

2016 *annual* report



Roma Education Fund

Egzona Hodiqi reacts during the classes at her school in Lipjan while waiting for instructions from her teacher about what to write on the black board. She is one of 550 students enrolled in secondary school as part of REF's Secondary School and Mentoring Program in Kosovo.

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Contents

CHAIRMAN'S MESSAGE	4
2016 IN REVIEW	6
Executive Summary	6
Grants Program at a Glance	8
Tertiary Education Scholarship Program at a Glance	13
FEATURE STORIES	18
Toy Libraries at the center of early development of young Roma children – Launching the Roma Toy Library Network in 2016	18
Ready, Set, Go! – Impacting disadvantaged communities through investments in local infrastructure, education activities and community outreach	20
Ensuring readiness and success for primary school in Croatia – Integration in Medimurje County	24
Phasing out school segregation one child at a time at Konik Camp	25
Equal opportunity backlash in Bulgaria – Did Roma secondary school students and the €30 scholarship topple a government?	26
Tertiary education scholarship students – Professional development and giving back to communities	27
RomaVersitas – A competitive pathway to the labor market	29
REF COUNTRIES	30
Albania	30
Bosnia and Herzegovina	34
Bulgaria	37
Croatia	42
Czech Republic	45
Hungary	50
Kosovo	56
Macedonia	60
Moldova	66
Montenegro	68
Romania	74
Serbia	81
Slovakia	88
Turkey	94
Moldova, Russia, Ukraine	96
FINANCE AND ADMINISTRATION	100
REF NETWORK	111
Governing Boards	111
REF Network Foundations and Branch Offices	113

Chairman's Message

Dear Reader,

In my previous message from 2015 I stressed that the closure of the Decade of Roma Inclusion signaled a new chapter for the Roma Education Fund (REF), wherein it "will need to define its strategies and priorities anew, especially in relation to the EU Roma Framework." Then I proposed that "the question is not what to radically change, but how REF can continue effectively to realize its mission in Europe's rapidly changing social and political climate."

In 2016, terrorism, migration and Brexit pushed Roma inclusion down the agenda of international and national fora, jeopardizing years of work to sustain REF's mission to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. With this shift in political priorities foremost among its chief concerns, REF's Swiss Governing Board decided to analyze the broader policymaking landscape in order to reformulate REF's objectives and priorities. This discussion on long-term strategy started at a Belgrade meeting of the REF Board in the summer. At the core of the Board's debate was the question: how can REF achieve its mission through a more result-oriented approach and measurable impact, including in areas of systemic change in education, as outlined in its Swiss statute?

According to its founding statute of 2005, the Fund was tasked to **"contribute to closing the gap** in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma by supporting policies and programs that ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems." A key word to flag here is **"contribute,"** and how REF can capitalize on its strengths to master possible "tools," including innovative ones, to effectively progress towards reaching this goal.

REF is uniquely placed, due to its funding and focus, to make equal access and equitable educational outcomes a reality for Roma children and young people. The highlights of this year's report can serve as "food for thought" about just how much REF can inspire and impact education authorities. This is especially relevant for those policymakers who may have, until now, discounted the ability of Roma children to succeed in integrated schools, classrooms and universities.

Working with families from over 700 municipalities and more than 2,500 schools, REF served 23,393 Roma children and students in the context of its 2016 grants portfolio, with another 1,269 students supported with tertiary education scholarships. **Eighty-seven percent** of children in early childhood education programs have been enrolled in integrated primary schools, **96 percent** of REF-supported students of

primary education graduated and were enrolled in secondary schools, **42 percent** of REF-supported students of secondary education graduated and enrolled in tertiary education and **71 percent** of final year students successfully graduated from tertiary education. Taken together, these are impressive deliverables and a powerful message for education authorities: REF's innovation and investment work hand in hand to promote better educational outcomes for Roma.

Government and education authorities need to build on REF's experience and to introduce it in a systemic manner to turn the tide and enable far more Roma children to overcome still persisting problems they may face in state run education. Ideally, the state should implement such affirmative policy at all education levels – with a view on increasing social inclusion and guaranteeing equality and equity.

