

Roma Education Initiative Mid Term Report



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PROJECT DESCRIPTION

A. Introduction to REI

1. Background

The Roma Education Initiative (REI)¹ began in 2002 when the urgent issue of Roma education was emerging as a priority on the European level, with many international organizations and donors becoming involved. Open Society Institute (OSI) was well positioned to take a lead in this arena.

Over the past ten years, OSI and its network, including National Foundations, have worked determinedly in support of improving educational outcomes for Roma children. OSI has been deliberate in involving young Roma in its programs. Some major initiatives have focused on mentoring and tutoring secondary school students to support entrance into university, while others have provided university scholarships for Roma youth. In addition, many non-formal education and youth programs have been initiated at the local level, often supported by National Foundation grants to local Roma NGOs.

Internationally, the Step by Step Program, a high quality early childhood development program, has been highly successful in preparing children for school and in maintaining parity of achievement between Roma children and their non-Roma peers in the primary grades. Furthermore, through the Step by Step Roma Special Schools Initiative, it was proven that most Roma children placed in special schools for the 'mentally handicapped'² are capable of performing to mainstream education standards when given the appropriate conditions for learning. Today Step by Step NGOs are active as implementing partners in REI.

REI is a joint initiation between the Open Society Institute Education Support Program in Budapest and Children and Youth Programs in New York. Designed as a joint initiative, REI has made efforts to involve and collaborate with parents and local communities, other institutions and governments, as well as other OSI network programs, such as the Roma Participation Program, the Network Women's Program, and the European Roma Rights Centre.

¹ 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.

² The term 'mentally handicapped' is used rather than other terms such as 'cognitive disabilities' because 'mentally handicapped' is the descriptor commonly used in the region.

Since its inception in 2002, REI has funded seven national-level projects in Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovakia, and Slovenia. In addition, REI has provided support to other national efforts focused on Roma education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo, through technical assistance or inclusion in international events.

2. Lessons Learned through OSI Experience

What works?

- ❖ Close cooperation with the Roma community and respect for the parents' aspirations for their children are crucial to success.
- ❖ The commitment of local authorities, supported by a strong legal framework, is required to promote high quality education in integrated settings.
- ❖ A comprehensive, community-based approach is needed to support children from 0 to age 18. Beginning when mothers are pregnant, until completion of secondary or technical schools, children and youth require multi-faceted, culturally appropriate programs and services, both within and outside the formal education system.
- ❖ Educators must abandon racist attitudes and approach each Roma child as an individual with the potential to learn and be successful. Anti-bias training is effective in helping change attitudes and practices.
- ❖ Both changes at the system level and in the way educators teach and think about students of different ethnic groups need the support of sustained, high quality technical assistance.
- ❖ Evaluation built in from project inception is important for supporting implementation, as well as for documenting results.

What does not work?

- ❖ Short-term, isolated projects that do not have a continuum of services nor a comprehensive approach are not sustainable and largely ineffective. Systemic change does not result.
- ❖ Projects that place educators and/or school administrators in the role of law enforcement officials in the absence of legal or regulatory sanctions are not workable.
- ❖ Projects that ignore the rights of parents as the first educators of children are doomed to failure.

What other lessons have been learned?

- ❖ Roma parents highly value education, provided that the educational setting does not risk their child's physical or emotional well-being.
- ❖ If given access to high quality education, Roma children can be as successful in school as their non-Roma peers.

REI sets out to affect national agendas through the promotion of practices that will inform policy in support of quality education for Roma children, while strongly advocating for systemic changes that work against segregation and racial discrimination in the education system. OSI believes that only through a comprehensive strategy, based on what has been learned to date, can deep and sustainable success in the field of education for Roma be realized.

