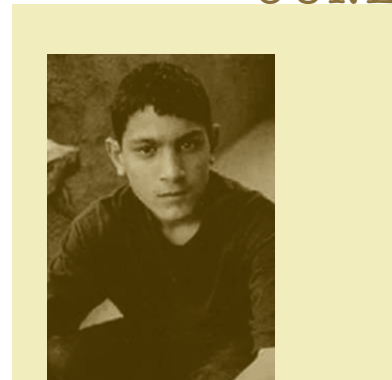


Roma Education Initiative
FINAL REPORT



JUNE 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Prepared for the Education Support Program
of the Open Society Institute – Budapest by



PREFACE



The Final Report on OSI's Roma Education Initiative, 2002-2005 has been published to bring to the attention of policy makers important new information in the field of Roma education.

The difficulties surrounding the education of Roma children have for long been high on the agenda of many countries but the debate on how best to address these problems has been hampered by a lack of information and analysis. Recently, however, more information on the education of Roma children has become available. Recent reports – from United Nations Development Program, European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia, the Open Society Institute, the World Bank and the newly established Roma Education Fund, to name a few – are either dedicated exclusively to education or contain chapters and subsections dedicated to education, and most cover important topics such as the state of the problem, providing data and statistics when available, factors influencing the education of Roma, overview of existing policies and measures, and recommendations for ways forward.

Few publications, however, touch upon the design of project interventions, whether governmental or NGO, and discuss impact of such projects, information that can be instrumental as interventions continue within the Decade of Roma Inclusion. Perhaps the reason why there is so little published on impact is because so few interventions integrate external evaluation¹ as an ongoing component of project implementation. Indeed, one recognized problem that hinders long term impact of interventions is just this, the lack of external evaluation. The Final Report on OSI's Roma Education Initiative fills many of these gaps, and as such, will be an essential tool for policy makers and analysts.

The design of the Roma Education Initiative did not envisage a centralized evaluation due to the variation in implementation and timeframes of projects; difficulties over the comparability of data would not have made that possible. Instead, REI relied mostly on national-level external evaluation of projects to provide data necessary to document the achievements of REI. The national evaluations were guided centrally, but were designed and implemented locally, as were the education projects that they were assessing. Relying on such a method had its challenges and limitations. For example, the implementation timeframe was too short to measure education outcomes with any reliability; local evalu-

¹ See OSI, Equality for Roma in Europe: A Roadmap for Action, January 2006.

ators did not collect baseline data and despite the attempts to obtain common data, variations in the data collected made difficult assessing change over time. The result is that much of the data required to substantiate many of the claims made in this Report are not really available, which poses a bit of a quandary for the analysis.

Although the Report cannot provide the detailed comparative evaluations that would facilitate the policy making process, it does provide much rich information and detail on project implementation. On this basis, ESP has paused to measure what has been achieved, and reflected upon what the lessons are in relation to policy development and how implementation efforts in the future might be improved. The publication of this Report underlines the need to have appropriate external evaluation as an integral part of all ongoing efforts in the field of Roma education. Appropriate design should include clear statements on expected outcomes, especially where data is concerned. In other words, design should stipulate precisely and unambiguously what external evaluation should be measuring. It also should provide for appropriate baseline data and/or comparative data. This exercise also points to the need for longer term assessments in order to learn about the impact of education interventions in the long term on Roma children's school success. For this, education projects and interventions must be funded for longer than three years, and certain assessments should be designed with a long-term life. Finally, this exercise has reminded ESP of the critical importance of accurate and reliable data in ongoing efforts to improve Roma education; without it, a better understanding of what works in improving education for Roma and informed policy making are not possible.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background



The Roma Education Initiative (REI)² began in 2002 when the urgent issue of Roma education was emerging as a priority on the European level. While many international organizations and donors were becoming involved the Open Society Institute (OSI) and its network, including National Foundations, was well placed to assume a leadership role. Since 2002, REI funded seven national level projects in Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. REI also provided support to other national efforts focused on Roma education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo. While REI funding and centralized activity officially came to an end on December 31, 2005, implementation in some countries will be supported until June 2006 and beyond.

