense and comprehensive. The reform gave teachers hope that schools could soon change and become contemporary institutions in which students would learn with greater enthusiasm. The intensity and pace of the change, however, also caused considerable resistance and fear.

Until 2004, the reform mostly focused on elementary school; it included the introduction of a new, child-oriented curriculum in Grade 1, intensive expert training of teachers, and assistance to schools in developing and establishing a new administration system. These changes positively affected the implementation of the project, which was perceived as part of the general reform.

Roma teacher assistants (RTA) were first introduced in Serbia in 1997 within the Program Step by Step Kindergarten as a Family Center for Romani Children (Implemented by CIP-Center for Interactive Pedagogy, supported by FOSS and OSI) in Romani settlements, both in kindergartens and schools. In the Equal Chances project, Roma teacher assistants were introduced in primary schools for the first time. In both cases, they were engaged and paid through the project budgets with approval of the MOE.

Visual framework and model of the REI intervention in Serbia

NATIONAL LEVEL

LOCAL LEVEL

EDUCATION OF TEAMS FOR POLICY DOCUMENTS

SCHOOL LEVEL

ACTIVITIES ON ALL LEVELS

DEVELOPING INCLUSIVE EDUCATIONAL MODELS

POLICY DOCUMENTS
WORKING GROUPS
Training of Team member
PRESENTING/PROMOTING
MONITORING

ADVOCATING

COOPERATION

PRESENTING PROGRAMS/PROJECTS/RESULTS

PROFESSIONAL & PERSONAL EMPOWERMENT
of Roma & non-Roma Students, Schools staff, RTA, Parents, Experts

Challenges the team faced – reform setbacks and loss of engagement

The changes in 2004, however, resulted in a series of negative consequences. The most visible effect was decreased engagement of teachers who had (after many years) been encouraged by reforms. Alongside the wavering course of the reform, there was confusion about which curriculum to apply (the old curricula were re-introduced to replace the new ones). The training of teachers was halted, inclusive education was qualified as unimportant, the individualised approach to children was shelved, etc.

Attitudes and biases negatively affected the implementation of the project in schools, these included: denial of discrimination and problems of Romani youth and children; non-acceptance of the responsibility of the teachers and schools; reluctance to embrace multiculturalism; insufficient engagement in education among Romani children and youth; and lack of institutional mechanisms necessary for the sustainability of changes.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED[10]

Despite the challenges faced at the school level, results were achieved. The results of the RTA's work demonstrates the importance of this role in education, and was embedded in the Common Action Plan. The MOE is preparing a pilot project for the 2006–2007 school year titled Assistants to Support Students of Roma Nationality in Education (supported by the OSCE and the European Agency for Reconstruction, EAR), which includes defining the role of the RTA and training 50 RTAs. Twenty RTAs will start to work in schools with a larger number of Romani students. Those activities will lead to the official recognition of this role, so in the future they will become school staff. CIP will conduct their training, as well as training for school staff. RTAs with the most experience and knowledge will be co-trainers and probably continue to work in schools which were part of the Equal Chances project.[11]

The experience gained during the implementation of the Equal Chances project, both positive and negative, considerably influenced the formulation of activities and pace of their implementation within the Equal Chances Secondary project. In the project period (2005–2007), FOSS and its implementing partners CIP, REC and Stablo were working together on developing a comprehensive model of inclusive secondary education, adjusted to the needs of the Romani community. The project was implemented in secondary schools (two from the Equal Chances project and one new), and some activities are conducted also in elementary schools in Kragujevac (two from the Equal Chances project and three new). The second project period (2008–2010) plans for the dissemination of the created model in new schools and local communities.

The approach that was taken for implementing Equal Chances on the school level proved to be successful, but also showed that changes are slow and are often embraced by individual teachers or classes only, but not on the whole school level. The lessons learned, therefore, indicated the need to take a different approach. One of the measures envisaged in the Common Action Plan, therefore, were plans for developing Annual School Plans. It is hoped this component will influence change more deeply and widely. The Equal Chances Secondary project began with this activity in all secondary schools involved in the project. School teams were established (principal, school psychologist, and teachers), with assistance from CIP and Roma NGOs. They made recommendations aimed to improve the education of Romani students. The planned activities became part of the obligatory Annual School Plans (for the 2005–2006 and 2006–2007 school year), and were approved by the local MOE departments. In preparation for their work, members of the school teams read the most important policy documents.[12] This was an important step, since teachers (as others) in Serbia do not usually read laws and documents. They also explored the Local Strategies for Improving Education of Roma for their city in order to better understand the issues encountered by Romani students and to learn more about how to solve them.

REFLECTION

The Equal Chances project was complex and comprehensive, implemented at different levels, involving various partners and through diverse activities. The effects of the project are reflected in the number of Romani children who have received a higher quality and more successful education, as well as changes in educational practice of individual teachers. There were much broader and more relevant implications, too. Working simultaneously at both the national and local policy

levels and – practically – at the school level, the project implementers were able to translate, relatively rapidly, practical experience into strategic documents and then, in turn, to practice strategic plans, measures and activities.

FOSS, CIP and the Roma NGO partners succeeded in taking the project one step further and influencing the process of formulating educational policies, which otherwise would not have been taken. In making concrete actions and including some of the concepts that were piloted in the Equal Chances project, the government of Serbia had for the first time shown interest in changing something, in listening to civil society and in recognizing that there was plenty that civil society could offer. As changes continued, it was not necessary to create new policy documents, but to integrate content into existing policy documents on all levels. Moreover, the creation of a policy document was just a first step, and if it sat on a shelf somewhere, it was necessary and important to make it a reality. For those wishing to influence policy, have a big vision, but celebrate your small accomplishments.

Initiating the definition of strategic courses of action arose from the need to develop awareness – broadly – of the complexity of the problem, i.e. that the existence of equality in law does not ensure that Romani children will receive equitable and quality education. At the same time, it is important to offer solutions and make the State and its institutions responsible for their implementation. Sadly, project implementers also learned that true political change depended on persons in powerful positions, and without their support, even the best initiative can be frozen or die (as was the case with local strategies in Niš and Kragujevac).

The challenges the team faced included the complexity of the project itself: involving partners, levels of intervention and numerous activities; constant political changes in the nation's educational reform, the MOE and MOE regional departments and local authorities; and with the schools themselves regarding their biases, unwillingness to accept responsibilities, fears, and general resistance to change. A project with many partners is complex and gives rise to many problems, which demands excellent management. Project implementers attempting to undertake complex and demanding work should not expect miracles. The work is a process. On the other hand, the more comprehensive the project, the more likely the results will be better. Good preparation for a project is important and it requires a long-term preparation period.

From the beginning of the project in 2002 to the present, even the vocabulary that the project implementers use had changed. Instead of "integration", the term "inclusion" is used; instead of saying "Roma children", "children of Roma nationality" is used. This showed that there was development in this area, and that new terms encouraged new ways of thinking.

The project was an exceptional opportunity for all involved, one they could have only dreamed about some years ago. Not often does one have the chance to directly affect the development of educational policies of one's country, an opportunity they were given by force of circumstance. Notwithstanding all the standstills, issues and resistance to the implementation of the Common Action Plan, one thing was certain: the reforms can be slowed down, but they cannot be halted.

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REFERENCES

The Strategy for Improvement of Education of Roma in Republic of Serbia (Serbian/English) can be accessed at: **www.see-educoop.net/education_in/pdf/str-improv-roma-educ-rep-ser-yug-srb-enl-t02.pdf**.

Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of the Roma/Serbian Common Action Plan for Advancement of Education of Roma in Serbia can be accessed at: **www.humanrights.gov.yu/files/ doc/Roma_Nacrt-Strategije_English.doc**.

Common Action Plan for Advancement of Education of Roma in Serbia can be accessed at: **www.romadecade.org/Action%20Plans/ ap-education-serbia.doc**.

- The Roma were given the status of national minority by the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, adopted by the Federal Assembly of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 2002. Roma are mentioned in the Introduction Chapter, which states: "the Law also provides for implementation of special measures for accomplishment of equality, particularly in case of Roma children".

- A Draft Strategy for the Integration and Empowerment of Roma was completed in 2002. The Federal Ministry for Minority and Ethnic Communities of the FRY (from 2003 the Federal Ministry of Human and Minority Rights) provided technical assistance, but it is related to Serbia only, as Montenegro made an independent, separate document.
  The draft strategy was adopted by the National Council of the Roma National Minority. The draft strategy was created by a team of experts in which Romani representatives took an active part, who also worked in expert groups in different fields (more than 70 experts were involved). The OSCE, OCHA and UNHCR provided funding, whereas the OHCHR provided professional assistance. Consultations were held with competent federal and republican ministries, the government and the Commissariat for Refugees of the Republic of Serbia, international organizations, local NGOs and representatives of civic society. This draft strategy proposed administrative and legislative reforms and roles of relevant institutions in all important sectors: housing, education, employment, health, culture, media, social care, status of Romani internally displaced persons, status of women, antidiscrimination. As a draft strategy, it is a document giving general guidelines.

- The Decade of Roma Inclusion began in 2005. During the preparation for the Decade, four Action Plans were created in 2004, which were aproved by the Serbian government in January 2005, and which include: Action Plan for Housing; Action Plan for Employment; Action Plan for Health and Common Action Plan for Improving Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, a document that was based on the Draft Strategy for Improvement of Education of Roma in the Republic of Serbia, 2003.

- The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper for Serbia was adopted in 2003 as part of the integral strategy of Serbia's development and plan to fulfil the UN Millennium Development Goals. The Cabinet of the Deputy Prime Minister was responsible for its implementation in cooperation with the Poverty Reduction Strategy (PRS) Implementation Focal Point. The PRS represented the plan of activities aimed at reducing the key forms of poverty by creating materials and other prerequisites and offering opportunities for all to provide existence for themselves and their families. The Reduction of Roma Poverty was the chapter within the Issues of Particular Significance for the Strategy. It described the status quo, and provided strategic courses of action, measures and activities. It emphasized the correlation between employment and education as well as the necessity of synchronized action. The PRS Implementation Focal Point has initiated a program titled Poverty Reduction Strategy Implementation – Local Initiatives, aimed to establish and strengthen coalitions, partnerships and networks at the local level as a contribution to the implementation of the PRS.

- The National Plan of Action (NPA) for Children in Serbia was adopted in 2004 as the government's strategic document defining the country's policy on children until the year 2015 (with no relationship to the Decade of Roma Inclusion). It was made in accordance with the obligations deriving from the United Nations documents such as Millennium Development Goals and the World Made for Children. The document identified the basic issues in the fulfilment, protection and improvement of children's rights in Serbia, and at the same time represented a mechanism that enabled monitoring of the status of children's rights as well as the well-being of children during the period of economic, social and political transition in Serbia. Within the framework, in 2005, three municipalities developed a Local plan of Action until 2010, supported by UNICEF.

- The National Council of the Roma National Community was established in 2003. The Law on the Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities defined the activity for National Councils for minorities. For the first time the Romani minority was given status as an ethnic minority, rather than an "ethnic group".

- The Roma National Strategy Secretariat (RNSS) was set up in 2003, within the Federal Ministry of Human and Minority Rights of Serbia and Montenegro (MHMR), with the support of the OSCE, CoE and UNHCR. In 2006, after Serbia and Montenegro separated, the MHMR became the Agency of Human and Minority Rights of the Government of the Republic of Serbia. The RNSS was the Agency's project, supported by the OESCE and EAR.

- Affirmative Action Measures were established from the school year 2003/2004. Some activities were done in cooperation between the Secretariat for the Roma National Strategy, the MOE and the National Council of the Romani National Minority on the level of Primary, Secondary and Higher schools and Faculties. Some of the measures undertaken were:

sets of textbooks for primary school students; projects in 74 primary schools aimed at improvement of Romani education; enrolment of students in secondary schools; financing students in colleges and university.