3. Goals of REI

Equal access to quality education of Roma is REI's basic philosophy and primary goal, while working towards integrating Roma children into mainstream state education. Quality education refers to:

- ❖ Use of child centered pedagogy, rather than subject or teacher centered pedagogy
- ❖ Use of differentiated instruction that supports individualization and building on children's strengths rather than focusing on deficits
- ❖ High academic expectations of all children
- ❖ Use of curriculum that is relevant to all children and their cultures
- ❖ A school and classroom climate that welcomes and values parents and community

REI does not tolerate or support efforts that perpetuate or contribute to unequal, segregated education. REI recognizes, however, that for genuine integration to occur, preparation of schools, teachers and majority communities, as well as academic preparation of Roma students are pre-requisites. Quality integration is more than the simple placement of Roma students into classes or schools with their peers from the majority population; rather, one would see Roma and non-Roma students interacting positively with one another both in and out of the classroom. Teachers would also ensure that the elements of quality education apply to all students in the class.

Specifically, REI country teams have been asked to address four inter-related outcome areas.

1. **Educational Outcomes:** REI supports equitable access to quality education with specific attention to the improved academic performance of Roma children. Educational outcomes may take the form of developmental progress in very young children, performance in core academic subjects that equals 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 (for example, more Roma children continuing in school beyond the primary grades).
2. **Desegregation:** Desegregation in REI projects is approached by supporting early childhood opportunities, preschool and Kindergarten, which support the integration of children into mainstream schools and classes as children move up 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 preschool children are brought to their Kindergartens by bus or chaperone.
3. **Comprehensive Approach:** 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 and institutions. The intention was to provide a range of services to Roma children and families that, in combination, will support children's educational success.
4. **Policy Impact:** This refers to making systemic changes and supporting policies that will lead to the sustainability of initiatives after REI funding and technical assistance has come to an end.



B. REI Project Design

REI, designed to work on both the international and national levels, is exceptional in that it consists of both grant-making and technical assistance functions.

1. International Level

Centrally, REI offers technical assistance, the main elements of which are:

- ❖ Strategy development support;
- ❖ Technical assistance in implementation;
- ❖ Technical advice, tools and instruments for monitoring and evaluation;
- ❖ Policy support;
- ❖ Networking and exchange opportunities.

The Initiative is governed by a Roma Education Initiative Working Committee, which consists of well known practitioners and people with credible 'voices' on Roma education from both within the network and outside, and from both Western Europe and Central-Eastern Europe. REI projects developed thus far are complex, based on selection criteria, and have needed a high level of technical support in the project development phase as well as in the implementation phase.

Monitoring to ensure quality implementation has been a large part of REI implementation. Upon monitoring, projects were often asked to revise their implementation plans, which consequently had implications for their budgets. Another impact on resources was the degree to which centralized training needs emerged, which required more funding to support than originally envisaged.

As a centrally coordinated activity, project management teams are brought together for international team meetings to discuss implementation challenges, strategies for improving advocacy, Roma NGO partnerships, and community development, among other topics.

2. National Level

REI originally planned to fund six projects. An additional seventh was taken on and funded because demand for participation in REI was high, and because the project had a high possibility for systemic impact. Though several proposals were not accepted, a number of countries decided to follow

REI principles and design concepts and to fund their own initiatives. These countries are Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, and Kosovo.

Table 1 shows the countries participating in REI. It should be noted that, as of September 2004, the majority of countries had only been implementing REI for a year or less.

Country	Serbia Slovenia	Bulgaria Hungary Slovakia	Macedonia Montenegro
Grant Given	September 2002	May 2003	December 2003
Implementation Begun	September 2002	September 2003	September 2004
Projected End Date	June 2005	June 2006	June 2007

The majority of projects are not scheduled to end until June 2006 and June 2007 and, therefore, will require financial support beyond 2005 when REI funding will cease. REI project experience has shown that a minimum of three years is required for the implementation of such a complex project, while a five year time span would likely prove even more fruitful.

Although project proposals were in alignment with the overall REI goals, each project is unique, based on the situation in the country. While variations are evident, all REI projects are based on the same principles:

- ❖ Work towards ending the status quo of segregated education for Roma children;
- ❖ Demonstrate shared costs with other donors, and government;
- ❖ Demonstrate feasibility and possibility for systemic change and have built in strategies for systemic reform;
- ❖ Demonstrate the use of existing resources/ OSI network programs;
- ❖ Have a built-in monitoring system for evaluating outcomes;
- ❖ Offer a high quality continuum of education services for 0 to age 18 and up;
- ❖ Appropriately link both direct educational services with institutional change efforts;

- ❖ Address the complexity of the needs;
- ❖ Be based on the Roma communities' needs and conditions and have active and interested Roma community leadership.