The Roma Education Initiative (REI) was designed to work on both the international and national levels and included grant-making and technical assistance functions. REI was governed by a Roma Education Initiative Working Committee, which consisted of well known practitioners and people with credible ‘voices’ on Roma education. A Program Manager (Education Support Program, OSI Budapest) oversaw the REI project. Her work was supported by a technical assistance team which included; an expert in Roma education including management, strategy and policy development, a specialist in early childhood pedagogy and second language learning, as well as the International Evaluation Consultant.

Core elements of REI included a focus on early childhood education, implementation of an interactive child-centered pedagogy (e.g. Step by Step), strong connections with Roma communities, training and other pedagogical supports, as well as networking and alliance building.

² Additional information on the Roma Education Initiative and on the education of Roma children can be found on the REI web-site www.osi.hu/esp/rei or contact Christina McDonald (REI Program Manager) at cmcdonald@osi.hu.

REI Focus



REI activities were focused around four broad outcome areas to be addressed by each implementing team.

- 1. Educational Outcomes:** REI supported equitable access to quality education with specific attention to the improved academic performance of Roma children. Educational outcomes could take different forms such as; developmental progress in very young children, performance in core academic subjects equal to that of the majority population for older children, and/or improved pass rates from one grade to the next or from one level of the system to the next.
- 2. Desegregation:³** Desegregation in REI projects was approached by supporting early childhood opportunities which promote the integration of children into mainstream schools and classes as children move through the educational system. Within schools, desegregation occurs by ensuring that children are integrated from all-Roma classes into classes with children from the majority population. REI was not designed to deal directly with the physical transfer of children from segregated geographical settings into integrated ones, except in a few cases when pre-school children are brought to their pre-schools by bus or chaperone.
- 3. Comprehensive Approach:⁴** Projects were expected to target children and youth ages zero 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 Roma children and families that, in combination, would support children’s educational success.
- 4. Policy Impact:** This refers to making systemic changes and supporting policies – both at the national and local levels that will lead to the sustainability of initiatives after REI funding and technical assistance have ended. Influencing policy was a strategic direction of REI.

³ Desegregation refers to the “action of incorporating a racial or religious group into a community.” It is not only policy-based but also is coupled with the development and provision of educational support programs including teacher pre and in-service training, anti-bias education, curriculum development, mediation and community development/ awareness raising. These factors in combination are seen as advancing the process of integration into school and the larger society.

⁴ The Comprehensive Approach was chosen as a methodology based on OSI’s previous experience in Roma education in the Roma Special Schools Initiative, Roma Education Research Project, and other projects implemented by Children and Youth Programs, New York. These projects revealed that in working in this complex area, by itself, no individual program model could respond to the entire spectrum of educational needs of all Roma children in any single country. Rather, program models should offer a continuum of services in response to an array of needs across various age groups.

Evaluation Approach



In the beginning, centralized evaluation of REI was not envisioned; rather each country would have technical support to help build local capacity for evaluation and monitoring. The national evaluation reports and the annual reports from the country directors were to provide the data necessary to document achievement of REI outcomes. Over time it became obvious that the information supplied by the country teams needed to be supplemented with some centralized data collection. Interviews with key people on the country teams were undertaken and a web-survey was used to document REI reach, aspects of the comprehensive approach, and desegregation numbers.

In constructing an overall evaluation on REI a number of challenges and limitations played a role. First, REI was implemented, at maximum, over a three year period. However, two countries did not begin implementation until September 2004, leaving them only one school year for activity prior to submitting data for this report. This short time frame affects the results that came to be expected. For example, improvements in educational outcomes that one would anticipate from a fully implemented quality education approach are unrealistic to expect in the first year, or even second year, of implementation. Also, a number of national evaluation reports did not provide analysis of change over time in educational outcomes nor comparisons to the achievement of majority population children, despite the concerted efforts of the REI Program Manager and the International Evaluation Consultant.