APPENDIX 2

APPENDIX 2	Inputs	Outcomes
National level	• Draft Strategy for Improvement of Education of Roma: work in expert team, organizational and financial support	• Influence on Common Action Plan: work in expert group, integrated experience from the project
Local level	• Local Strategy for Improving Education of Roma in two towns (Niš and Kragujevac): work in expert team, organizational and financial support • Cooperation with Roma NGOs	• Inspired other local communities to provide their own strategies • Taught their future local teams • Empowerment of Roma NGOs
School level	• Equal Chances Secondary: gave initiative and help to schools to organize School Teams who produced School Plans for Improving Education of Romani students as a part of School Annual Work Plan • Supported teams in their work • Involved Roma teacher assistants in schools	• School plans were done in all schools; planned activities were implemented
At all levels	• Advocacy • Representing policy documents on professional meeting • Dissemination of policy documents	• Raised awareness of problems that Roma have in education in professional circles and relevant institutions. • Engaged people from schools, MOE and its local departments, local governments, relevant institutions and Roma to think and work on improving education of Roma.

NOTES

1 The project benefited from the financial support of Foundation Open Society-Serbia (FOSS), the Open Society Institute-Budapest, and UNICEF.

2 Kočić Rakočević, N. & Miljević A. (2003). *Roma and Education – Between the Needs, Wishes and Possibilities,* Belgrade.

3 One positive example is the evaluation of the preschool Step by Step program Kindergarten as a Family Center for Roma Children within the *Research on Selected Roma Education Programs in Central & Eastern Europe,* OSI/ESP, 2000. The high quality of the program implemented by CIP, Center for Interactive Pedagogy and supported by FOSS and OSI-NY, was confirmed and it was recommended for further implementation. The research is available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei/rerp.html**.

4 The Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 is an unprecedented political commitment by governments in Central and Southeastern Europe to improve the socio-economic status and social inclusion of Roma within a regional framework. The Decade is an international initiative that brings together governments, intergovernmental and nongovernmental organizations, as well as Romani civil society, to accelerate progress toward improving the welfare of Roma and to review such progress in a transparent and quantifiable way. The Decade focuses on the priority areas of education, employment, health, and housing, and commits governments to take into account the other core issues of poverty, discrimination, and gender mainstreaming. Website available at: **http://www.romadecade.org/**.

5 For a chart outlining the achievements on the national, local and schools levels, please see Appendix 2 on page 116.

6 The *Common Action Plan* is available in Serbian at: **www.prsp.sr.gov.yu**.

7 In the General Ministry of Education Strategy Paper for the period 2005 to 2010, which was developed after the *Common Action Plan* and the *Draft Strategy,* the MOE defines the improvement of Romani education as one of its priorities. Parts of the *Common Action Plan* are included in this *Strategy,* notably within the framework of the Strategy of the Sector for the Development of Education and International Cooperation in Education and of the Sector for Preschool and Elementary School Education. The NGO sector has, however, continued actively advocating it as it maintains that the MOE is not (sufficiently) interested in implementing the Strategy.

8 Supported by the European Cultural Foundation and EDUMEST Association, Center for Studies in Cultural Development, Belgrade, in 2002.

9 These organizations were all members of the Roma Forum, an Association of Roma NGOs in Valjevo, a small city near Belgrade.

10 Internal evaluation of the Equal Chances project was conducted regularly, and external evaluations were conducted at the end of the second and third year of implementation by the Center for Evaluation, Testing and Research, at the University of Belgrade. Material used for evaluation were: questionnaires, conversations, meetings and monitoring.

11 In December 2006, Roma teacher assistants began to work in schools. However, schools were not well prepared, and there were problems with actual employment and payment of assistants. In response, the MOE began to work in MOE regional departments, who appointed a person in charge of Romani education, and there were preparatory trainings held with schools, beginning with explaining the Decade of Roma Inclusion, discussing the *Common Action Plan.* This will hopefully prepare the ground for a proper work with Roma teacher assistants.

12 For example, the Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities, National Plan of Action for Children in Serbia and the Law on the Bases of the Educational System.

7.2.2 Local Integration Networks as a Tool to Facilitate Transition at Critical Periods in the Education System

By: Emese Ibolya, independent consultant, International Step by Step Association

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 7 to 18 years;
- **Supports:** access, educational achievement, family–community involvement, civic involvement in project management;
- **Partners:** participating preschools, primary and secondary schools in Miskolc, Ec-Pec Foundation, Miskolc LIN, Nr 3 Pedagogic Expert Committee from Budapest, the Faculty of Pedagogy at Miskolc University.

CONTEXT

The Roma Education Initiative was implemented in Hungary between 2003 and 2005 by the Ec-Pec Foundation[1] in order to influence systemic changes in education by improving the education policy of central government. The project was unique at the time, in that it was designed to improve the practice of desegregating Romani students in the Hungarian education system.

Hungarian Roma had traditionally been the target of ethnic prejudice because of their socio-cultural characteristics and generally poor economic background, which correlated to their relatively low level of education. According to Radó (1997), while 62% of Hungarian students successfully continued from primary to secondary school in 1997, only 9% of Romani students did so. Havas, Kemény and Liskó (2001) identified 126 Roma-dominated segregated primary schools in Hungary, where 40% of all Romani students in Hungary attended. At the time of their study, the ratio of non-Romani students at segregated schools was only 6.3%. Havas, Kemény and Liskó stated that while in 1991, 7.1% of Romani students studied at segregated primary schools, this rate increased to 18.1% by 2001. Since then these rates have continued to grow. As Havas and Liskó (2004) stated, between the 2000–2001 and 2003–2004 school years the number of Roma-dominated primary schools increased from 126 to 178.

Such segregated schools usually offered a lower quality of education, which had a stigmatizing effect on the child, whose chances to subsequently be accepted into a quality secondary school were extremely low. Therefore, the most frequent occurrence after finishing a segregated primary school was to leave the educational system or to attend a vocational school. Consequently, the attendance rate of Romani students in higher education was very low. According to research data and Ec-Pec's own experiences, the most critical period in leaving the education system was during the transition between different educational levels. Therefore, REI Hungary intended to enhance a smooth educational transition for Romani students at those critical junctures by introducing a methodology suited to their socio-cultural characteristics.

This study introduces the case of Miskolc, where the most significant project results were reached in REI Hungary. Importantly, there is an enormous Romani population in the city who live in extremely underdeveloped conditions, in segregated and ghetto-like communities. The large proportion of Romani in the city is the result of Miskolc having been an industrial city in the socialist regime before 1989, when local factories employed a large number of unskilled Romani workers. Therefore, in Miskolc the size of the Romani population is estimated to be higher than the national average (unofficial estimates approximate 60%). According to the 2001 census, 190,046 people reported themselves as Roma in Hungary; however, some researchers estimate their numbers to be between 450,000 and 600,000,[2] a number which is still growing.

The kindergartens and schools participating in REI in Miskolc were both segregated and integrated. The two participating kindergartens, Vasgyári and Nyitnikék, were situated nearby two large, geographically segregated Romani settlements. Therefore, the vast majority of their students came from Romani families residing in one of those nearby Romani communities. From the four primary schools involved, one was similarly segregated, situated on the edge of a disused steel factory which operated during communist times and offered employment to thousands of steel workers, along with family houses in a nearby community. After the political change in 1989, those workers became unemployed and most migrated to other parts of the country seeking job opportunities. As a result, a gradual population change took place in the community,

as the mostly abandoned houses became attractive to disadvantaged and poor Romani families looking for homes. Thus, 90% of the students attending Fazola Henrik Primary School were of Romani origin at the time of the project.

The three inclusive schools, Komlóstetői, Erenyői and Rákóczi Ferenc Primary Schools were situated in more developed communities and mostly attended by middle-class non-Romani students. Prior to the project, these schools only had a few Romani students enroled with a relatively higher socio-economic background than those described above. On the next school level, the project collaborated with two secondary schools, Baross Gábor and Gábor Áron, both of which provided school leaving diplomas to students on completion of four years, which allowed students to enter higher education institutions.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: The main goal of the project was to enhance the integration of Romani students from 3 to 18 years of age through quality education.[3]

Local integration networks for educational inclusion

The REI Hungary project set up local integration networks (LINs) in three communities of Hungary where a significant number of Roma, who had been subject to persistent discrimination and segregation in education, resided. The three selected locations were District 7 of Budapest, the city of Miskolc and the town of Pátka. LINs are institutional networks for the educational integration of Romani students aged 3 to 18.

Parallel with the operation of REI LINs, the Hungarian government set up the National Education Integration Network in 2003.[4] Its goal was to disseminate validated practices in integrating Romani students among primary schools in the country. The chosen 45 schools, having already reached some success in integration, served as models for other schools participating in the program that were intending to desegregate. The program aimed to present methods to successfully balance the ratio of Romani and non-Romani students. Two of the REI partner schools became members of the National Network. Thus, the two programs complemented each other.

The REI LIN differed from the government model in that it consisted of local stakeholders responsible for the education and social welfare of Romani children in a given age group. These stakeholders included kindergartens, schools, the local family support center[5] and the local Romani self-government. The government network only consisted of primary schools, and acted as a national network rather than a local one. The number of people and institutions participating in each LIN varied according to its size, while each of them was adapted to the social, educational and political characteristics of the given community. Given the decentralized education system in Hungary, the project's most important partner was the local government, the body responsible for local schools, kindergartens and social-welfare institutions.

In Miskolc, the general aim of the LIN was to break the cycle of segregated education for Romani students and to set new, individual "tracks"[6] for their integration. Therefore, the segregated schools and kindergartens were paired with integrated primary and secondary schools. Efforts were aimed at breaking old cycles of unquestioned 'tracking' and rerouting children to integrated environments, rather than segregated ones, which was how they were previously and unquestionably tracked. Integrated schools within REI Hungary to which Romani children were being sent were called "accepting schools".

In Miskolc, in addition to cooperating with the kindergartens and schools, the project implementers found it equally important to involve local Romani leaders and the Miskolc Romani self-government as formal and non-formal political representatives. They indirectly participated in the LIN by advising project stakeholders on cooperation and communication with the Roma and by mediating between Romani families and project staff whenever it was necessary. Such strong contact had a very beneficial effect on cooperation with the Romani community.

The local Romani self-government's activities were complemented by the Local Family Support Center, which was also a LIN partner. This Center was in daily contact with Romani families and was familiar with their individual socio-

economic background. The Center was located near one of the Miskolc Romani settlements with good access to the Romani community. Through regular visits to the local Romani settlement, their role was to identify Romani students aged 3 to 18 who were not attending school regularly, who had family issues, or who were in danger of leaving the system. Social workers would immediately report such students to the responsible school, and together they supported the student in his or her issues, and encouraged him or her to attend school regularly. They also provided skills and personality-development activities to Romani teenagers involved in the project. In this way, they helped Romani youth get to know themselves better, improve their self-confidence, and increase their engagement in learning by discussing issues and conflicts that they experienced in school.

Regular monthly meetings among LIN members were facilitated by the Ec-Pec Foundation's central project management. These forums served as an opportunity to redefine LIN members' (educational and non-educational institutions) roles in the project and to share experiences in its implementation. The bimonthly reports on achievements, handed in by LIN members to the foundation, were also discussed at these meetings with feedback provided by the project management. Besides these forums, LIN members also had self-organized meetings on the local level and used other types of communication such as telephone or the Internet.

The establishment of the LIN system was an essential element for the implementation of the methods applied in the projects, which are described below. LINs were meant to set a coherent framework for different project activities through regular communication among the partners and evaluation of each others' work. Therefore, without the strong institutional cooperation of involved stakeholders in the LINs, project results could not have reached the intended level.

THE METHODS APPLIED FOR FACILITATING TRANSITION

Child-centered early childhood pedagogy

The method developed to support the successful educational transition in the Miskolc LIN included different strategies on different school levels, adapted to the needs of the given age group. The first objective was to introduce the Step by Step program to the kindergartens and schools, particularly the early primary years, as a tool for enhancing personal development in tune with the individual needs of each child. The program stressed the importance of education by preserving the natural curiosity of the child with an engaging effect on their willingness to explore the surrounding world. The teachers facilitated the process of learning new information through thematic units in the human sciences, natural sciences and the arts. Consequently, each student involved received an individual development plan from his or her teacher, which was shared and discussed with teachers from the accepting schools on a monthly basis. These meetings were facilitated by the directors of the kindergartens, who regularly participated at LIN meetings. Thus, by the time the students entered the next school level, the new teachers were already familiar with their skills and abilities.