First, as indicated in this report, REF has been successfully engaged in and supported a number of early childhood education and care programs in Roma communities. Each year, REF sees more government and education partners buying into its interventions models, whether they be for children under age six or university students. Despite this good news, the segregation of Roma children and their overrepresentation in "special" or "practical" schools continues in many education systems. More needs to be done by REF to highlight the impact on the quality of outcomes for Roma children attending integrated classrooms as opposed to segregated ones. The priority here is to increase the scope of REF's research and advocacy that would help to overcome segregation practices in the education system.

Support for Roma children's access to quality education must unequivocally coalesce around one message: when we talk about access to quality, we refer to both quality conditions and quality outcomes. Quality implies that Roma children should benefit from comparable material conditions, qualified teaching staff and high standards for not only the interventions but also for children's achievements and progress. The European Commission's infringement proceedings initiated against several EU member states in this regard reinforce REF's efforts at desegregation and ridding school systems of this persistent tool to disenfranchise vulnerable communities.

Second, for years REF has pioneered scholarships for Roma secondary school students in order to not only graduate but also to motivate them to continue to higher education. REF has combined scholarships with

mentoring and tutoring schemes. These scholarships have grown to include thousands of students. For instance, together with the Ministry of Education of Bulgaria, REF launched a secondary school scholarship program in 2016 that made financial support possible for 700 Roma students, a first in Bulgaria where such programs are viewed with skepticism. REF also managed to win a €2.3 million grant from the German Development Bank (KfW) for a Serbian project targeting Roma returnees from EU countries, including scholarships for Roma studying in vocational schools, and facilitating their access to the labor market.

As a new area of action REF began to support Roma graduates of vocational schools to successfully enter the labor market. REF may seek here close cooperation with specialized agencies and organizations who have the capacity and expertise in preparing members of excluded communities to access the labor market. It is important, however, that REF's support provides Roma youth with high-quality skills and can work to overcome institutional racism they may face.

Third, the **REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program is the largest of its kind in Europe**, a landmark in the landscape of Roma education, supporting 1,269 Roma students in 2016. The merit-based eligibility criteria were adjusted in 2016 to prioritize students studying STEM subjects, legal studies, medical studies, pedagogy and interdisciplinary studies. Even before these modifications, the program's results have been improving year on year. Some students also have benefitted from RomaVersitas, a network of student "clubs" supported by the Grant Program that offer tutoring, training and other opportunities for learning and networking.

Over the last few years REF has conducted tracer studies within its Tertiary Education Scholarship Program investigating to what degree its programs contributed to the successful academic and professional trajectory of scholarship recipients. Such research efforts are powerful tools for REF to advocate with state institutions responsible for successful transitions of Roma graduates of vocational or university education to the labor market. In early 2016, REF published its second tracer study on the Roma Health Scholarship Program and will follow up with an employability study researching employment procedures and work opportunities for Roma medical professionals in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. Such studies are important milestones to measuring REF's long-term impact to create skilled Roma professionals working in all walks of life.

Fourth, as a private foundation REF has the independence to decide to assist and support the emergence of Roma professionals who can be a resource, as well as promoters and triggers, of change in Roma communities that otherwise would not take place. Indeed, REF initiated promoting the idea of contribution to the Roma community, including through volunteerism, of Roma students who benefit from the REF scholarship.

In difficult and uncertain times more focus and clearer priorities make sense – not the least for donors. REF is undertaking this path by reformulating its long-term REF strategy. REF is also actively seeking new donors to make the prospects for continuing its mission secure and not to lose what already has been achieved by some children, their parents and communities. REF's experience and lessons learned are valuable and should serve as advocacy tools for governments and education authorities to make a lasting impact on school systems – open to inclusive education, able to effectively prevent segregation and discrimination and supportive of multicultural and minority education.



Andrzej Mirga
REF Chair

2016 in Review

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since its establishment the Roma Education Fund has reported annually about tangible progress made in the field of educational assistance to Roma. REF openly promotes the collective effort made by school administrations, teachers, civil society organizations, parents and scholars, not to mention children, who are the center of our work. In its interventions REF is moving from ensuring access to quality of outcomes. Yet the magnitude of REF's assistance is modest in relation to the needs and complexities arising from the socio-economic deprivation of Roma.

Our journey in 2016 was marked by two developments: providing continuous core support to its beneficiaries in the field and launching an institutional rethink concerning the foundation's long-term priorities and objectives. REF embarked on a deliberative process from which it sought to decouple education measurement tools and education outcomes both by quality and quantity. Consequently, our educational support focused on talented children and children at risk of early school leaving.