Results and Conclusions



Despite the challenges, REI demonstrated success in all outcome areas.

- REI was able to reach over 20,000 children and youth in each of the last two years of its implementation, of whom over 5,000 per year were Roma. These children would not have had access to quality education, both within school and after school or through summer programs had it not been for REI.
- Over **1,000 teachers** and approximately **120 Roma teaching assistants** were involved in each year of REI. These educators, as well as numerous others included in REI trainings, now have an enhanced skill set with which to continue their work with Roma children and families.
- The **comprehensive approach** not only encouraged the inclusion of children from zero to 18, but also partnering with others. **Roma NGOs** were a key implementing partner in REI projects and their influence should not be underestimated, particularly their role in supporting educational success for Roma children and their ability (along with that of the Roma teaching assistants) to create linkages between schools and families.
- REI teams were also successful in finding an **array of partners and funders**. Connections with ministries and other governmental institutions were crucial to influencing policy and setting the stage for 'scaling up,' while the involvement of other donors enhanced the possibilities for sustainability.
- Across all countries, there was evidence that involvement in REI supported the **improvement of Roma children's educational outcomes**. The REI experience suggests that, while not universal, school success for Roma children is likely when supported by quality educational practices and a comprehensive, collaborative, community approach.
- Approximately **2,000 Roma children gained access to pre-school** as a direct result of REI. Hundreds more moved from segregated to integrated educational settings, often made possible by their improved academic skills and knowledge; thus illustrating the importance of linking quality education and desegregation.

- Despite successes and the mutually supportive relationships between quality educational practices and desegregation efforts, **barriers to desegregation remain daunting.** REI teams encountered many challenges to desegregation, particularly the lack of political will at the local level to support desegregation which reflects in large part the racism that continues to exist within many communities and institutional structures.
- In all countries participating in REI, some **impact** has been achieved **at the policy level**, particularly in developing policies and products at the national level and in the legitimizing of the position of the Roma teaching assistant. However, national policies are not always implemented at the local level, so assuring that action follows policy continues to be a major challenge.



REI was a complex and ambitious undertaking. Country teams were asked to support local action in implementing quality education, developing a comprehensive approach (including many partners), and working for desegregation while, at the same time, operating strategically at the policy level. All REI teams faced major challenges to this work, but were able to demonstrate successes in all areas, the extent of these successes being very much dependent on the national and local social and political contexts.

Given the short time frame for implementation and the significance of the challenges faced, the successes of REI should be recognized and celebrated, particularly as they provide some important lessons that can inform future initiatives.

Lessons Learned



What has been learned – or confirmed – by the REI experience?

- **Quality Matters to Educational Success:** Quality teaching and inclusive educational environments make a difference to children's success. Children achieve in supportive environments that are childcentred, respectful, and where high expectations for success are the norm. Quality education and desegregation efforts are mutually supportive: "quality education practice helps the process of desegregation through stimulation of high academic results." Change in teacher practice and attitudes are inter-twined, and both have an impact on student success. While quality early years intervention is clearly crucial, if school success is to be sustained for Roma students, supports and quality pedagogy need to be injected at the higher grades.
- **Desegregation Requires Political Will:** Communities and schools exist within political environments. As was noted in the REI Midterm Report (2004): "The role that lead-implementing agencies had to play in coercing schools and local education authorities to desegregate was enormous. While this could be done at the project level through the expenditure of great effort, it is not realistic in the current climate to believe this could be done on a larger scale relying only on the efforts of dedicated local NGOs and educational institutions." Lack of political will and widespread bias at the local level translates into maintenance of the status quo. Without concerted efforts to overcome bias and without legal enforcement of national desegregation policies, any meaningful progress on desegregation will not be achieved.
- **A Comprehensive Approach Is Fundamental:** The comprehensive approach was not only valued by the REI implementing partners, but deemed as a cornerstone for building future initiatives. The complexity and sensitivity of the issues demand a complex, comprehensive approach; one that brings together everyone who has the potential to impact on the lives of Roma children and youth. Program models must offer a continuum of services in response to an array of needs across various age groups. Roma partner NGOs are essential in providing services related to the implementation of the comprehensive approach. Roma parents are also key partners who must be included within any comprehensive strategy.