Core Pedagogy and Methods

The tools by which REI works toward desegregation is through the empowerment of Roma NGOs to work with communities and schools and through the support of good pedagogical practice in integrated schools. The former helps ensure Roma children have access to and attend integrated Kindergartens and schools, and the latter is to ensure Roma children have access to high quality, integrated education once they are in school.

Early childhood learning opportunities: Since one of the main factors in the failure of Roma students in school is the lack of school readiness when they start first grade, REI is designed to provide early childhood learning opportunities to Roma children.

- ❖ All of the primary schools in the project are linked with either formal or informal Kindergarten programs to give children a better chance at succeeding in school. Primary school teachers who have received Roma students who have attended Kindergarten say that these children do much better academically and are more easily integrated in the first grade.
- ❖ There is an emphasis on teaching children the official language of the country and in developing pre-literacy and pre-numeracy skills.



Interactive child-centered pedagogy: A key component of REI projects in all countries is the use of interactive, child-centered pedagogy. At the early years, teachers are supported in the implementation of Step by Step (SbS), while in the higher grades, Reading and Writing for Critical Thinking (RWCT) becomes an important instructional vehicle.

Connections to the Roma Community: Roma NGOs are taking a strong role in the school attendance problems experienced with Roma students. In conversations with schools, all have stated that Roma students' school attendance has improved in REI sites. This is the direct result of the Roma NGOs visiting parents who are not sending their children to school.

Roma partner NGOs were involved in all training, including Roma teaching assistants, who are often affiliated with Roma NGOs. Roma NGO staff often work as trainers in other areas, such as Roma Culture and History, and have benefited from participating in training for their own skills and capacity. Roma partners have also been involved in all international events.

REI supported the capacity building of implementing NGOs in areas such as The Education for Social Justice Primary Curriculum (a curriculum that deals with diversity and second language techniques in classrooms), The Education for Social Justice Adult Curriculum, and School Improvement training.

Comprehensive Support Programs

While the strategies described above are common among REI projects, REI teams have also responded to their local contexts by implementing other programs and services in cooperation with the Roma community. For example, in Serbia, young people (including school drop-outs) successfully completed trade-related secondary school courses supported by REI.

In Slovakia, in cooperation with the OSI Network Health Program, REI is linking high quality health provision and prevention services, which assist in assuring access to school for Roma children.

REI Slovenia is supporting literacy programs for adults in cooperation with state institutions: Regional Education Center (Razvojno izobraževalni center - RIC Novo mesto) for Škocjan, Association for Education and Culture (Zavod za izobraževanje in kulturo – ZIK Črnomelj) for Semič, and Organization for Adult Education (Ljudska univerza – LU Krško) in Leskovec. The programs offer a completion of primary school (7th or 8th grade) and literacy programs (1st to 6th grade) for adults in the community.

Snapshots of REI Projects

Bulgaria

- ❖ Number of sites – 3 (Lom, Glozene, and Blagoevgrad)
- ❖ Number of schools – 8 (4 preschools and 4 elementary schools)
- ❖ Number of children – 2,627
- ❖ Number of Roma children – 1,215
- ❖ Implementing partners - Step by Step Foundation Bulgaria, Open Society Foundation Bulgaria, Roma Lom Foundation, Bulgarian Reading Association (BulRa), representatives from the municipal administrations, Open Society Club Blagoevgrad, and partner Roma leaders.

Hungary

- ❖ Number of sites – 3 (Budapest, Miskolc, and Patka)
- ❖ Number of schools – 10 (3 preschools, 4 elementary schools, and 3 secondary schools)
- ❖ Number of children - 154
- ❖ Number of Roma children - 108
- ❖ Implementing partners - Ec Pec Foundation, Rehabilitation and Expert Committee – Budapest, National Institute of Public Education - Budapest, University of Miskolc, Local Minority Government (Roma) - Budapest, Budapest Local Government, Family Support Centre - Miskolc, Local Minority Government (Roma) – Miskolc.