Revised assessment tools and procedures

In terms of skills measurement of the students, in Hungary local pedagogic expert committees were responsible for testing whether a child was able to attend normal education or whether he or she had special needs and should be transferred to a special school, or *speciális iskola*, for the mentally disabled. These tests consisted of a complex pedagogical, medical and psychological examination, followed by a report on the child's mental capacity and eligibility for normal or special education. According to the project implementers' experiences and other critical research, the pedagogic tests the committees applied were suited to the value system of the middle-class, mainstream population – the culture that the test developers represented.[7] Therefore, these tools often showed incomplete or false results regarding the abilities of students whose socio-cultural background differed from the average. Low achievement with such testing was given as the prevailing reason for misplacing Romani students into special classes for the mentally disabled.

In order to gain objective data on the skills and abilities of each child involved in the project, REI Hungary invited pedagogic expert committees to develop culturally independent pedagogic measurement tools for objective results. They developed four culturally independent pedagogic tests with the management of the Nr 3 Pedagogic Expert Committee from Budapest.[8] The tools were used in testing at the beginning and the end of the 2004–2005 school year for 33 children in

kindergarten and 13 students in primary school. Thus, the project implementers were able to gain objective data on children's abilities and skills, while measuring how much they developed during the school year compared to their initial achievement.

Good communication among schools

In order to support transition, the participating kindergartens maintained close contact with the partner primary school teachers through telephone correspondence and face-to-face meetings. The future teachers from the accepting primary schools regularly visited the kindergartens and set developmental activities for the children, such as drawing a picture of their imaginary future school and then discussing their expectations. The parents were also welcome at such activities. Through the practice of and activities organized by the primary school and kindergarten teachers, the Romani parents and children gained insights into the future integrated primary school. This was meant to instil confidence in the schools and teachers, and by the time the children entered school, they were familiar with the value system of the primary school. At the same time, the teachers got to know the children and were aware of their individual strengths and weaknesses. Such meetings were coordinated by the local LIN managers who had been appointed by the REI project management. From the four managers in Miskolc who were representing LIN institutions, two were the directors of partner kindergartens. The LIN managers were responsible for the project implementation at their own institution and regularly reported to the Ec-Pec NGO on their REI activities.

School visits and supplementary classes

At the Fazola Henrik Primary School, Grade 8 students preparing for secondary education regularly had the opportunity to visit the two accepting secondary schools and to become accustomed to their environment by visiting lessons and meeting with students and teachers. Their transition was also supported by weekly lessons in mathematics and literature which took place at the secondary schools and which were offered by two teachers from those schools. These teachers functioned as a bridge between the two school levels, transmitting the "culture" and norms of secondary education to the students attending their lessons. These activities were coordinated by the head teacher of the finishing Grade 8 class, who was involved as a LIN manager in the project.

Teacher training and mentoring

As a tool to facilitate inclusion on different school levels, the REI Hungary implementing team also found it important to provide training for the participating teachers. This training was meant to support teachers in revising their methodological practice, critically assessing their attitudes towards cultural differences, and coping with the challenges of inclusive education.

Besides introducing the philosophy and methodology of the Step by Step program in courses designed for kindergarten and primary-school teachers, REI Hungary also provided training on cooperative learning, observing and developing skills for successful learning, critical thinking for primary and secondary-school teachers, and education for social justice or "anti-bias" training for all project stakeholders.

István Kindergarten, Bp. LIN, Africa day from 2003

The Faculty of Pedagogy at Miskolc University was also a project partner. They developed a mentoring course for their future teachers to learn about the realities of the profession by allowing teachers-in-training the opportunity to mentor and tutor disadvantaged Romani students at Fazola Henrik Primary School. Each university student chose a Grade 8 student to visit on a weekly basis, primarily to discuss preparing for different subjects. The faculty also intended to present a model for lifelong learning, and to develop school students' personalities and communication skills through a confidential, personal relationship. The mentoring took place at the site of the Grade 8 student's choice, for example at

the school or at their home. The whole process was coordinated by the head teacher of the class, who was well respected by the students, in collaboration with the teacher who was teaching the course at the university.

After being admitted to quality secondary education institutions, the Romani students' next greatest challenge was to cope with the new environment, the possible hostility of some students and teachers, as well as the high expectations of secondary school. Thus, the newly admitted Romani students at the two secondary schools also received regular mentoring from both the university students and the two secondary school teachers who had been working with them in Grade 8, in order to prevent them leaving school.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

REI was implemented with very significant results, and the majority of the project's goals were realized. According to the final evaluation,[9] in schools where a "project identity" had taken hold in the attitudes of the teaching staff, desegregation became irreversible. In all schools, most of the interested teachers managed to identify the "individual tracking" of students and plot individual learning routes for them. In this way, they could break the cycle of segregation among different school levels as a prerequisite for integration.

As an important indicator, 85 to 90% of children from the segregated kindergartens were admitted to participating integrated primary schools. They received regular extra mentoring from their teachers in the first year in order to cope with their unique situation – entering a traditionally "non-Roma" school. The results were similarly significant in terms of admission rates on the next school level. From the Fazola Henrik Primary School, twelve out of the fourteen eighth grade students participating in REI entered one of the two secondary schools involved.[10]

Of the students from the parallel Grade 8 class at Fazola Henrik, only 2 out of 11 students were admitted to secondary school. The rest entered vocational school or left the education system, which was what typically happened to Romani students after finishing their primary studies. This class was taught by "traditional methods" without applying elements of SbS. These students could also participate in preparatory courses in two subjects. However, according to the secondary school teachers, the vast majority of them left during the school year due to lack of engagement in schooling.

As for teacher training, according to feedback given to LIN managers, the anti-bias training named Education for Social Justice was extremely popular and turned out to be a great success. LIN managers reported having at least twice as many people interested in the anti-bias training from the LIN than could be accommodated. According to feedback from teachers, these courses contributed to the improvement of their teaching practice to a great extent by supplying them with tools necessary for teaching in an inclusive class setting.

The mentoring course at the university also proved very successful for both participant groups. The primary school students became more confident in their school performance and more engaged in continuing their studies on a higher level. This was obvious from the fact that almost all involved students applied to secondary school. At the same time, university students had the opportunity to gain practical experience with the realities of the teaching profession by regularly visiting a "non-elite" school and by understanding the underlying factors contributing to socio-economic disadvantages. According to feedback from the participating university students, they became engaged in accepting socio-cultural differences and devoted to the educational inclusion of Romani students. One of them expressed his satisfaction with the course as follows: "Now I know what it really means to be a teacher. In my teaching practice, these Romani kids helped me open my eyes to social differences".

The Miskolc LIN is operating on its own now. After a relatively long initial period during which the stakeholders identified with their role in the project, they managed to integrate most of the program activities to their everyday work. This was seen as a crucial aspect in the sustainability of REI. Even though financial support was no longer available from the project, the stakeholders internalized the vision and tools for working together for integration on the local level.

The project results were disseminated on several forums, such as conferences and workshops on the national and international levels, and in several articles in professional journals and magazines. Some NGOs and educational institutions seeking professional advice adapted the LIN model in their own projects as an effective tool in the educational inclusion of Romani students. One such project was recently launched in the town of Hajdúböszörmény, managed by the local Kincskereső Kindergarten, and involving primary schools in the community, the local government and the Romani self-government.

REFLECTION

A general challenge, at least in the initial phase of the project, was the low level of engagement and cooperation among project stakeholders. This was especially true for the local municipality when it came to active participation in the project. According to REI project implementers' experiences, practices of segregation had a long history at local schools and responsible bodies did not always seem interested in reaching effective, measurable results in desegregation. In most cases, non-Romani parents did not wish their children to be educated together with Romani students; therefore, they put pressure on schools not to desegregate. As part of REI Hungary's mission, project implementers intended to raise the awareness of municipalities, schools and parents towards inclusive education. In an increasingly multicultural society, with a growing number of Romani students at schools, it was in the interest of each child to learn the values of tolerance, respect, and acceptance of differences.

The operation of a systemic, organized network such as the LIN was a completely new phenomenon for local stakeholders who were not accustomed to the strong and organized cooperation required in this desegregation model. In the primary phase it was difficult to make each LIN member familiar with their role and responsibilities, in addition to the means to achieve them. Therefore, it took approximately one year within the three-year project for LIN members to define their own roles and responsibilities in the initiative, as well as to identify themselves with the goals. In the process, the project manager[11] had a crucial role in facilitating regular meetings with LIN members and helping them to identify their roles and chosen activities in the initiative. This was achieved through frequent LIN meetings where the project action plan was developed and each participating body was represented. These meetings also proved very useful in the exchange of information and experiences regarding implementation.

Another challenge encountered by staff members of participating schools and kindergartens was the lack of engagement in the inclusion of Romani students. The previous paradigm of segregation proved a much easier task for teachers who were not always aware of the real consequences and dangers of segregated education. One of the project's important tasks was to convince them gradually of the advantages of inclusive education and to turn those arguments into a personal motivator. Through regular feedback from project management at LIN meetings, mentoring sessions for teachers provided by experienced mentors, as well as anti-bias trainings, REI Hungary managed to affect most stakeholders' views on desegregation. Besides changing the past practice of education at the given schools, REI Hungary also provided teachers with the necessary tools for the implementation of integration in the long term.

The involvement of secondary schools was maintained through the preparatory courses offered by teachers and staff participation at methodology and anti-bias trainings. Their role was crucial to the program, since the vast majority of local Romani students had previously left the education system after completing primary education, or entered vocational schools. Therefore, integrating Romani students from the segregated Fazola Henrik Primary School into integrated secondary schools was one of the most important goals in REI. As attending secondary schools was still not a widespread practice among Romani students in Hungary, participating teachers were key figures in gradually transmitting a new perspective on the importance of inclusion to the rest of the school staff. This fact was extremely significant considering the average attendance rate of Romani students at integrated primary and secondary schools in Hungary.[12]

The overall achievement of REI Hungary was the accumulative result of the strong cooperation among different stakeholders in the LIN, the consistent mentoring and tutoring the students received, the training teachers attended and the application of the Step by Step methodology. The implementation of a project that attempted to achieve long-term systemic changes in schools that – often "unconsciously" – segregated Romani students, required lots of patience and tolerance. Participants needed to

adapt their teaching practices and beliefs to a completely new educational setting, which inclusion required, and which was potentially extremely challenging in the short term, but crucially important for the future.

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NOTES

1. The Ec-Pec Foundation was established in February 2001 with the intention of promoting the child-centered Step by Step (SbS) pedagogical program in institutions (preschools, schools) educating disadvantaged children, and supporting program development in educational institutions already using the program. Ec-Pec is a member of the International Step by Step Association.
2. Havas, G.; Kemény, I.; Kertesi, G. (1998), "A Relatív Cigány a Klasszifikációs Küzdőtéren" (The virtual Gypsy and the struggle for classification), *Kritika* 27 (3), pp. 31-33.
3. The relatively broad age range was meant to reach the largest possible number of disadvantaged Romani students in segregated school settings or in danger of leaving the education system.
4. More information on the Network can be found at: **http://www.okm.gov.hu/main.php?folderID=126&articleID=7036&ctag=artic lelist&iid=1**.
5. Family Support Centers in Hungary are municipal organizations responsible for the social welfare of local families regardless of ethnicity. Due to the disadvantaged social status of Romani families throughout the country, they are more often in the focus of these Centers' activities than are members of the mainstream population.
6. The use of the word "track" is meant to indicate regular and consistent patterns of sending children from one type of school to another because it is an accepted, unquestioned, common practice.
7. *A Kisebbségi Ombudsman Jelentése a Kisebbségek Oktatásának Átfogó Vizsgálatáról* (Report of the Ombudsman of Minority Issues on the Special Education of Roma Children), 1997. The Ombudsman appointed the Ec-Pec Foundation in 2001 to implement a desegregational program at a given primary school following a civil complaint on segregation from the local community. The report can be accessed at: **http://www.obh.hu/nekh/hu/ugyek/okta-1.html**.
8. The adapted tests were the following: Leiter-R, Cattel, Express Neurodiagnostic and Budapest Binet IQ Test.
9. The Hungarian external evaluation, Németh, Sz. (2005). *REI Annual Research and Evaluation Report Hungary: Quality Public Education Against Segregation*, can be found on the REI website available at: **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei**.
10. Due to the financial limitations of the project, there were two parallel classes of Grade 8, and only one was selected to participate in REI where the Step by Step methodology had been operating since Grade 1. Most of these students were also involved in the preparatory course in mathematics and literature during the whole school year besides receiving regular mentoring and tutoring from the university students.
11. This individual has subsequently left the Ec-Pec Foundation.
12. According to Havas, Kemény, Liskó (2001) 38.1% of non-Romani students entered secondary schools providing graduation certificates, while this rate was only 15.4% among Romani students. For segregation data on the primary school level see "Context" at the beginning of this study.

