



**ROMA**  
EDUCATION  
FUND



*REF believes the foundation of school success begins in integrated, inclusive classrooms. This first grader, who attended one of two REF-supported Preschool Clubs in Ostrava, is now enrolled in a mainstream primary school in the city.*

PHOTO: REF - JANA BAUDYSOVA

**The Roma Education Fund (REF)** is an international non-governmental organization that was established in 2005. With an active and growing network of representative offices across Central, Eastern, South Eastern Europe and the Balkans, REF's mission is to contribute to closing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. The Fund provides grants and scholarships to entities and individuals who share its belief in quality, inclusive education and desegregated schools and classrooms.

## HOW DOES REF ACHIEVE ITS MISSION?

- 1. GRANTS.** REF provides grants to civil society and public institutions to implement education projects in the following areas of intervention:
  - Expanding Roma children's access to quality early childhood education and care
  - Improving primary education outcomes for Roma children aged six to fourteen
  - Boosting academic performance and graduation rates from secondary education for Roma pupils
  - Improving the graduation rates and strengthening the identity of Roma students in tertiary education
  - Enhancing employment prospects for young Roma and adults through second chance programs for adult education and training
- 2. TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS.** REF provides merit-based, open competition academic scholarships for Roma students pursuing Bachelor, Master or Doctorate degrees at state-accredited universities.
- 3. ADVOCACY AND RESEARCH.** REF promotes evidence-based models of good practice and advocates for innovative methodologies, curriculum reform and renewed policies targeting Roma students.
- 4. EXTERNAL SUPPORT.** REF implements large-scale grants funded by European Structural and Social Funds, EU Instruments for Pre-Accession (IPA), EEA/Norway Grants and the German Development Bank to amplify its mission.



*Twelfth-grader Vllaznim Shaljani volunteers to tutor Roma pupils in Fushe Kosove / Kosovo Polje. He is among over 500 recipients of REF's Secondary School Scholarship Program in Kosovo in 2016.*  
PHOTO: REF - JETMIR IDRIZI

## **THE PROBLEM TODAY**

As a consequence of the migration and refugee crisis in Europe, drastic cuts in public expenditure are expected in education. Such a shift in policies threatens the achievements made through the efforts of the Roma Education Fund and a coalition of like-minded donors, institutions and non-governmental organizations over the last decade in enhancing Roma access to quality, inclusive education.

Today, the discrepancies in educational attainment between Roma and non-Roma remain significant across Europe. One out of ten young Roma in Europe do not achieve even a primary-level education certificate. For example, low preschool attendance rates contribute to a deficit of equal educational opportunities for Roma students. Many Roma are channeled into segregated schools or classes, and many others are placed in special schools where Roma children are disproportionately represented. Roma tend to score far worse than their non-Roma peers and drop out much more often from all educational levels.

The evidence shows that early school leavers bring about high economic costs to society. Concretely, people with lower secondary or even no education - many of whom are Roma in Central and South Eastern Europe and the Balkans - make up many of the unemployed; all these aspects have influence on their health, living conditions, well-being and lifetime earnings.



*Sorin Lăcătuș is in his sixth year of medical school in Romania and has been supported by REF's Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) for four years. He said about his choice of profession, "I was born with a birth defect. When I was a toddler I was operated on by the medic that afterwards became my role model."*

PHOTO: COURTESY OF ACTIVEWATCH  
- PETRUL CALINESCU

# REF ACHIEVEMENTS

## GRANTS PROGRAM

In 2005 REF Grants reached 5,000 beneficiaries. More than a decade later REF's outreach has multiplied twentyfold and the cumulative number of annual beneficiaries reaches 100,000 people.