Macedonia

- ❖ Number of sites – 3 (Skopje, Kumanovo, and Prilep)
- ❖ Number of schools – 8 (4 preschools and 4 elementary schools)
- ❖ Number of children – 4,280
- ❖ Number of Roma children – 1,053
- ❖ Implementing partners – Step by Step Foundation Macedonia, Open Society Foundation Macedonia, Dendo Vas in Skopje, Drom in Kumanovo, Kham in Kumanovo, and AHP in Prilep.

Montenegro

- ❖ Number of sites – 4 (Podgorica, Konik Camp, Berane, and Niksic)
- ❖ Number of schools – 9 (5 preschools and 4 elementary schools)
- ❖ Number of children – 5,520
- ❖ Number of Roma children – 635
- ❖ Implementing partners – Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Montenegro, Pedagogical Center of Montenegro, Foundation for Open Society Representative Office Montenegro, UNICEF, Red Cross of Montenegro, Roma Association of Montenegro, Roma Association “Početak,” NGO Enfant-Djeca, and SOS for Women and Children – Victims of Violence.

Serbia

- ❖ Number of sites – 2 (Nis and Kragujevac)
- ❖ Number of schools – 10 (4 preschools, 4 elementary schools, and 2 secondary schools)
- ❖ Number of children – 3,856
- ❖ Number of Roma children - 760
- ❖ Implementing partners – Fund for an Open Society - Serbia, Center for Interactive Pedagogy, Roma Education Center (Nis), Roma Information Center (Kragujevac), Society for the Improvement of Roma Settlements, Association of Roma Students (defunct), and Association for Educational Improvement (DUO).

Slovakia

- ❖ Number of sites – 4 (Košice, Jarovnice, Smižany, and Rudňany)
- ❖ Number of schools – 10 (6 preschools, 3 elementary schools, and 1 secondary school)
- ❖ Number of children – 2,532
- ❖ Number of Roma children – 1,214
- ❖ Implementing partners – Wide Open School Foundation, Open Society Foundation – Bratislava (Slovakia), Project Schola (Košice), Cultural Union of Romani Citizens (Rudňany), Dženo – Spiš (Smižany), and Civic Association ASAL (Jarovnice).

Slovenia

- ❖ Number of sites – 3 (Leskovec pri Krškem, Semič, and Škocjan)
- ❖ Number of schools – 6 (3 preschools and 3 elementary schools)
- ❖ Number of children – 1,591
- ❖ Number of Roma children - 172
- ❖ Implementing partners – Developmental Research Center for Educational Initiatives (DRCEI) Slovenia, Slovenian Roma Association, Roma Association of Leskovac, Regional Roma Association of ROMANO GAV, Association of Friends and Youth, Slovenian Adult Education Center, and Peace Institute.

PROJECT STATUS

A. Overall Status

Countries are at various stages of REI project implementation. All countries that were funded in 2002 and 2003 required a developmental period that spanned a minimum of six months before actual implementation began. This period was necessary because, not only were REI projects complex and ambitious in scope, they also faced a variety of implementation hurdles. Thus, even the longest funded projects, in reality, have only been in operation for a period of approximately one year.

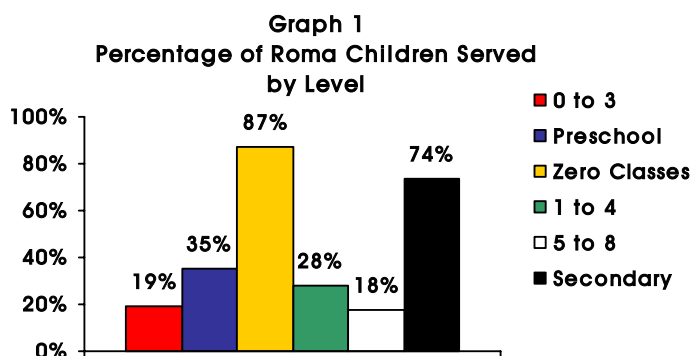
As previously illustrated (Table 1, page 6), REI projects have been funded on a rolling basis with different beginning and end points. The most recent projects are not scheduled to end their three year implementation until June 2007. Therefore, it must be recognized that overall, the information presented in this report reflects REI prior to mature implementation.