7.2.3 Quality Education for Roma:
Systematic Changes or Mission Impossible?

By: Jagoda Novak, Research and Information Department Manager, Human Rights Center, Zagreb, Croatia

- **Participants:** children and youth aged 6 to 18 (indirectly);
- **Supports:** direct policy influence;
- **Partners:** Open Society Institute - Croatia, Ministry of Science, Education and Sports, Media.

CONTEXT

During the nineties in Croatia, a time of war, refugee crisis, and painful economic and political changes marked by an authoritarian government, the issue of the Roma as an impoverished group on the margins of society was not on the agenda. Unlike in other countries in the region, donors in Croatia did little to contribute to the capacity building of Romani organizations. This, coupled with a relatively small Romani population,[1] an even smaller number of Romani activists, and disputes between organizations, made lobbying for human rights and education virtually impossible. At that time, the government did not perceive Roma and their representatives as serious partners who could jointly articulate their needs for changes in education; change, however, was absolutely necessary. The percentage of Romani dropouts from primary school varied from 83% to 92%.[2]

At the beginning of 2001 the Open Society Institute - Croatia realised it was necessary to take a proactive step towards building upon earlier non-coordinated support of Romani grassroots initiatives. A legal case in Međimurje County in September 2002 confirmed this decision. At the time, a group of non-Romani parents had physically stopped Romani children from entering school in order to prevent their children from having to share a classroom with them. In response, Romani parents filed legal action against the segregation of their children into separate departments. This action was supported by the European Roma Rights Center and the Croatian Helsinki Committee. The hostility between the Romani and non-Romani population was palpable.

In 2000 OSI-Croatia had signed an Agreement of Cooperation with the government of Croatia in four areas, including education. Convinced the government would recognize the advantages offered by OSI-Croatia's expertise and willingness to fund, and confident with the signed agreement, they hoped the government would see OSI-Croatia as a worthy partner for tackling the problems of Romani education.

Consistent with the experience of other European countries and according to the Roma Education Initiative (REI) model, in 2001 OSI-Croatia proposed a two-year Pilot project of the Comprehensive Roma Education Program at three locations (Zagreb, Međimurje and Sisak) to the government, offering financial support to preschools, schools and local Roma NGOs. The intention was that after the implementation and evaluation of the pilot project, the validated practices within the model would be further implemented on a larger scale on the national level as part of the government's strategic program.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To instil a pilot project's validated practices into long-lasting systemic changes for quality education for Roma.

Brief description of the model

Underpinning the pilot project model was the idea that quality education for Roma could be achieved only if quality education was given to all children, with due respect to their cultural and linguistic differences, and also by creating

Underlying principles of the model:
- to demonstrate that simply providing access to education is not enough, that quality education matters as well;
- to increase retention in education by creating a welcoming school, and by integrating Romani children into all activities with other children;
- to demonstrate that school is a means to achieve a better quality of life, employment and social integration of Roma.

a motivating work environment for teachers. Cooperation with parents was a necessary component as well. Children aged 3 to 16 participated through various activities. The first involved free high quality preschool programs and mentoring which would support the language and other abilities needed for integration in school. In addition, parents were involved in educational programs and vocational education. Finally, teachers, school authorities and non-Romani parents received additional education to support their work with children from different cultural, social and linguistic groups.

The beginning (October 2002)

The process began with OSI-Croatia proposing that the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports collaborate in the implementation and evaluation of the program. After some delay, in October 2002 the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports eventually signed a Letter of Intention, which stated that together with the representatives of OSI-Croatia, the Ministry would implement and evaluate the Pilot project of the Comprehensive Roma Education Program.

The next logical step was to jointly sign a Cooperation Treaty that would concretize the established cooperation. But, despite numerous meetings and frequent telephone calls whereby proposals for the Cooperation Treaty were repeatedly modified[3] and pilot project locations were

Open Society Institute – Croatia's English language project brochure.

changed, the Cooperation Treaty was never signed and joint activities did not begin. Endless back and forth negotiations with the Ministry of Science, Education and Sports lasted for two full years, from 2002 to 2004.

OSI-Croatia, despite the Government's lack of cooperation, continued to prepare the pilot project's implementation without the Ministry's partnership and with the intention of showing the project results to the wider public and other policy decision makers.

> The problem of discrimination against Roma and non-implementation of the National Program for Roma is mentioned as one of the social problems in the Avis of the European Commission on the Application of Croatia for Membership into the European Union from 2004.

The first years (2003)

OSI-Croatia's Roma Program Coordinator, Jagoda Novak, new to the job and engaged in Romani issues, was quickly acquainted with Romani organizations and swiftly developed a good relationship with them, learning about their culture, activities and needs on the ground, exchanging ideas and co-creating projects, while at the same time helping Romani representatives to apply for and successfully implement projects. This cooperation helped to identify several Romani organizations who would later become reliable partners. Next, developing appropriate teacher training became the focus of Ms. Novak's work. Having recognized the need, together with experts from the University of Zagreb, the coordinator gathered a professional team to develop a module on teaching Croatian as a second language. This team began working in project sites and schools, and produced a manual with theoretical and practical materials for teachers and children. Concurrently, OSI – Croatia's partner organization, Step by Step, adjusted their educational trainings for preschool and school teachers to the needs of teachers working with Romani children, and, together with the REI team, for the first time in Croatia created and implemented a project on anti-bias education.[4] This was followed by the program coordinator's setting up a monitoring and evaluation team consisting of psychologists and sociologists from the field of education and minority policy. This was a real feat in 2003, since at that time, project evaluation in Croatia as a professional discipline was still in its infancy. This team produced the first major evaluation[5] of a three-month outreach preschool program organized by the Ministry. The program was then compared to a one-year preschool program organized by the Romani

PILOT-PROJEKT OBRAZOVANJA ROMA, BELI MANASTIR

TKO PROVODI I PODUPIRE PROJEKT? →

INSTITUT OTVORENO DRUŠTVO – HRVATSKA
u suradnji s Vijećem Europe, stranim veleposlanstvima i ostalim donatorima

KOJI SU CILJEVI PROJEKTA? →

- Izjednačavanje šansi za KVALITETNO OBRAZOVANJE, postizanje boljih obrazovnih postignuća i INTEGRACIJU u društvo ROMSKOJ DJECI i djeci iz socijalno ugroženih obitelji
- Poboljšanje KAPACITETA ŠKOLE, vrtića, lokalnih institucija i nevladinih udruga u radu s roditeljima i djecom različitih etničkih i socijalnih grupa
- Unapređivanje SURADNJE u zajednici na svim razinama

TKO SU PARTNERI U PROJEKTU? →

- Grad Beli Manastir
- Osnovna škola Beli Manastir
- Dječji vrtić Cvrčak Beli Manastir
- Udruga Roma grada Belog Manastira
- Projekt građanske demokratske inicijative – P.G.D.I.
- Balcanactie van de Gemeenten – BAG
- Ured pravobraniteljice za djesu
- Ured pravobraniteljice za ravnopravnost spolova
- Misija OSCE-a u RH
- Delegacija Europske komisije u RH
- Belje d.d.

PREDŠKOLA za romsku djecu u vrtiću Cvrčak

MONITORING I EVALUACIOJA (kontinuirano praćenje pomaka i rezultata Projekta)

EDUKACIJE nastavanika, učitelja i odgojitelja (Korak po Korak, RWCT, nematerinski jezik, zdravstvene edukacije itd.)

Koje su aktivnosti Projekta?

EDUKACIJE U ROMSKOJ ZAJEDNICI: zdravstveni i ženski programi, opismenjavanje odraslih, poduzetničke aktivnosti

Mentorska potpora učiteljima i nastavnicima u provedbi edukacijama stečenih znanja u praksi

PRODUŽENI BORAVAK za djecu od 1. do 4. razeda

MENTORSKI RAD / instrucije u školi za djecu od 5. do 8. razeda

organization Roma for Roma in cooperation with experts from the Teacher Education Academy. The evaluation showed much better results for the one-year structured preschool program.

After two years (September 2004)

OSI-Croatia went public with the results of this evaluation in a press release that pointed to the need for systematic support for a one-year minimum of preschool education of Romani children, and highlighted the unjustified school segregation of Romani children who went through preschool and mentoring programs. This press release initiated the first signs of changes in the Ministry, resulting with some minority education officials being removed from that department and withdrawn entirely from the Ministry's public life. This demonstrated the power of the media in affecting policy changes and opened a floodgate for further media appearances related to this topic. At the same time, through donor forums and PR materials, OSI-Croatia exchanged experience with other donors and international organizations and quickly became recognized as an institution which sincerely wanted to help the Romani community.[6] This, in turn, helped with raising additional financial resources. Surprisingly, OSI-Croatia also established a very successful collaboration with the Government Office for National Minorities which focused on the empowerment of young Romani activists; this office recognized OSI-Croatia as a partner who had credibility in the Roma NGO world and who had the professional and financial resources needed for planned training.

As a governmental partner, at the end of 2004 OSI-Croatia, together with Roma NGOs, organized a workshop which created the policy document Action Plan for Croatia within the activities of the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015 (Decade Action Plan, or DAP). By choosing the participants and international consultants, OSI-Croatia helped this document to be written in a participatory, inclusive and professional manner. The document strategically defined actual measures the Government intended to undertake in the area of equalizing social circumstances of Roma, and thus became an implementation plan of sorts for the Croatian Government's National Program for Roma. Many of the planned pilot project activities became a consistent part of the DAP.

Through collaboration with Romani organizations (Roma for Roma, Romane Droma, Association of Roma from Baranja) and international organizations, OSI-Croatia became acquainted with the situation on the ground, including the needs of Romani communities. By holding frequent meetings with local authority representatives, OSI-Croatia was able to monitor the attitude of local decision-makers and assess their readiness to support systematic and sustainable changes towards quality Romani education. Having a finger on the pulse of local politics enabled OSI-Croatia to begin "plan B" for creating policy changes: the independent implementation of the pilot project in partnership with Roma and non-Roma NGOs, local authorities and other donors, including strong public presentation of the results on the national level as "good practice" of a systematic and comprehensive approach to Romani education. The project duration was planned for September 2004 to September 2006.

> **Goals of the pilot project:**
> - increase the school-entry level preparedness of Roma children to more closely match that of their non-Roma peers;
> - show the functionality of an integrated schooling model;
> - decrease the Roma dropout rate;
> - increase the capacities of the school, kindergarten and social service center for better quality work with children from different ethnic and social groups and especially for successful collaboration with parents;
> - provide additional education for the members of the Roma community about health issues, women programs and vocational education;
> - facilitate successful community partnership through community center activities and provide the sustainability of the project on the local level.

OSI-Croatia used its network of partners and invested finances in the Baranja region, in Beli Manastir, a town with 9,000 inhabitants of which 12% were Roma. It was a post-war region with high unemployment and a multiethnic population.