- More than 70,000 children have been supported with direct enrollment in early childhood development programs.
- Early school leaving programs have reached over 120,000 Roma children in 13 countries of Central and South Eastern Europe and the Balkans.
- Parents are a crucial factor to the educational success of their children. Through their activities, REF partners have reached out to over 450,000 Roma parents.
- REF has trained more than 30,000 teachers in making school environments more welcoming to previous line and inclusive for Roma children.
- Over 4,000 scholarships have been granted annually to Roma students to complete their upper secondary education through the provision of school-based mentoring and tutoring.
- Over 1,900 tertiary education Roma students have benefitted from courses in digital literacy, English language and communication skills under the RomaVersitas programs in seven countries.

## TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

During 2007-2017, the REF Scholarship Program has awarded 12,581 scholarships to 6,258 Roma tertiary education students.

- Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP) - 9,524 scholarships have been awarded to 5,022 tertiary education students in 13 countries.
- Law and Humanities Program (LHP) - 1,391 scholarships have been awarded to 559 tertiary education students in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.
- Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) - 1,412 scholarships have been awarded to 534 tertiary education students in medicine in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia.
- Roma International Scholar Program (RISP) - 254 scholarships have been awarded to 143 tertiary education students in 16 countries.

## WHY PARTNER WITH US?

- **Extensive geographical coverage** and on-the-ground experience in target countries, including partnerships with municipalities, local governments and ministries
- **Deep understanding** of EU funding mechanisms and considerable experience in absorbing and implementing EU funds
- **Substantial grant-giving experience** and implementation of large-scale projects in 16 countries
- **High-quality monitoring and evaluation expertise** recognized by the World Bank, J-Pal, EU, Sida, SDC and national governments. REF is noted for:
  - result-based systems and procedures developed together with the World Bank
  - network of skilled professionals across Europe
  - online IT platform tailored for monitoring a large number of projects, grantees and scholarships
- **Transparent operations** that are supported by financial audit by PWC and a quality management system according to ISO 9001



## DONATE TO REF!

<http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/support-ref>

*Henriett Dinók, alumna of REF's Scholarship Program and junior research fellow at the Institute for Legal Studies of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, was appointed as Executive Director of RomaVersitas in Hungary, a REF-supported program of which she is also an alumna. She said, "RomaVersitas presented me with the feeling that has guided my life ever since my first open university week-end: an endless hunger for more knowledge."*

PHOTO: REF - MIKLOS DERI

## INVESTING AND INNOVATING IN ROMA EDUCATION

- **Toy Libraries** - In 2011 REF introduced Toy Libraries to a handful of Roma communities, encouraging children and their caregivers to check out quality toys and to learn by playing on site. REF's network of Toy Libraries has since expanded to nearly 40 Roma communities, reaching 2,000 Roma families and their children in 2016.
- **Your Story** - Storytelling sessions empower mothers, help build their relationships with their children as well as one another and lead to better literacy and critical skills. Hundreds of Your Story sessions have been held within REF's early childhood education and care programs over the last five years.
- **School Desegregation** - Bussing has been a potent tool to catalyze desegregation processes. REF provides transportation services together with complex intervention for children, parents and teachers as a way to close segregated schools and enroll children in mainstream ones. Every day REF helps hundreds of children reach mainstream schools and get the education they deserve.
- **Tutoring and Mentoring** - For students who may underperform due to years of substandard teaching and low-quality schools, tutoring services are a proven remedy to improve the grades of primary and secondary school students at risk of dropping out. Mentors may also be part of this package, providing accessible role models to students and helping them to graduate.
- **Secondary Education Scholarships** - A rapidly growing number of secondary education scholarships now reach thousands of Roma secondary students a year, helping them with financial and academic support to go the extra mile and complete their studies.
- **RomaVersitas** - RomaVersitas is a unique service for Roma university students to empower themselves and enhance their academic performance. Functioning like a student union in seven countries, these centers provide academic support, networking opportunities and training in soft skills that make a positive difference in the job market.
- **Tertiary Education Scholarships** - REF's flagship tertiary education scholarship program has been a motor of success to create a critical mass of highly educated Roma professionals and intellectuals. Ask nearly any Roma student how they managed to study, and the majority will answer that the support of the Roma Education Fund made their achievements possible.

## REF NETWORK

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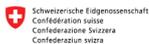
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