B. REI Participation

Overall, REI has served **20,530 children** ages 0 to 18, of whom **5,157** (or 25%) are **Roma children and youth**. The largest number of children served was at the Grade 5 to 8 level, although the largest number of Roma children was at the early childhood (Grades 1 to 4) level (Table 2).

Age Level	Number of Countries Working with these Children	Total Number of Children	Total Number of Roma Children
Ages 0 to 3	3	306	57
Preschool (formal & non-formal)	7	2,974	1046
0 (zero classes)	2	76	66
Early Childhood (Grades 1 to 4)	7	7,972	2,214
Grades 5 to 8	7	9,060	1,669
Grades 9 to 12 (secondary, gymnasium, tech/vocational)	2	142	105
		Total Number = 20,530	Total Number = 5,157

Children other than Roma children are served by REI because **REI is working in integrated settings**. Furthermore, at the high school/secondary level, the small number of Roma students reflects the fact that, in some countries such as Slovenia, some schools have had no Roma youth progress beyond Grade 8 for many years. The programs that REI teams have implemented for this aged population are most frequently for school drop-outs.



When viewed as a proportion of the populations involved in REI, the highest **percentage of Roma students** were at the zero classes served (87%) and at the secondary school level (74%). Given that these would both be places where initiatives specific

to Roma students would be initiated, these results would be expected (Graph 1). All projects involved Roma parents, for a total of **1,300 Roma parents**.

In total, **71 schools/preschools** and **1025 teachers** were involved in REI. The largest number of teachers was at the Grade 5 to 8 level (451). All seven countries had Roma teaching assistants involved in REI for a total of **122 Roma teaching assistants**. The largest number was 61 at the preschool level (Table 3).

Age Level	Number of Schools/Preschools	Total Number of Teachers	Total Number of Roma Teaching Assistants
Ages 0 to 3	4	24	15
Preschool (formal & non-formal)	29	210	61
0 (zero classes)	6	5	2
Early Childhood (Grades 1 to 4)	26	316	31
Grades 5 to 8		451	13
Grades 9 to 12 (secondary, gymnasium, tech/vocational)	6	19	0
	Total Number = 71	Total Number = 1025	Total Number = 122

Six countries had **tutoring/mentoring initiatives** operating in 221 classes as part of REI. A total of 3,445 children were involved, of whom 1,600 (46%) were identified as Roma. The largest number of children was at the early childhood level (1,703 children, of whom 994 were Roma). Tutoring and mentoring involved 168 teachers and 45 Roma teaching assistants.

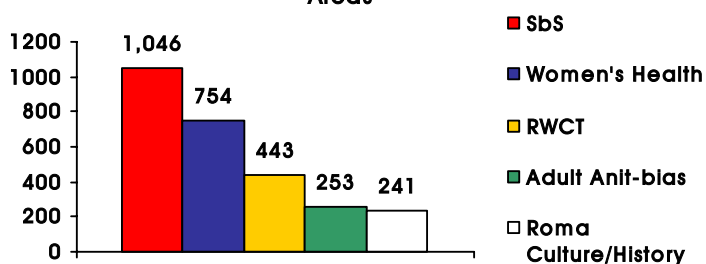
Four countries have offered **summer programs** in 54 separate classes. In total, 1,005 children have participated, of whom 814 (81%) were Roma. The largest numbers were at the early childhood level (709 children, of whom 582 were Roma). Fifty-five teachers and 27 Roma teaching assistants were involved.

All countries provided trainings as part of REI, for a total of **324 trainings**. The largest number of trainings was related to tutoring and mentoring (126), followed by Step by Step (45), and Women's Health Programs (37).

A total of **4,554 people participated in trainings** related to REI. The largest number of people participated in Step by Step trainings (1,046), followed by Women's Health Programs (754) and

RWCT (443) (Graph 2). Trainings involved teachers, parents, Roma teaching assistants, school administrators and, in some countries, Roma university students, and representatives of local authorities.

Graph 2
Number of Participants in Top Five Training Areas



C. Emerging Trends

1. Documentation of Outcomes

REI projects were required to conduct local monitoring and utilize external evaluators to assist, at a minimum, with documentation on outcomes related to desegregation/integration and educational outcomes. As each country's context and specific REI activities varied, actual data related to REI outcomes are also country-specific. Local capacity building was the focus and resources were not allocated for a comprehensive, centralized evaluation.