In cooperation with partners, the Roma Association of Beli Manastir and the non-Romani organization PGDI (Projekt Građanske Demokratske Inicijative – Project of the Citizen's Democratic Initiative), OSI-Croatia quickly began to negotiate

with other local participants and partners. The team managed to quickly put together integrated preschool groups in the local kindergarten, which the project also furnished and reconstructed. There were two groups; one group had 85% non-Romani and 15% Romani children, and was a whole-day program. The other group, a half-day program that was free of charge, consisted of 20% non-Roma and 80% Roma. Both groups had joint activities at least three times a week and children played together on a daily basis.

All teachers were trained in Step by Step methodology. It should be noted that this was the first educational training the teachers had had in ten years. A group of Romani children and socially disadvantaged non-Romani children from Grades 1 to 4 were put together in an extended day program,[7] and there was also tutoring and mentoring help for children from Grades 5 to 8. The project was coordinated and supported by two Step by Step mentors who were already thoroughly trained and recognized for their work. In anticipation of potential negative media, the project immediately made a media plan and anticipated its monthly coverage in the local media, newspapers and on national radio and television. The project coordinator and partner Roma NGO performed this job together, with support from OSI-Croatia board members and the OSI-Croatia director, who had influence in the media and civil society sector. Some journalists regularly invited the team onto their shows dedicated to minorities, young people and education, while a more proactive approach was required for others through brief press releases, invitations to project presentations, personal contacts, distribution of materials about the project (leaflets, brochures), and so on.

The evaluation results were presented in the form of a public presentation by the external evaluator followed by a round table discussion of all project partners: the Romani community, municipality, county representatives, school, kindergarten, Social Service Center, and the local Institute for Education. The invitation, together with

Progress was not as quick as was hoped for or expected. After one year, the formative evaluation in July 2005 showed that preschool children had very good results, as well as those in the first two grades of the extended school day program. Progress among teachers differed and participation of Roma parents in school was still not extensive. Remaining challenges were engagement of school authorities in promoting the project to the entire staff, as well as higher participation of Roma parents and their connection to school and kindergarten.

highlights of the formative evaluation, was also sent in advance to the Ministry of Education and Sports, in order to leave the door open for partnership and to give them first-hand information about a successful working model. Information was also distributed to the Government Office for National Minorities with whom OSI-Croatia continued a successful partnership on projects indirectly related to education within the Decade of Roma Inclusion. The Ministry accepted the invitation and sent a high level representative: the new Minister's Assistant for National Minority Education. At the round table discussion, the assistant spoke of the project as an example of good practice that would be supported and spread in other locations by the government.

After three years (September 2005)

Based on the formative evaluation results, there were some implementation changes that occurred in the second year of the pilot project: school authorities were encouraged to involve all teachers not only in training but also in mentoring support through the SbS teaching model. By changing school timetables, and allowing for the use of classrooms with space and good equipment, the team enabled good work-space conditions to allow for methodological changes. Education for social justice and bilingual teaching techniques were introduced, including lots of materials for working with Romani children. In addition, more non-Romani children were included in the extended day program in order to improve inclusion. Together with an economics expert, business sector and local authorities, the Education for Employment sub-project began, which introduced regular monthly meetings of all participants in the project and thematic parent meetings for all partners in preschool and the school. Romani culture and language as an extracurricular activity was included in the extended day program.

In addition, negotiations with local authorities on the sustainability of the project began. For example, it was discussed whether the municipality would finance preschool education. Three other donors, the Council of Europe, the Embassy

of the Netherlands and the Embassy of Norway also supported the project in the second year of implementation (2005–2006). That same year, the Minister's Assistant for National Minority Education accepted an invitation to visit the project location and showed great interest in the project and satisfaction with the achieved results, while repeating the Ministry's intention to continue with wider implementation of the pilot project model.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

In 2006 the Ministry of Education finally decided to apply for Roma Education Fund resources within the Decade of Roma Inclusion, intended for systematic changes in Romani education. Instead of OSI-Croatia applying individually in cooperation with the Roma Association from Baranja for REF resources, the Ministry of Education consulted OSI-Croatia in the REF application process regarding taking over the Baranja model, and designed a project to extend the model into the Međimurje region. As in the Baranja pilot project, the key elements were: one-year quality preschool education, after-school and mentoring activities, encouraging Romani organizations to collaborate with local authorities, and teacher training. The project was approved in April 2006, and REF resources ensured continuation of the project activities.

At the same time, local authorities in Baranja engaged in sharing the cost of preschool education providing sustainable transport for Romani children, and enabling the sustainability of preschool on the local level. The activities in Baranja continued with the support of REF, local authorities and the Ministry. The teachers of the Baranja elementary school, thoroughly trained and much more engaged, shared their experience with other teachers in Croatia in workshops organized by the Institute for Education and the Ministry of Education within the new reform of the Croatian education system. The success of the sub-project Education for Employment became recognized and other countries in the region wanted to use it. The team for teaching Croatian as a second language has published a manual for teachers working with Romani children.

REFLECTION

Indirectly, OSI-Croatia's and the project implementation team's endeavours bore fruit. One must ask, then, why collaboration did not begin earlier, although the contents of the early Letter of Intention were never directly questioned. The way in which the Ministry of Education assigned work on the problems of education to various officials – none of whom wanted to take responsibility for implementation – coupled with the constant delays in signing the Treaty revealed the fact that the Ministry of Education had little political will to solve this problem and to begin systematic changes, despite the enormous frustration of parents, teachers and the Romani community and the pressure from human rights groups. The fact that OSI-Croatia was not considered a desirable partner to some of the Ministry officials because of the period in the nineties when it openly encouraged a critical attitude towards the ruling regime, must also be considered.

Upon reflecting on how this radical turnaround happened, it would be wrong to pinpoint one reason. The key breakthrough, perhaps, happened on a human level. New people in the government body who began in 2004 and 2005 also brought new views and a different strategy, as was ushered in with the reorganization of the Ministry of Education. The other important factor was certainly Croatia's approaching Europe, which required higher human rights standards and recognized the Romani minority as a marginalized and discriminated group, for assistance. Funds resulting from Croatia's movement towards the EU indirectly forced the government to make strategic and human rights amendments which resulted in the change of policy towards Roma.

Nevertheless, OSI-Croatia certainly also made a contribution to "the winds of change" by finding partners in local authorities and Romani organizations when the partnership with the Ministry of Education failed, as well as by using the highest decision-making platform through the Government Office for National Minorities who urged the Ministry of Education to cooperate more concretely. The engagement of the Office for National Minorities and their perception of OSI as a useful partner was probably one of the causes of the top government officials' (the Prime Minister's) decision to join the initiative of eight European countries: the Decade of Roma Inclusion 2005–2015.

Finally, there would have been no policy changes without the influence of the media. The project showed that good results have no value if they are not repeatedly presented in public in an innovative way. If OSI-Croatia had known that at the beginning, it would have used a strong presence in the media and included international and local partners earlier, when the project idea was born.

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NOTES

1   The unofficial but realistic estimate is that Roma make up 1% of the Croatian population, which equals approximately 40,000 people.

2   Open Society Institute - Croatia (2005). Roma Education Pilot project Formative Evaluation Report, Zagreb.

3   In total 12 meetings were held with Ministry representatives at all levels.

4   More information on Education for Social Justice can be found on REI's website at **http://www.osi.hu/esp/rei or from the International Step by Step Association's website at http://www.issa.nl**.

5   Open Society Institute - Croatia (2005). Roma Education Pilot project Formative Evaluation Report, Zagreb.
    Available on the forthcoming idemo website: **http://www.idemo.hr/miniweb/index.asp?cid=63**.

6   Donors and international organizations included the Council of Europe, the EC Delegation to Croatia, foreign embassies in Croatia, AED, and CNF.

7   The extended day program consisted of:
   • mentor's help in learning and writing homework in school, four hours every day after school;
   • a hot meal (lunch);
   • creative workshops in painting, English language, children's quiz shows, language games using Romani languages and Croatian language, etc.;
   • workshops from Roma crafts and tradition (old Roma games, Roma dances, Roma specialties, basket-weaving, etc.;
   • day trips (to national parks in the region, libraries, main public institutions in the region, etc.).

   The program was primarily situated in the school, led by the Step by Step (SbS) trained teacher, but in cooperation with the Roma NGO Udruga Roma Belog Manastira – Baranje, with Romani volunteers from the Roma Community Center, and other non-Roma NGOs (volunteers exchange program).

7.2.4 Increasing High School Enrolment among Roma through Campaigning and Affirmative Action

By: Ramis Osmanovski, President, Vrama Si ("It is time") Center for Education, NGO Drom, Kumanovo

- **Participants:** youth aged 14 to 17 years;
- **Supports:** access, social relations, family-community involvement;
- **Partners:** Drom NGO, Vrama Si Center for Education, Kumanovo, Advisory Committee consisting of local stakeholders, primary and secondary schools.

CONTEXT

According to official statistics, in 2002 there were 103,252 citizens in Kumanovo, out of which 4,632 were Roma, representing 4.5% of the population.

Since precise data on the educational situation among local Roma did not exist, in 2003 Vrama Si carried out research to compile data on the municipality's local Romani population. According to their research, there were between 5,700 and 6,000 Roma, including those who did not have citizenship, but who were permanently settled. About 70 to 80% (3,884) of Roma in Kumanovo were settled in ethnic Romani districts. These ethnically segregated settlements were the Baraki district (805 citizens), Stari Lozja (139 citizens), Bavci (395 citizens), and the Sredorek central urban area (1055 citizens).

The research provided a picture of the educational situation among the Roma in these communities:

Level of education among Roma in Kumanovo
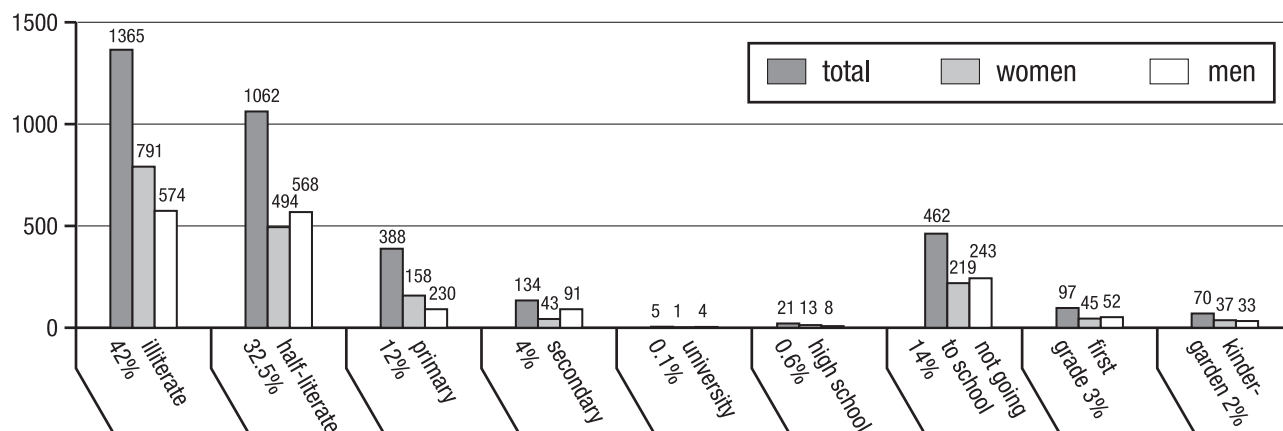
Source: Vrama Si

According to the research that Vrama Si carried out, the most striking data related to the rate of school leaving among Romani students when they made the transition in primary school from Grades 4 to 5. The total number was around 90%. Vrama Si research also uncovered that, on average, about 15 to 20 Romani children enroled in Grade 1 annually, while only 60 to 70% of these completed Grade 8. About 30%, or 3 to 6 children, went on to enrol in high school, and about 2 to 4 of these graduated. Out of those who graduated, there was a maximum of one or two who continued on to enrol in university.

The completion of Grade 8 in primary education is compulsory in the Republic of Macedonia. According to the law on education, primary school is both an obligation and right for all children. The law states that: Primary education has eight years duration (by the new regulation it is now nine years, including a "zero" preparatory year); Primary education is obligatory for all children aged 7 to 15 years. However, if some children do not complete education in the defined age bracket, they may continue the same education up to 17 years old, by request of the parent.[1]

To enforce this law, state institutions may penalize parents and, if parents do not pay the penalty fee, they could serve time in jail. For the most part, however, these measures are not enforced. Other measures to overcome this problem do not exist outside the initiatives of some civic groups and organizations.