This year's report brings to light specific evidence on the progress made – for example, graduation and cumulative GPA rates, and transition versus dropout rates within and between educational levels. In parallel, our measurements contribute to defining an input-output ratio in relation to the minimum investment per child/student that is required to bridge the gap in the school environment. In sum, 2016 REF continued to provide assistance to REF beneficiaries, nurture talent and enable better learning environments for children in need during 2016.

REF supported 92,759 beneficiaries in 2016, from whom 99 percent (91,263) were supported by the Grant Program and the remaining one percent (1,269) by the Scholarship Program. The participation rate split between parents and children is 63 percent and 37 percent, respectively, indicating that mobilization, participation and choice of Roma parents is a central factor for advancing the education attainment of Roma children.

The relative strength of the progress made in REF's portfolio in the last few years makes an undeniable case supporting its investments and innovations in quality, inclusive education.

- **Transition from preschool to primary education** – retention and transition rates are conventionally highest at the preschool level in comparison to other intervention levels. Individual country data from 2016 show very promising results both in the access to and attainment of primary education as **87 percent of REF preschool beneficiaries enrolled in integrated primary schools**.
- **Transition from primary to secondary education** – **96 percent of REF-supported students who graduated primary education enrolled in secondary schools**. Such growth is a big, tangible step to close the gap in education outcomes. This compares favorably to the mainstream, where the effective transition rate hovers around 99 percent.¹ In 2005, just ten to 12 percent of graduates progressed from primary to secondary education.
- **Transition from secondary to tertiary education** – **42 percent of REF-supported students who graduated secondary education in 2016 enrolled in tertiary education**. This is a good example of how REF models work to close the outcome gap. In 2005, only one percent of Roma secondary school graduates were enrolled from secondary to tertiary education. More broadly, the Europe 2020 strategy on education expects that the share of the European population aged 30 to 34 who have completed tertiary or equivalent education will surpass 40 percent by 2020.²
- **Tertiary education graduation** – 71 percent of final year REF-supported students successfully graduated. In addition, 69 percent of students have been successful in transitioning to the next academic year in their respective field of studies with REF support.
- **Gender balance** – barring Second Chance projects supporting adult education, female participation is meaningfully higher than male participation in all REF education interventions, particularly among university students where the ratio of female participation is 58 percent versus 42 percent of male students.

REF intervention models were scaled up in several new countries in that hitherto had avoided addressing gaps in Roma education outcomes, proving that REF interventions are making an impact at a national policy level.

- The **Secondary Scholarship Program started in Bulgaria** in the 2016-2017 academic year in partnership with the Ministry of Education secured joint funding support for 700 high school students.
- A **new funding commitment from the German Development Bank (KfW)** ensured a continuation of the secondary education scholarship scheme that REF implemented in Serbia under a previous agreement with the OSCE, and which includes the extension of its objectives to labor market transition of Roma secondary school scholarship recipients.
- The **network of RomaVersitas student programs has grown** as a new RomaVersitas center was established in Romania in the last quarter of 2016.
- The **number of Toy Library Network members has increased** to 39 as we **established 23 new Toy library centers** in eight countries in 2016.
- **REF Romania** successfully managed to coordinate and implement a **complex Norway Grants project**, combining service provision, infrastructural interventions and early childhood education and care curricula development.
- REF is an **attractive partner for universities and academic institutions**, a new value added to our work as it sets reality checks within our practices with mainstream policies and plans. The partnership with universities in Sussex, Seville and Umea in the implementation of an EU-funded project has revealed **new learning horizons and prospects** for our mission.
- The traditional **partnership with Central European University** was scaled up for the next five years as we jointly fund and implement the Roma in European Societies initiative.

REF can prove that relatively small investments per child can yield significant results. When calculating an average unit cost for our interventions, the Grant Program averaged €116 annually per beneficiary, or just €0.6 per school day.³ This amount is added on top of the regular public expenditure provided by the state education system. The average REF grant in 2016 was €64,801. This is around €10,000 less compared to the average 12-year grant amount of €75,790. The average scholarship amount granted to students during one academic

year in tertiary education amounts to €1,265, which equals a one-month scholarship in most EU member states. Regardless of having limits to its financial means, REF sustained its range of projects and programs in its portfolio by leveraging funds from other sources, proving unequivocally that REF is setting the stage for the next horizon in its growing operations, bringing better quality educational outcomes to Roma communities in the near future.