It is difficult to extract particular aspects of the comprehensive approach and suggest these are the key elements. The strength of the

approach is that it is by nature, comprehensive and does not seek to divorce educational and community interventions from one another, or to divide children by their age or educational level. This holistic approach to addressing the needs of children and youth – and their families – by building on existing initiatives and including multiple partners was heralded by all REI teams as the approach holding the greatest potential for truly improving educational outcomes and realizing desegregation in the longer term.

- **Networking and Strategic Alliances Are Crucial:** Related to the comprehensive approach are the strategic alliances that are a vehicle for fostering positive change on multiple levels. REI projects were compelled to use a consortium of partners (e.g., NGOs, service providers, schools, local education authorities, teacher training institutions). Experience has demonstrated that such broad-based coalitions are necessary for success. On a political level, strategic alliances are important in mobilizing support for the building of civil societies through the inclusion of Roma in the political and social realities of the region. Initiatives that promote equity of opportunity and excellence in educational practice require political will combined with multi-lateral financial and policy support. Roma NGOs and community leaders are crucial in developing both the vision and implementation strategies within such strategic alliances, both at the local and national levels.
- **Support Systems Strengthen Implementation:** The REI support system included centrally-delivered technical assistance which was valued by the implementing teams. Within REI activity, mentoring for teachers and others who are engaged in professional learning and change was viewed as critical to implementing quality educational REI Executive Summary practices and the comprehensive approach. A number of REI teams advocated that the best way to start was with School Improvement training, including parents and other representatives from the community. Workshops on Roma tradition and culture were also viewed as important for Roma children and families as well as educators. In a related vein, REI teams also spoke of the importance of social justice training for educators and others.
- **Pay Attention to Time:** Time is required to implement projects as complex and ambitious as REI: *“A minimum of four years is needed to rally and leverage resources and build the capacity needed for [an initiative such as] this.”* Because significant change requires time along with all the other necessary supports, evaluation of initiatives needs to be conducted over the longer term.

Directions for Future Endeavours



In sustaining and extending the activities of the Roma Education Initiative, the following should be considered.

- Future large scale projects should be supported not only through financial support for improved educational practice, but also through political and economic pressures that facilitate desegregation.
- Roma NGOs are a crucial partner in any endeavour that promotes improved educational outcomes for children and families. Their participation should be actively supported, and valued.
- Projects need time, experience, support and resources (financial and human) if they are to develop fully and truly implement a comprehensive approach. Related to the timeframe, projects would also benefit from a start-up or development phase which would allow projects to lay the groundwork for implementation.
- Local contexts are crucial and need to be explored and understood in order to maximize the comprehensive approach and minimize the chance of negative community reaction that can – and has – resulted in violence and tragedy. The need to involve all levels of community in the development and implementation of projects that directly affect children, youth, and families is paramount.
- Monitoring and evaluation should be built into projects in order to learn what is most effective in promoting quality integrated education for Roma children and youth. The progress and achievement of Roma students needs to be tracked over time.



Prepared for the Education Support Program
of the Open Society Institute – Budapest
by Proactive Information Services Inc.

2006 June

310 - 123 Bannatyne Ave.
Winnipeg, MB Canada R3B 0R3
voice: (204) 943-2370 fax: (204) 943-5607
www.proactive.mb.ca

Photos: Poppy Szabó • Design: Rudolf Komjáti
Printed on digital offset in 150 copies in Budapest, Hungary