Additionally, REI projects are in relatively early stages of implementation, making any expectation of definitive results, particularly as related to complex issues such as desegregation and educational achievement, unrealistic. Data examples relating to desegregation and educational outcomes are only illustrative of initial, country-specific results.

Systematic data on the comprehensive approach (including data related to participation in REI) were collected centrally from all projects through the use of a web-survey. Again, the early stage of REI must be taken into account when viewing these data. It is anticipated that consistent data related to desegregation will be coupled with repetition of the web-survey and will be collected at a later stage of REI implementation at which time, a more definitive picture will emerge.

A more formal study documenting REI outcomes and learnings will be available after another year of implementation, likely within 18 to 24 months.

2. Educational Outcomes

Educational outcomes mean different things depending on whether it is a preschool population with development gains or school drop-outs achieving work-related credit. It should also be recognized that it is premature to attribute improved educational outcomes to a project prior to its full implementation.

- ❖ Roma children in Step by Step classes demonstrate improved educational achievement. For example, in Slovakia, there was a significant decrease in the number of Roma students who failed and a slight increase in their grade point average. Often, however, their achievement does not equal that of their peers from the majority population.
- ❖ In Slovenia, more than half of the children made progress in almost all the domains and sub-domains of development (e.g., social-emotional, language, cognition, creativity).
- ❖ In Serbia, young people in trade-related secondary school courses connected with the REI project successfully completed these courses.

3. Desegregation/Integration

Though REI has been instrumental in creating strategies that support desegregation, the biggest challenge remains the governments' willingness and ability to implement those strategies, especially at the local level. Nevertheless, some progress has been realized as illustrated by the following examples.

- ❖ Integration of children into Grade 1 classes is in process at most sites.
- ❖ At the Kindergarten level in Košice -Saca (Slovakia), as of the fall of 2004, there is no longer a special class for Roma children. Seventeen children enrolled in mainstream Kindergarten in the fall of 2004.
- ❖ The 1,669 Roma children affected by REI at the Grade 5 to 8 level are in integrated settings.

- ❖ Roma children and children from the majority population generally interact positively in integrated settings. For example, in Serbia, at the beginning of the project, 86% of Roma children stated they most often studied only with “their friends,” while at the end of the same year, 44% reported the same dynamic. A larger proportion of Roma children indicated that they studied with all or most of the children in their integrated classroom.
- ❖ In Serbia, 90% of Roma parents claimed their children made friends with children of different nationalities.
- ❖ The connection of Roma parents to their child’s school has also been strengthened in many REI sites. For example, in Serbia, 64% of Roma parents always or often attended parent meetings at the beginning of the project. This percentage increased to 80% by the end of the first year of implementation.
- ❖ In Slovenia, the percentage of teachers who chose segregated or partly segregated classrooms (73%) prior to anti-bias training drastically decreased to 9% after training and one year’s experience.

4. Comprehensive Approach

The comprehensive approach encouraged schools, communities, local governments, and agencies to work collaboratively, at multiple levels, in support of Roma children from ages 0 to 18.

- ❖ REI projects were serving children from ages 0 to 18, although not all projects were as yet at the stage of having programs at the 0 to age 3 and the post Grade 8 levels. (See Table 2, page 11.)
- ❖ All countries had partnerships with Roma NGOs. In total, 25 Roma NGOs were involved with REI, in addition to one other Roma community organization. Nine other NGOs were REI partners, as were 21 other community organizations.
- ❖ A total of 32 Roma community leaders were involved with REI across six countries. Sixteen other community leaders also participated.
- ❖ All countries cited ministries and/or other government institutions as partners. These partnerships existed at both the national and local levels. Universities, medical centers and a variety of other partners are also involved with REI.
- ❖ All countries but one listed other funders, including PHARE EU Commission, Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation, USAID, UNICEF, local municipalities, and embassies, to name a few. In Macedonia and Serbia, other funders based their grants directly on the REI model, so funds leveraged by Pestalozzi Children’s Foundation and USAID represent ‘scaling up’ the REI model.