After more than a decade, we are proud to say that we managed to advance the education prospects of nearly one million girls and boys as well as their parents. To do so, REF representatives engaged and interacted with schools, teachers and administration in many localities. Their consistent advocacy and openness for cooperation convinced schools, municipalities and ministries to commit specific budget lines for the education needs of Roma – which in 2016 reached around 40 percent co-financing.

Year on year, REF intervention models have proven to be easily replicable as well adjustable to children's needs. All education levels have become more affordable for Roma children thanks to regular support from REF. In particular, REF succeeded to cultivate and embed a reliable set of features in its institutional and operational design:

- Cost-effectiveness and result-based evidence
- Quality assurance standards
- Uniform outreach methods
- Trusted cross-sectoral cooperation and partnership
- Easy-to-access field-based structures for direct support and technical assistance

Based on in-house evidence and analytics, the 2016 Annual Report pairs a general overview with in-depth reporting about program and project interventions realized in 16 countries. It brings to attention the key achievements and events, contrasts REF results with mainstream educational trends and visualizes aggregated data. A handful of features explore some of the challenges experienced by REF entities during the implementation process, while an index of REF country portfolios include additional information about REF's investments and priorities, complemented by personal spotlights on how education has made a difference in people's lives. General statistics for each country chapter are contrasted with REF data about its interventions, providing an up-to-date comparison of the education policy and development landscape along with evidence underlining the successful outcomes that REF has triggered through its projects and programs. By default, the Annual Report concludes with information on finance and administration, including audit findings on income and expenses made by the REF Network.

1. Available online: <http://data.uis.unesco.org/index.aspx?queryid=159>

2. Available online: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/ALL/?uri=CELEX:52014DC0130>

3. The average school year has 180 days

GRANTS PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

REF’s grants support program has focused on decreasing the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma; it has been acknowledged by several stakeholders including European Commission, World Bank and national governments that REF has made a valuable contribution in bettering the educational outcomes of Roma children. In several countries, REF has well-established partnerships with governments, local municipalities, and civil society organizations.

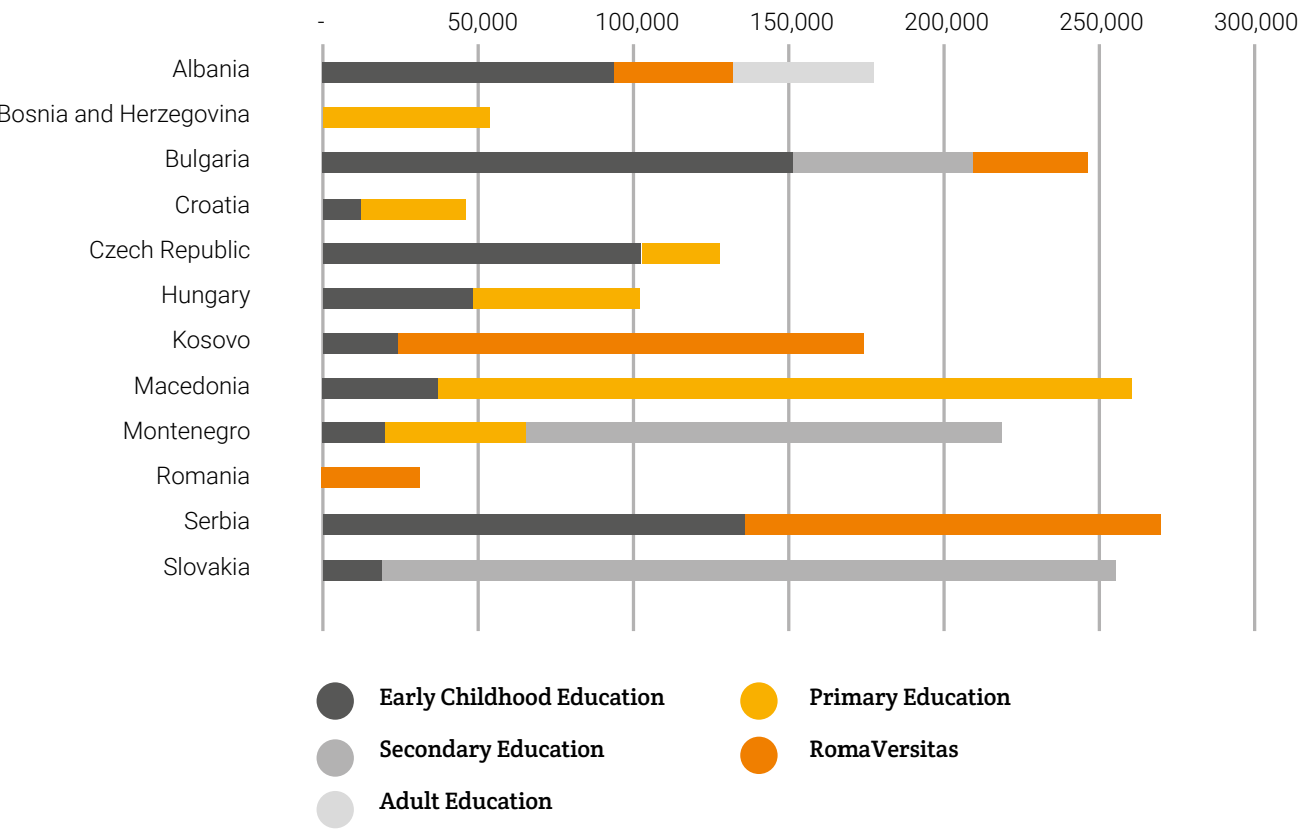
According to EU thematic Evaluation on IPA Support to Roma Communities “[E]ducation has achieved desired institutional changes where there were clear links between national policy and IPA support. Evidence for improved educational attainment is piecemeal and anecdotal – but points strongly in the right direction. The role of the Roma Education Fund must be recognized as a force for positive policy models and practice”.⁴