The high rate of school leaving among Romani students is a result of marginalization and the fact that education is not always a high priority for Roma, especially considering the struggle for everyday existence. The families face great economic hardship, live in ghettoized districts in substandard conditions, and lack educated, employed Roma as role-models. All of these things reflect on the school enrolment and achievements of the children, who are often taken out of school to be near their parents or to carry out seasonal or informal work, such as collecting paper, ironing, cleaning car windows or searching for food. This situation is not helped by the fact that, according to the research made by Vrama Si, even the 10% of educated Roma who have completed high school still have difficulties finding employment. In part, this is due to the strong role that nationality and political affiliation play in the Republic of Macedonia.

In this context, the Center for Education was established in 2002, as a sub-project of the NGO Drom in Kumanovo.[2] The program sought to increase the level of education among Roma by providing educational support for students in preschool, elementary and high school. The main activities included learning the Macedonian language, health care education in preschool, providing help in writing homework and preparing for the next school day, elementary teaching, joint actions with parents and schools, and mediation for enroling students in high school. Since January 2006, the Center for Education has been registered as an independent NGO called Vrama Si.

With the start-up of the Center's activities in 2003, governmental and educational institutions got the wrong impression that the Center was a parallel educational institution contributing to the educational segregation of Roma. They did not understand that the Center's activities strengthened and complimented those of the schools, especially with regards to completing homework. The assistance made up for the fact that the majority of parents had low educational levels and were unable to assist their children at home. The rejection and criticism from the authorities led the Center to identify methods for obtaining their support.

The main method employed was the creation of an Advisory Committee to the Center's activities, which consisted of relevant governmental representatives, Romani parents, and staff of the Educational Center.[3] These included:
- advisor to the City Mayor;
- director of the Center for Social Work;
- two head teachers from the primary schools with the most Romani students;
- three heads teachers from high schools with the most Romani students;
- two representatives of the parents' council (Roma) for children attending the Center;
- two Romani representatives working in the Center;
- one doctor from the Institute for Health Care;
- one representative from the business sector, who was also a member in the municipal working group on local development.

The role of the Advisory Committee was consultative, though members often took a direct part in the implementation of the Center's activities, such as initiating, evaluating and monitoring activities, along with needed lobbying and presentation of activities in front of governmental institutions. The 13 members of the Advisory Committee were appointed because of their professional capacity, not as individuals. Meetings were held every three months and additionally, according to need. The location of the meetings was either the Center or one of the primary schools in the program.

photo by Ramis Osmanovski

Advisory Committee Meeting.

From 2003, the Center, together with the Advisory Committee, organized many activities for Roma in Kumanovo and for the city in general. This study looked at activities of the Vrama Si Center for education aimed at increasing both school attendance and attainment levels among Roma from the municipality of Kumanovo, Republic of Macedonia.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PRACTICE

Goal: To increase enrolment in mainstream, integrated high schools among Romani primary school graduates.

In one of the first Advisory Committee meetings, the members discussed the problem that many Romani students terminated their education at the primary school level. The representative of the Ministry of Education and Science proposed that the group work out a strategy and action plan for increasing students' enrolment into high schools.

The following essential activities were identified and carried out:

Setting up an affirmative action fund for supporting high school costs

More than 90% of Roma in Kumanovo are unemployed and beneficiaries of social assistance ranging from €30 to €50 per month. The cost for high school students is about €150 a year, which represents an additional expense that is difficult, if not impossible, to meet. Therefore, one activity was to set up a fund to support the costs of school supplies, books and enrolment fees for disadvantaged families.[4] The funds were provided to the Education Center by the Pestalozzi Children's Foundation (PCF).

Campaign to increase students' engagement in high school

To spread news about the services and material help being offered to high school students, the Center organized a campaign targeting the parents of children who would finish primary school in the current year, and also those whose children had finished in the previous one to two years, and who were under the age of 17. The list of students completing primary school was compiled with the help of primary school directors in the schools that Romani children were attending.

The information campaign was carried out directly in the Romani districts through the distribution of booklets and family visits by two Romani community members who worked in the Center, and who had good relations and influence on the local Roma. In their visits to Romani families they stressed the importance of education with the aim of convincing the children to enrol in high school, and to encourage parents to support their children in the educational process.

In addition to home visits, the families were also invited to attend a meeting in the Center, where they would hear the details regarding the program's aims, the support that could be expected and the forthcoming public meeting with educational officials. In addition to providing a more clear understanding of the initiative, the meeting also contributed to building trust among parents towards government institutions.

Public meeting with educational officials for recruiting Romani high school students

The public information meeting was held in the sports hall of the local Octomvri 11 primary school, which was centrally located and accessible from all the Romani districts. High school principals and a representative for high school education within the Ministry of Education presented the profiles, conditions and criteria for enrolment through video and by sharing booklets on the high schools. Some of the schools also had their Romani students make presentations in Romani, which proved to be extremely engaging for parents and students. Furthermore, interested students could schedule visits to the schools.

Meetings with parents and students in the Educational Center Vrama Si - Kumanovo.

It should be noted that the presence of governmental representatives was important, since it gave the Center an opportunity to reinforce commitments set out in the Decade of Roma Inclusion Action Plan[5] by presenting its work and promoting its methods. The Center's work was in direct alignment with the Decade Action Plan's goals.

OUTCOMES AND LESSONS LEARNED

The public presentation meeting was organized in the second half of May 2005, one month before the end of the school year. The Center managed to attract 43 Romani students and their parents to the public meeting. Twenty-two of the students were finishing primary school in the 2004–2005 school year while the other twenty-one had finished in previous years and were under seventeen years old.

In the history of Kumanovo, there had never been so many students who had enroled in high school in one year. In fact, the number of students nearly quadrupled. According to data kept by the Center, these were the results of its interventions:

School year	2000-2001	2001-2002	2002-2003	2003-2004	2004-2005	2005-2006
Number of students to enrol in high school	7	9	11	8	12	43

Source: Vrama Si

In the 2006–2007 school year, the Educational Center organized the initiative again, where 17 out of the 19 students completing primary school enroled in high school.

The participation and involvement of government institutions' representatives in NGO activities proved to be very important because representatives became more familiar with these kinds of activities, and contributed towards them. This made lobbying in government institutions easier, in that the presentation and acceptance of the NGOs' activities and positive achievements could contribute to their systematic inclusion.

Cooperation between school and parents was also very valuable, but it was necessary to have a strategy for this sort of cooperation. The strategy involved creating multiple opportunities for building trust between parents and schools, which could later be transformed into actively involving parents in the NGO's and school's activities. Strategies for gaining parents' trust included helping them to write appeals or requests, discussing and providing information about their personal rights, and organizing debates and workshops according to their needs.

Taking affirmative action played a great role in increasing the number of Romani students enroling in high schools. It was very important to organize activities towards the end of the school year. At the same time, it was necessary to provide some basic material goods to provide incentive to candidates; support took the form of the provision of books, school materials such as writing instruments, paper notebooks, a book bag, and if and when possible, paying for their participation at meetings and school. In Macedonia, a great deal of Roma did not continue their education due to economic difficulties: materials could cost as much as €150 to €200. This was expensive, bearing in mind that more than 90% of the Romani population in Macedonia relied on social support equalling less than €50 per family per month.

REFLECTION

The campaigning and affirmative action fund proved to be a good model for increasing the number of Romani students in high schools. The initiative was presented in several cities in the Republic of Macedonia by representatives of the Department of Education and Science, non-governmental organizations and donors. Indeed, the role of the Advisory Committee meant that the initiative engaged key stakeholders in the process, which led to good understanding and cooperation among the schools, the Romani community, the Center and the Ministry of Education and Science.

The work of the Center and the Advisory Board could also be considered successful from the point of view that all participants were able to realize their interests. The schools increased the number of students in their classrooms (thus securing a certain level of financing per student), students obtained better school results, the rate of students leaving school decreased and there was better collaboration with parents. The local government and departments could better realize their programs and the interests of citizens through collaboration with the Center, and all members of the Advisory Board could be satisfied that they successfully implemented the program.

One important point to make was that collaboration would only succeed if both partners benefited. That is why Vrama Si always tried to give something back to its partners, either through technical or logistical support, for instance by visiting the families (Romani settlements) together with school personnel, setting up a database that could be used by the government institutions, providing training to public officials, for example schools teachers, and taking an active part in government programs to work with and develop civil society.

By reaching out to the families through direct campaigning, home visits and public meetings, Center staff could provide Romani community members with access to information, while developing relations of trust and confidence with regards to the schooling of their children.

In part, the Center also attributed the success of the initiative to the fact that it had gained the trust of local Roma due to its many years of providing individual help in overcoming various issues and contributing to infrastructure development in the neighbourhoods. Furthermore, beyond the work described in this study, the extra-curricular and after-school support that the Center provided to different age groups also reinforced the whole process of support and encouraged families to participate in the educational process.

Certainly, the fact that the initiative allowed disadvantaged families to overcome the financial barriers of high school participation was an important component. In the future, the Center hopes to transfer this role to the local high schools, in particular through collection and redistribution of school books from students who have already graduated, and by lobbying for fee wavers among disadvantaged students.

The willingness of parents to listen to Center staff and send their children to high school was also increased by the Center's complementary activities, such as the computer club and various workshops for high school students, covering such issues as early marriage, drug and alcohol abuse and intercultural learning. Furthermore, the Center organized a series of workshops for both parents and children based on their interests. Topics included rights and obligations of social assistance beneficiaries, family planning, and local government obligations, amongst others.

In short, the Center provided for a broad range of support and development of mutual understanding among various participants involved in the educational system. In doing so, it showed that high school enrolment among Roma could be increased with the removal of socio-economic barriers and with the introduction of a supportive environment.

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NOTES

1   Governmental Gazette of the Republic of Macedonia N° 44/95 from 20.09.1995 in Basic Regulations paragraph 3.
2   The project started in 2002 with full support from OSI-Macedonia; as such, the NGO Drom was an indirect beneficiary of the Roma Education Initiative Project. From 2004 the Center gained support from USAID and the Children's Foundation Pestalozzi. The project will be funded from OSI and USAID up to the year 2010, with reduced funds.

3   To gain support for the Advisory Committee, Center staff first distributed a newsletter informing the main institutions of its activities. This was followed by personal meetings with local representatives, such as the Ministry of Education and Science, the mayor and his advisor. With their support, potential members of the Advisory Council were invited to a meeting that was hosted by the local government.

4   These can be broken down into: enrolment fees – €16; second-hand books, school materials and school bags – €100; free access to the internet on the premises of the Center, and free mentoring by the educators from the Center.

5   Macedonia's action plan can be found on the website of the Decade of Roma Inclusion at: **http://www.romadecade.org/**.

7.3 Policy and Systemic Change

In summary, the documentation studies in this chapter point towards the following policy and systemic changes.

- Partnerships between school staff, government, preschool educators, local partners, and NGOs are critical to change at the policy and systemic level. Collaboration among several actors is important, as the issues facing Romani students in education are considerable and complex. Partnerships need to include those working at the local level within schools and communities, as well as those within the municipal, national, and international spheres.

- Good communication and feedback among partners was stressed by the Hungarian REI team. Establishment of partnerships to foster educational change for Romani students needs to build in systems for ongoing communication and feedback.

- Change at the systemic and policy level can only be achieved through continued provision of information and advocacy work. Forging links with international bodies and agencies, such as the European Union, can provide the level of pressure and support that fosters change. In addition, the media has a role to play in advocating for systems and policy change.

CHAPTER 8
LESSONS LEARNED AND IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY

While efforts continue to support school success for Romani children, the documentation studies included in the previous chapters highlight the challenges faced by Romani students in accessing and achieving success within educational systems. Though differences exist among participating REI countries, a number of interrelated trends can be identified, namely poor access to quality preschool, lower curricular outcomes and expectations of Romani students, and pervasive practices which hamper the educational achievement of Romani students. These factors influence educational achievement at all levels and hinder Romani students' chances of school completion.