5. Policy Impact

REI projects have had some success directly influencing policy or in creating the momentum and frameworks that support policy change.

- ❖ REI teams in Slovakia, Serbia, Slovenia, Macedonia, and Montenegro have been closely involved in the design of National Strategies for the education of Roma children.
- ❖ REI teams have also been extremely active in organising round-tables and discussions on the topic of the education of Roma, often times bringing together actors for the first time to discuss these issues.
- ❖ Serbia and Slovenia have been instrumental in instituting Roma teaching assistants as a cultural and linguistic link between Roma communities and schools. Slovenia was successful in getting financial support from local authorities in paying for these positions.
- ❖ Hungary is developing a culturally sensitive assessment system, which will be used by the state-financed “Expert Committees.” The intention is to avoid the many instances where Roma children are inappropriately categorised as having special needs.

KEY FACTORS FOR FUTURE IMPLEMENTATION

A. Political Will

Despite efforts to advocate for education policy change through the implementation of REI projects, government inaction exists as a major obstacle. This inaction has been experienced at the local school-based level up to the national level. It is endemic throughout the systems of the region. Although several countries have good national policies (e.g., Bulgaria, Hungary), there is no mechanism to implement and enforce these at the local level.

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 resistance to change. Without concerted efforts to overcome bias and without legal enforcement of national desegregation policies, significant progress cannot be made. If the two fundamental goals of REI are to be achieved – desegregation and educational achievement for Roma children – legal action will be required to support quality educational programming in integrated settings.

B. Networking and Strategic Alliances

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.

Strategic alliances represent an avenue for fostering positive change on multiple levels. For example, one strategy for promoting quality practice in REI schools was to support participating school teams and partner NGOs to share experiences. This worked towards achieving a higher level of understanding regarding the complexities of the integration of Roma children. Networking allowed teachers to observe each others' practice, to share ideas and strategies regarding common problems, and to mentor and support each other both on implementation and evaluation issues.

On a political level, strategic alliances are important in mobilizing support for the building of civil societies through the inclusion of Roma into 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 will be crucial in developing both the vision and implementation strategies within such strategic alliances.

C. Capacity

In the REI experience, the highest quality service is correlated to the implementing teams' area of greatest competence; in this case, pedagogical expertise. Project teams report that the greatest assistance in implementing REI was the many years of experience with the Step by Step methodology. Relatedly, teachers who already had experience implementing child-centered, interactive methods can more easily move to deeper levels of implementation, including the commitment to delivering quality education to Roma children within an inclusive educational environment.

Roma partner NGOs were essential in providing services related to the implementation of the comprehensive approach. Investing in keeping the education agenda as a priority in Roma NGOs as well as facilitating the connections with schools are key elements of promoting quality education within an inclusive setting.

In order to achieve high quality service, recognition and enhancement of local expertise is essential. The challenge for REI and similar initiatives is to recognize and utilize the strengths that currently exist, while nurturing the skills that will help communities create a future where systemic barriers are erased or, at least, can be overcome.

D. Implementation Timeframes

Experience has demonstrated that implementation of large scale, complex projects requires a minimum three year timeframe. Even a three year implementation timeframe is only realistic if there is provision for a significant developmental period prior to implementation.

The REI experience suggests that while some progress is possible within the first 18 months to two years, results are sporadic and it is not appropriate to generalize or assume long term systemic impact based on initial results.

Evaluation must be a key component of projects but, again, time needs to elapse and comprehensive implementation needs to occur before it is reasonable to attribute outcomes to project activity.

E. Resourcing and Costs

The use of REI funds was driven by quality national strategies and local resources, dedicated to REI plans. While it was not clear that, in the beginning, all countries would wish to take advantage of REI funds, an excess of demands for REI funds signalled the need in the region.

The resources needed to implement the comprehensive approach were much larger than what was originally budgeted for REI. The grants that were given to REI projects represent the minimum that would be needed to achieve the desired results.

In order to achieve the ambitious and politically challenging goals of projects such as REI, resources and time need to be respected and supported. Systemic and significant change is difficult to achieve and requires patience and vision, as well as the necessary human and financial resources.