In 2016, based on commitments of REF’s Governing Board, REF contracted 42 grant projects with a total commitment of €2.0 million. In addition to this amount, REF implementing partners committed €1.6 million in co-funding for these projects.

The current portfolio of grant contracts, including grants committed in 2016 and the preceding years, consists of 74 grants with a total committed amount of €10.4 million. The implementing partners raised additional €9.7 million in co-funding to support the project activities.

REF and its partners worked in over 700 municipalities across 13 countries and more than 2,500 schools served 23,393 Roma children and students within the 74 active grants in its 2016 portfolio. REF support ensured children’s smooth progression from one education level to another, from early childhood through tertiary education. Such interventions encompass the social, intellectual, emotional and cognitive development of Roma children and their adaptation to the educational process.

Grant Contracts by Educational Level by Country in 2016, EUR



REF beneficiaries across various education categories in 2016

Education Categories	No. of beneficiaries
Participation in preschool education – ECEC	8,962
Prevention of early school leaving	9,792
Secondary school model	3,745
Tertiary education – RomaVersitas	1,343
Parental participation in children's education	57,781
Parents’ membership in Toy Libraries	3,075
Desegregation	4,635
Prevention/reversal of enrollment in special education	1,683
In-service teacher training	1,318
Roma employment within REF projects	425
Total	92,759

Primary and secondary education, transition rate was almost **98%** for students in their final year.

The dropout rate in REF supported projects averaged **4%**.

4. European Commission, Thematic Evaluation on IPA Support to Roma Communities, June 2015.

Some projects directly intervened to stop Roma children's enrollment in segregated and/or special education.

2,936 preschool children were enrolled in desegregated kindergartens in Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary and Montenegro.

1,450 preschool children were discouraged from enrolling in special schools in Czech Republic and Slovakia.

1,679 primary school pupils in Macedonia and 20 primary school pupils in Hungary were enrolled in integrated school.

FIVE MODELS GUIDING GRANTS AND POLICY

Seeking to grow its influence and ability to prove without a doubt that investments in Roma education generate enormous returns for both Roma and society at large, REF has been actively scaling up its own proprietary model-based education interventions that were launched in 2013. When considering its investments in each country in its portfolio, REF capitalizes on its know-how and experience and then balances its interventions across the region. REF works with a large number of professionals and stakeholders serving beneficiaries to achieve better educational results and to decrease the inequity that persists in education systems across the region. REF consistently has supported evidence-based educational projects both inside and outside formal education systems.