This chapter summarizes the key means, methods and lessons of the REI supported initiatives in terms of their contribution to quality inclusive education and improved academic outcomes among Romani children and youth. Although the methods and models are clustered thematically, most of them are inter-related and mutually reinforcing, forming integral parts of a comprehensive approach.

8.1 Access to Education

Issues of access to quality inclusive education were emphasized as pivotal to the success of Romani students. A number of documentation studies highlighted the importance of early education, particularly preschool and primary school, as supporting student success. With the introduction of kindergarten fees in many countries, Romani participation has decreased due to the social and economic challenges facing many families. In addition to economic hurdles, the distance of many Romani communities from preschools created further access issues. Therefore, some programs provided free community-based preschool, such as the after-school support offered at the Education Centers in Macedonia, while others, in Slovakia and Hungary, worked on improving access to and pedagogical practices within local kindergartens. Funds provided for covering costs of school fees, books and supplies for Romani high school students also increased their access to quality education.

Staff at local Roma NGOs played a critical role in influencing school enrolment and continuation through door-to-door campaigning and organizing community-based events. Through such actions they promoted education and career orientation and provided information on enrolment requirements. Once in school, many projects provided after-school support to review lessons and complete homework, along with summer programs, interest clubs, performances and day trips.

Lessons learned in access to education
- *Access to early education is important.*
  While access issues are present at all levels of education for Romani students in the region, the importance of access to quality preschool and primary school should be a focus. Building upon this foundation, issues of access to higher education will likely follow.
- *Families play an important role in accessing education.*
  Families play a critical role in preschool access as well as in the success of students once they enter the education system. Romani families need to be supported through access to quality and affordable (preferably at no cost) preschool opportunities. In many cases, providing information regarding educational options is necessary, as many are not aware of preschool and primary schools options. Roma teacher assistants and staff in community-based NGOs are uniquely placed to provide information and support regarding access to education for Romani children and families through home visits and door-to-door campaigning.
- *Supporting Romani students at key transition points facilitates access.*
  Between Grades 4 and 5 as well as between Grades 8 and 9 there appear to be times when Romani students struggle to continue their education. Supporting students academically, socially and economically through in-school and out-of-school supports positively influences their capacity to access higher education.

8.2 Supporting Educational Achievement

Enhancing educational outcomes for Romani students in terms of student achievement and continuation in education was at the core of REI supported projects. Interactive child-centered pedagogy, through the Step by Step methodology, played a central role in helping young Romani children to excel in kindergarten through Grade 4. In later years (Grades 5 to 8) teachers used Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking methods to promote active, inquiry-based learning and democratic practices. Other methods introduced were Active Learning and Teaching, Education for Social Justice (dealing with diversity and second language techniques in the primary grades), anti-bias strategies (with adults), bilingualism and multiculturalism, and Romani history and culture.

The role of Roma teacher assistants was highlighted in a number of documentation studies as supporting student achievement through language assistance, cultural inclusion, role-modelling, and academic support. Although some teachers were reticent at the beginning, RTAs proved to be beneficial to teachers and helped create a dynamic team partnership in the classroom. By participating directly in learning activities, they supported both Romani and non-Romani students, and represented an important role-model for the children. Finally, for children with Romani language as a mother tongue, the RTA's assistance in the classroom proved vital for meaningful participation and sustainable inclusion.

A number of REI projects underlined the importance of staff's professional development in enhancing student achievement. In particular, teacher training usually involved a number of different modules aimed at providing teachers and Roma teacher assistants with the knowledge and tools to respond better to the individual needs of disadvantaged students. Some projects, such as in Slovenia, provided a follow-up system of monitoring and mentoring along with organized exchanges among teachers from different participating localities.

In addition to improving teachers' qualifications and practices within the classroom, a number of projects also involved school directors, administrators, teachers and parents through School Improvement Training. The initiatives sought to provide teachers with a more holistic environment conducive for introducing new practices and standards.

Lessons learned in supporting educational achievement

- *Educational outcomes among Roma could be improved when disadvantages were addressed.*
  When projects successfully addressed social and economic disadvantage, Romani children had better success in terms of academic performance and continuation onto higher grades. In particular, the documentation studies showed that, alongside teacher training to improve methods within schools, out-of-school complimentary activities had a great impact.
- *Good education for Romani students is good education for all students.*
  Good teaching supported inclusive education for all children. Many of the documentation studies focused on the learning environments needed to foster student success. The Step by Step child-centered early childhood methodology fostered academic success, critical thinking and problem solving, and also built self-esteem. Culturally inclusive and developmentally appropriate assessment was also needed to support student success.
- *Many Romani students are second language learners.*
  Many Romani students speak Romani as a first language. Documentation studies highlighted the importance of educators understanding the needs of second language learners and having access to professional development to support the unique needs of these students. While RTAs have a critical role to play in facilitating the learning of an additional language, other educators must also be sensitive to this issue in order to support student success.
- *Out-of-school activities are an important part of the learning process.*
  In many cases, after-school activities impacted academic success and helped students continue to stay in school. In particular, documentation studies highlighted assistance with homework and extra-curricular activities to enhance engagement and increase general knowledge. Whether held in schools, local NGOs, or community centers, out-of-school activities helped address disadvantages confronting a number of families and students. It provided the opportunity for broad-based learning and knowledge attainment in terms of reinforcing daily lessons, having access to tutors and mentors, and enjoying hobbies and cultural outings like other children from their age groups.

- *Professional development is essential to supporting student achievement.*
Increasing teachers' qualifications for using child-centered methodologies improved both the quality of education provided and the overall academic success of Romani students. In doing so, Romani children were better equipped to respond to the demands of integrated classes, with the same expectations and standards as non-Romani students.

Some documentation studies underscored the importance of teacher readiness to foster maximum participation in professional development and the importance of accrediting professional development activities. Professional development was best sustained through mentoring and classroom visits, and collegial exchange. This provided ongoing practical support.

Finally, professional development also changed school cultures. This was achieved by including different types of educators in training, including Roma teacher assistants and school directors. The role of the school directors was seen as important in terms of changing a school's overall atmosphere, engaging teachers and promoting sustainable outcomes. Ensuring the support of upper levels of school management, and fostering a system and culture of School Improvement, should form the starting point of such initiatives.

8.3 Family and Community Involvement and Capacity Building

Augmenting and supporting the participation of parents in education was another key element of REI projects and the comprehensive approach of the initiative. Local projects employed a variety of methods to foster communication with parents of school-aged children, facilitate relationships that encouraged regular school attendance, and engaged families in classroom and other school related activities.

On the one hand, some studies highlighted proactive approaches where teachers, Roma teacher assistants and Romani community-based organizations engaged parents. Teachers made concerted efforts to contact and communicate with parents. Roma teacher assistants and NGO advocacy groups played a particularly important role through regular home visits to hear families' concerns and interests. In addition, they reached out to families though community-based meetings and through assistance in navigating various administrative procedures. These types of activities improved trust between schools and parents.

On the other hand, a number of projects introduced a variety of activities for parents and children, with the purpose of engaging parents directly into school and into the teaching/learning process with their children. These included individual and group parent meetings, inclusion of parents in specific classroom activities, organizing workshops based on parents' interests, student performances and ceremonies with parents as partners, and adult education through vocational and employment-related projects. These activities framed school/family relationships in a positive light. The inclusion of elements of Romani culture created an atmosphere of respect and inclusion, which in turn, fostered student attendance.

Engaging parents increased the capacity of Romani families to support education. This fostered student attendance, greater continuation of studies beyond primary school, and in cases from Hungary and Slovakia, influenced the choice of schools in which children enroled (such as high schools rather than vocational schools or integrated schools rather than local Roma-only schools).

Lesson learned in family and community involvement and capacity building
- *Respectful family involvement is a cornerstone of democratic and inclusive schools.*
Education takes place in homes and communities as well as in schools, making families valued partners in the educational process. Therefore, respectful relationships with families and engagement of parents in education is an essential cornerstone upon which to build programs and systems that foster school success for Romani students. Fostering relationships with families facilitates issues around access to education as well as enhancing student achievement.

- *Democratic and inclusive schools address the challenges of parental involvement.*
  The poverty, social disadvantage, and marginalization faced by Romani families made participation in education an ongoing challenge. Many local initiatives identified parental involvement as an important factor influencing school success. However, this was also identified as one of the more difficult elements to address. Parents were invited to participate at school more regularly through inclusion in specific classroom activities and after school events. In addition to improving school/parent relations, this created opportunities for improving relations among Romani and non-Romani parents. Often, school leadership is strategic to making such initiatives a success.
- *Community-based Roma NGOs, family coordinators, and Roma teacher assistants are important.*
  A number of documentation studies highlighted the role of community-based Romani organizations, family coordinators, and RTAs in fostering parental engagement and participation. Their roles went beyond that of school outreach through community-based work and home visits. In cases where parents spoke Romani languages, community-based organizations and Roma teacher assistants were better able to communicate and build mutual understanding. At times, they helped families with social issues, thus gaining the trust and respect of families, along with greater willingness to partner with schools in their children's education. Furthermore, their direct involvement in the community provided the means for gathering a detailed picture of the situation and needs of the local families before starting a project. Unfortunately, some of this work was funded through external grants, creating sustainability issues unless support from public bodies could be obtained.
- *Capacity building is important.*
  Getting families involved in education was not enough. Increasing community and familial capacity was also essential and contributed to the sustainability. This was accomplished in a number of ways. By providing opportunities for vocational training, Romani parents became involved in their own learning, thus contributing to the learning of their children through modelling and increased economic opportunities.

8.4 Multiculturalism, Romipen and Anti-Bias Education

Because education occurs within a larger social context, it is strongly influenced by society. Democratic and inclusive schools understand that students come from various ethno-cultural backgrounds and find ways to respectfully incorporate aspects of culture in the classroom. REI projects emphasized the importance of including Romani culture in teaching and learning. Roma teacher assistants played an essential role by incorporating Romani language, culture, and history into classrooms. In addition, RTAs linked teachers and parents, as well as increased engagement and confidence in schools by making them more welcoming environments. Students who were engaged, included and respected in their learning environment were more academically successful and more likely to continue their education.

Lessons learned in multiculturalism, Romipen and anti-bias education
- *Greater awareness raising is necessary to counter ingrained practices within institutions.*
  It is important to recall that practices supporting segregation are historically rooted in the local schools and that integration requires both engagement and concerted effort. For some teachers and school staff, it was easier to maintain the status quo rather than invest time and energy in integration. Therefore, in addition to activities such as those improving qualifications and knowledge amongst educators, sustainable inclusion will also require time and resources for building real political will for integration by improving attitudes and awareness among municipalities, schools, parents and students.
- *Bridge the gap between different cultures living side by side.*
  Misunderstanding stemmed from mono-cultural values and systems which, ultimately, had a negative effect on the education of Romani children. Respectful and multicultural methods for increasing knowledge and socialization skills among preschool and primary school children helped students' academic and social/emotional development. Inclusive classroom dynamics call for qualified, sensitized teachers, while out-of-school activities can help improve relations among Romani and non-Romani students and parents as well.
- *Training and culturally appropriate materials are needed to foster intercultural understanding.*
  The Ciganeska documentation study emphasized the importance of culturally sensitive anti-bias training to influence

educator attitudes. In addition, students need to see themselves reflected in the materials available in their learning environment, stressing the importance of culturally sensitive environments and materials.

8.5 Complex Approaches to Influence Systemic Change

Another factor contributing to the success of local educational projects was the ability to gain broad support and to partner with appropriate organizations. To achieve this, good communication and information exchange among stakeholders (schools, local NGOs, parents, Romani leaders and representatives, local authorities and social services) was important. Two specific models in the documentation studies included setting up an Advisory Committee (Macedonia) and working in a Local Integration Network (Hungary). In both cases, meetings among members were held regularly throughout the project, and the arrangement provided for a coherent framework for sharing information, planning, coordinating and evaluating activities.