Expanding Access to Preschool Education: Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

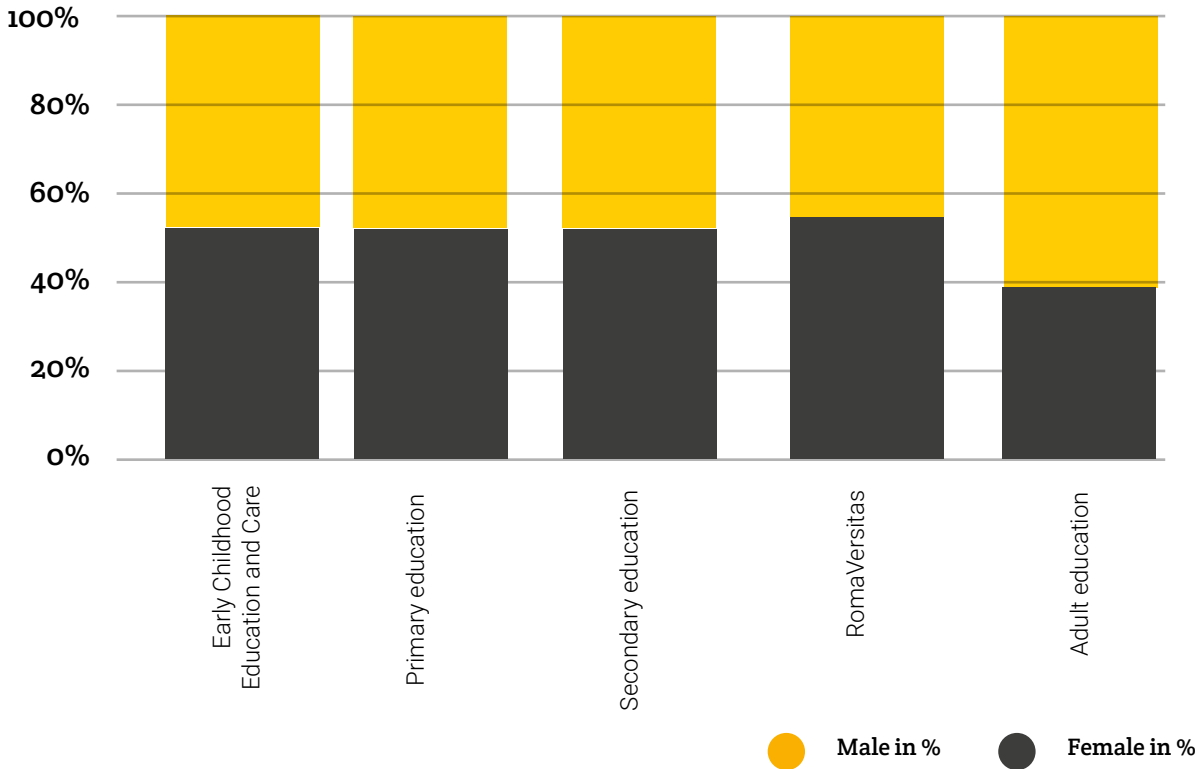
REF's ECEC services aim to improve the school readiness and early childhood development outcomes of Roma children under age six by improving the enrollment and attendance in mainstream preschool services; enhancing the parenting skills and improving the practices of Roma parents; strengthening the link between parents and preschool facilities; and raising the quality of ECEC services, such as teaching and learning methods. These ECEC programs often are located in communities with high levels of absolute poverty and spatial segregation.

REF partners supported 8,962 Roma children ages zero to six with ECEC services with 36 projects in eleven countries in 2016. In addition, 3,075 parents became members of Toy Libraries, together with their children. 12,161 parents were empowered about ECEC parenting through participation in these projects. Their literacy and reading skills have been improved under the guidance of experienced educators. Mothers benefited from debates, excursions, cultural and educational events, thus enhancing their ability to provide support to their children's education. Project locations in Bulgaria, Hungary and Montenegro recorded **zero dropouts from kindergarten**, pointing to the success and quality of these programs.