Setting up committees or networks to ensure participation of stakeholders helped create the supportive attitudes and understanding needed for carrying out necessary changes within municipal bodies, schools and Romani communities. They were particularly useful in building relations between the Romani community and local institutions, and providing for the coordination and input of different resources. Addressing the various educational needs of disadvantaged children required partnerships. One organization could not do it alone. Establishing partnerships and finding joint strategies greatly influenced and positively impacted the educational process.

To increase the overall impact of good civic practices and models, it is important that state bodies eventually absorb the learning produced through such initiatives and introduce systemic changes whenever possible. Other activities to encourage state bodies to develop new plans and implement new programs related to Romani education included direct involvement of those who implemented projects in national and local strategy development, and comparative analyses of state and civic programs combined with widespread media coverage of the findings. Indeed, strong public presentation of good practices and results was seen as one of the strategic factors encouraging public bodies to respond appropriately.

Lessons learned in complex approaches to influence systemic change

- *Partnerships take time to build, manage and maintain.*
  Engaging relevant partners was a process requiring both time and resources. In some cases, local organizations have been working in the field of education with good results for many years. This allowed for trust and good relations among schools, teachers, parents, the community and other public bodies to develop over time. In the experiences of the Local Integration Network (Hungary), project managers found a full year was needed to define roles and responsibilities and to set goals. The documentation study in Croatia underlined the importance of persistence. If one sector is not responding, search for others that may be open and willing to partner, since genuine political will to cooperate is a key factor for success.
  Indeed, working with participatory methods and in a team with diverse members can be a new experience, which requires careful attention and planning. Furthermore, projects that require a number of partners also need to be properly managed in order to achieve the desired outcomes
- *Roma NGOs and community workers have a strategic role to play.*
  Roma NGOs and community workers played key roles in inclusion, in particular as partners and links to the implementing schools. In doing so, they bridged the gap between schools and communities. At times, their roles involved mediating communication and relations with Romani community members, and helping prepare families and children for inclusion. They also took the lead in organizing engaging and educational experiences for Romani parents, in view of supporting education through active engagement in schools and classrooms.
- *Building capacity for strategy building and action planning is important.*
  The increased awareness and momentum surrounding issues of Roma inclusion, especially in the field of education, have led to the creation of strategies and/or action plans at national levels. All countries participating in the Decade of Roma Inclusion are committed to developing National Action Plans, though the quality of these varies significantly.[1]

In the context of decentralizing education, the development and implementation of local strategies and action plans becomes increasingly important. For this, it is important that local actors have the relevant capacities and knowledge for developing both the strategies to outline what should be achieved and the related action plans to describe precisely, how, when, with what resources, and by whom it will be achieved.

NOTES

1   See: **http://www.romadecade.org**.

8.6 Summary: Policy and Systemic Change

Although specific and more detailed policy and systemic changes are included at the end of each thematic chapter, key policy and systemic changes rooted in the lessons learned are summarized here:

- Policies and programs need to be established at all levels of the system (national and local) to facilitate access to education for Romani students at the preschool and primary school levels. Romani families must be aware of educational options available and must be supported in accessing the documentation necessary for registration.
- Policy and programs dealing with issues of access need to address all aspects that affect access to education, including health, infrastructure, sustainable transportation, economic support, and social services.
- Policies and programs are required to support Romani students at key transition points in education, including but not limited to support in taking entrance examinations, homework support, as well as mentoring and role-model support.
- Meaningful parental involvement does not just happen. Educators at all levels, teachers, schools directors, Roma teacher assistants, pedagogues, and government officials should be trained on the value and importance of family involvement in supporting school success for Romani students. This training (both pre-service and in-service) also needs to incorporate elements of anti-bias training (education for social justice) and an understanding of Romani culture and history.
- Policies which advocate for approaches that foster student success through the use of child-centered activity-based learning (for example Step by Step) are needed. These must include school-based programs, but can be supplemented with community-based programs.
- Policies and programs need to be developed and implemented to support the sustained training and mentoring of educators as they move from a teacher-directed to a child-centered paradigm. In addition, educators should have access to professional development that focuses on the unique needs of second language learners. Where appropriate, this training should fit within the framework of credentialing and salary augmentation appropriate to the educational jurisdiction. Within the region, credentialing lends legitimacy and, consequently, enhances the engagement of educators in professional development.
- Roma teacher assistants have a significant role to play in facilitating access to education, enhancing the involvement of Romani families in their children's schooling, and supporting Romani students in the classroom. Policies and programs that foster recognition of RTAs through acknowledgement of the profession and through professional training linked to credentialing are needed. While the profession of Roma teacher assistant has been recognized in some countries, steps can still to taken to ensure RTAs are supported in their work through appropriate salaries and access to professional learning opportunities.
- Partnerships between school staff, government, preschool educators, local partners, and NGOs are critical to change at the policy and systemic level. Cooperation among several actors is important, as the issues facing Romani students in education are considerable and complex. Partnerships need to include those working at the local level within schools and communities, as well as those within the municipal, national, and international spheres.
- Change at the systemic and policy level can only be achieved through continued provision of information and advocacy work. Forging links with international bodies and agencies, such as the European Union, can provide the level of pressure and support that fosters change. In addition, the media has a role to play in advocating for systemic and policy change.

APPENDICES

Glossary

Anti-bias education (education for social justice)

An active/activist approach to challenging prejudices and stereotypes. It addresses educational change and empowerment, and is designed to facilitate the awareness of biases and how it affects the classroom. Education for social justice seeks to increase people's knowledge, understanding, and sensitivity of mechanisms which perpetuate and maintain systems of oppression and inequity, and promotes the concept that each person must intervene, challenge, and counter the personal and institutional behaviors that perpetuate these systems.

Equal Chances: Integration of Romani Children and Youth in the Educational System (Equal Chances)

Equal Chances refers to a project to foster educational success for Romani children supported by the Open Society Institute through the Center for Interactive Pedagogy (Serbia).

International Step by Step Association

The International Step By Step Association (ISSA) is a non-governmental membership organization established in the Netherlands in 1999, which unites individuals and organizations into a powerful network to foster democratic principles and promote parent and community involvement in early childhood education.

In-Service Teacher Training

Professional development programs of varying duration for the existing teaching force.

Open Society Institute

The Open Society Institute (OSI), a privately operating and grant-making foundation, aims to shape public policy to promote democratic governance, human rights, and economic, legal, and social reform. On a local level, OSI implements a range of initiatives to support the rule of law, education, public health, and independent media. At the same time, OSI works to build alliances across borders and continents on issues such as combating corruption and rights abuses. OSI was created in 1993 by investor and philanthropist George Soros to support his foundations in Central and Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. Those foundations were established, starting in 1984, to help countries make the transition from communism. OSI initiatives cover a range of activities aimed at building free and open societies, including grant-making to strengthen civil society; economic reform; education at all levels; human rights; legal reform and public administration; media and communications; public health; and arts and culture.

Pre-Service Teacher Training

Training for students in higher education before they enter the teaching profession.

Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking

Supported by the Open Society Institute, the Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking project trains teachers and teacher educators to help improve classroom practices at all grade levels and in most school subjects.

Roma Teacher Assistant/Roma Family Coordinator

While at times used interchangeably, the role of Roma teacher assistant and Roma family coordinator are distinguished in some national contexts. In some countries such as the Czech Republic and Hungary, family coordinators have a major responsibility in liaising with Romani families and community. On the other hand, while Roma teacher assistants also have some community responsibilities, their focus is the classroom. RTAs act largely as co-teachers in classroom, assisting students with language acquisition and academic support.

Romipen

While definitions and descriptions vary depending on sources, Romipen generally refers to Romani culture and identity. More specifically, Romipen includes Romani heritage, origins and history, languages, ways of life, values and unique human relationships.

School Improvement

Seeks to enhance student learning outcomes through creating equitable learning communities founded upon principles of democracy. Democratic schooling refers to education that supports and enhances students' social participation, particularly the participation of students from marginalized populations. Thus, School Improvement is a process of educational change or renewal that supports equity and social justice, both of which are central to the creation of an open society.

Step by Step

Step by Step methodology is based on child-centered methods in which special attention is devoted to the whole child's development. It advocates equal access to education, individually and culturally appropriate environments and approaches, and physically, psychologically and socially safe environments for learning in which choices, independence and cooperation are promoted. Step by Step methodology believes in the teacher as a facilitator of learning and the creator of learning communities, while parents are viewed as primary educators. The methodology promotes parents' involvement in the educational process and seeks to advance the collaboration between schools and local communities.

REI Good Practice Documentation Methodology

Background

To respond to the need and demand from international donors, organizations, national partners and interested parties for REI to investigate and document experiences both in practice and policy regarding Romani education, OSI's General Education Sub-Board (GESB) approved the development of a "Compendium of Good Practice" to begin immediately.

A methodology was developed in order to create space to "tell the story" of REI in a qualitative way; to allow for highlighting and documenting the intricacies and specific aspects of the comprehensive model, inclusive pedagogy and integration practices that REI piloted; and to relate the experiences that were collectively gained.

Target audience

The studies are being documented for use by program implementers, educators, policy makers, Ministries of Education, journalists, researchers and others interested in the countries of Europe.

STRUCTURE

Context – 20%

This section will describe where the intervention took place – the location – the educational level targeted, and the needs the intervention addressed. It will also describe the goals of the project. It may include the specifics of the project background, and how this practice fits into the national context.

Description of the practice itself – 50%

This section should focus on telling the story. It will describe the technical aspects of what was actually implemented, including information on what was achieved, and how it was achieved, but in a compelling way. What were the preparation challenges? Who were the main people involved? What was required to implement the practice, to see it through from A to Z? Authors should explain the feelings and hopes of the stakeholders, and bring in several perspectives.

Reflection – 30%

This section should reflect on the following: Why was this intervention considered good practice? What results can we draw from external evaluation? What were the strengths and weaknesses, the barriers encountered, and lessons learned? What replication advice is there? What evidence is there to draw conclusions one way or the other?

Pictograms/inclusions

- summary of outcomes of the project according to external evaluation
- statements from project stakeholders
- photos
- examples from actual materials that were created
- media snapshots from newspaper and journal articles
- information on resources needed – both human and financial
- other.

Note: The percentages shown represent the amount of text in each section.

Length

The good practice studies should be six to seven pages in length. Appendices/inclusions may account for an additional two pages.

Language

Good practice studies must be submitted in English. Local language versions are welcome, but any translation arrangements are the responsibility of the author. If translation is not acceptable, the study will be sent back to the author for improvement.

Deadlines

- Drafts of good practice documentation studies provided in English up to: 24 April 2006.
- It is expected that one methodology meeting for all authors will take place in May 2006.
- Final good practice documentation studies provided in English up to: 20 June 2006.
- Review of drafts will take place, and authors are expected to incorporate feedback.

Payment

Authors will receive 100% of the payment after delivery of the completed product. Authors will be compensated a lump-sum payment for a full-length good practice study.

Comprehensive Approach Matrix

MEANS/STRATEGY	DOMAINS								
	Access	Educational Achievement	Social Relations (interpersonal/age/ethnic)	Family-Community Involvement	Improvement of School Management and Governance	Capacity Building	Multiculturalism and Romipen	Direct Policy Influence	Civic Involvement in project management
Preschool education									
Preparatory classes and/or transitional means									
Bias-free testing									
Roma teacher assistant/Roma family coordinator									
Capacity building/professional development of teachers including Anti-Bias training for non-Roma and Roma									
Parent education									
School mini-projects									
Mentoring/tutoring									
Supplementary classes									
Romani culture/history workshops									
Child-centered pedagogy									
Free textbooks/donations/humanitarian aid									
Extra-curricular and all day activities									
Multicultural environment at the classroom and school level									
Second language approach with instructional strategies									
Vocational courses for secondary school (competency based education)									
Courses to complete primary education for drop-outs									
Parent-NGO meetings									
Parents as co-teachers/volunteers									
Promoting and building cooperative groups at the school level									
Desegregation working groups									
Educational policy groups (national, local and school levels)									
School improvement									

REI { ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ }
ROMA EDUCATION INITIATIVE

REI { ROMA EDUCATION INITIATIVE ▪ ▪ ▪ ▪ }