Avoiding Early School Leaving in Primary Education / Desegregation

REF's primary education model intends to improve the primary education outcomes of Roma children aged between six and 14. The intervention supports primary education enrollment and school-after-school programs (tutoring and mentoring) with improved access (enrollment) to primary education. Simultaneously, these models seek to prevent early school leaving, enhance parental skills, strengthen the link between parents and schools, provide remedial classes to children and offer professional support and guidance to school staff and authorities. Successful project implementation had a direct impact, with **zero dropouts from primary education** in Bulgaria, Croatia and Hungary. Furthermore, there has been an average **improvement of nine percent in learning outcomes** measured prior to and after these interventions.

Gender by project type in 2016



Expanding Access to Secondary Education

The secondary education model aims to improve the academic performance of students and to maintain the retention and graduation rate of Roma secondary school students through better outreach, provision of scholarships, school-based mentorship support and tutorship support. For the first time ever, there was **100 percent graduation rate** in secondary education in Tuzla Canton, Bosnia and Herzegovina. Similar to the primary education model, REF has recorded an average **increase of seven percent in learning outcomes** measured prior to and after these interventions. A positive trend has also been noted in transition rate to tertiary education: on average, 42 percent of the graduates applied to continue their studies in universities.

Expanding Access to Higher Education: RomaVersitas

RomaVersitas intends to improve the retention, performance and graduation levels of Roma full-time tertiary education students by providing them with academic tutoring and mentoring and strengthening their Roma identity and community participation. This model consists of compulsory and optional components. It serves as a bridge for young Roma scholars and includes **mentoring, tutoring and additional training** in professional development and foreign language competences. Furthermore, RomaVersitas also encourages and works with high school graduates to continue to tertiary education as well as facilitating the enrollment process. Some 800 tertiary education students are now members of eighteen RomaVersitas centers in nine countries. Encouragingly, 59 percent of RomaVersitas students found employment after obtaining their diplomas.

Second Chance Programs for Adult Functional Literacy and Formal School Completion

Second Chance programs provide those with incomplete primary and/or secondary education with tutoring and financial support for **completing formal education**. Albania, Macedonia and Hungary hosted such programs in 2016, ensuring the completion of primary and secondary education for 255 Roma adults and enabling them to become more competitive in the labor market.

Capacity Building and Technical Support to Implementing Partners

REF has been developing and fine-tuning its Secondary Scholarship and Mentorship Program (SSMP) for nearly ten years. SSMP targets secondary school students, as well as students in their final years of primary school, from enrollment to completion of secondary education. It offers monthly financial support to finish secondary school, while mentoring and tutoring ensure a better academic performance, reduced dropout rate and increased transition rate both to the next grade and to tertiary education. REF operates the program in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Slovakia with their respective ministries of education.

TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM AT A GLANCE

The main goal of Roma Education Fund Scholarship Program (REF SP) is to contribute to the emergence of a critical mass of Roma higher education graduates, confident and proud of their Roma identity, academically and socially adept, equipped with skills and competences that enable them to become professionals in their fields, as well as remain solidly connected to the Roma community and support its further advancement and inclusion into the wider society. To achieve this goal, REF SP provides support to Roma students to facilitate their access to higher education within their countries of residence or abroad, support their academic efforts during their studies, and successfully graduate. For this, the Scholarships Program offers four academic merit-based scholarship schemes in 16 countries in Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine). Scholarships are provided for one academic year and students can renew their application provided they have successfully completed the prior academic year.

Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP) is the largest scheme, designed to facilitate open access for Roma youth to tertiary education and to enable larger numbers of Roma to enter the labor market as mainstream professionals. The beneficiaries study in their own countries for a variety of specializations, in Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programs (or their equivalents) and 953 students received €800 support for the 2016-2017 academic year to cover basic study and living expenses, as well as up to €1,200 to cover tuition fees. In addition to the financial support, RMUSP scheme offers academic and professional development support. RMUSP is implemented in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia and Turkey.

Following the global trends and labor market skills requirements, as well as the Roma community development needs more broadly, the REF SP as of 2016 introduced a measure of awarding additional points in evaluating the applications of students pursuing studies in natural sciences, interdisciplinary sciences, medicine, law, IT and engineering, as well as pedagogy, to incentivize Roma students to consider pursuing specializations in high demand on the labor market.

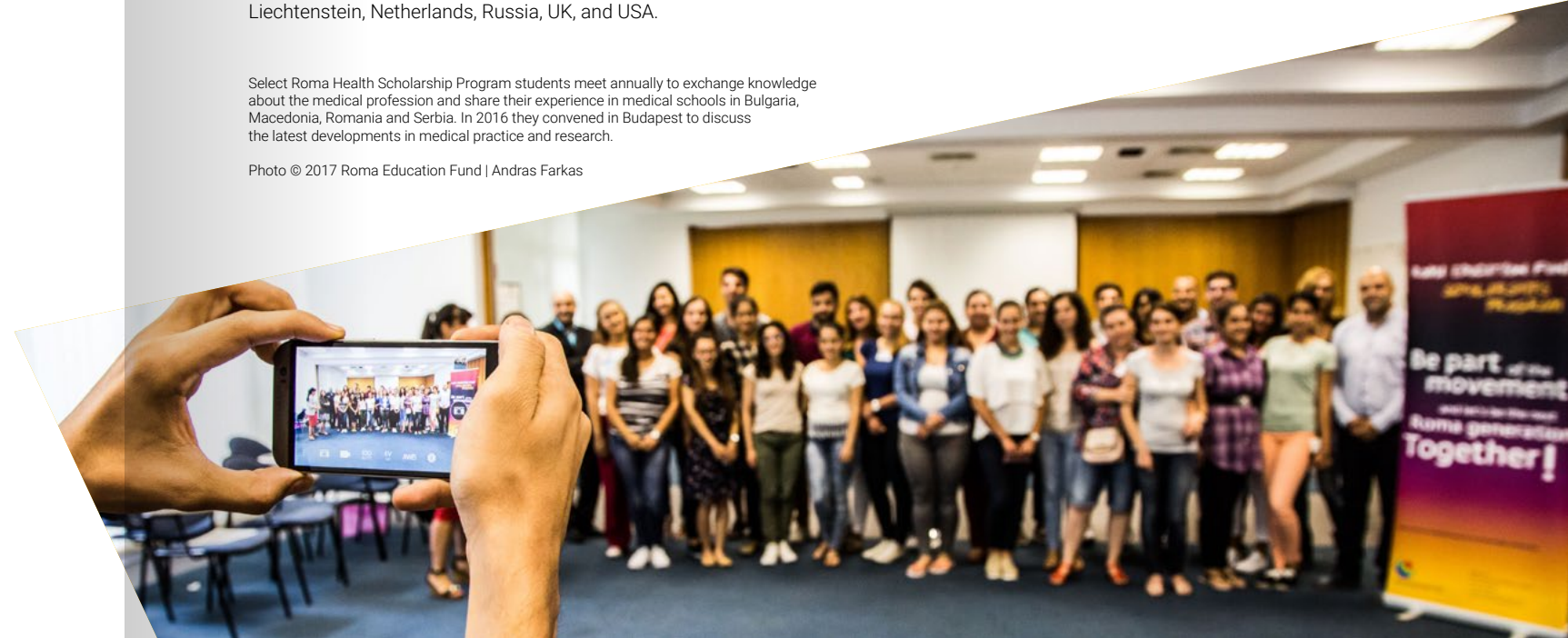
Law and Humanities Program (LHP) is implemented in Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine. 208 beneficiaries received €1,300 financial support for the 2016-2017 academic year to cover basic study and living expenses, as well as additional support for a maximum amount of €1,000 covering tuition fees. In addition to the financial support, LHP scheme offers its beneficiaries academic and professional development support. (more details see in Chapter for LHP Russia, Ukraine and Moldova program)

Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) is implemented in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia, and 97 beneficiaries received support to continue medical studies in their own countries at vocational or tertiary levels. The scholarships varied between €675 and €3,335, depending on the country and the level of studies. In addition to the financial support, RHSP scheme offers its beneficiaries academic and professional development support. (For more details, see country chapters.)

Roma International Scholar Program (RISP) accepted 11 beneficiaries from Bulgaria, Hungary, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, and Ukraine who received financial support to study outside their home countries in Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programs in the 2016–2017 academic year. The scholarship awards ranged from €3,784 to €9,050 (with an average of €6,390), taking into consideration students' secured third-party support, to cover their living and study-related expenses at universities in Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Estonia, Hungary, Italy, Liechtenstein, Netherlands, Russia, UK, and USA.

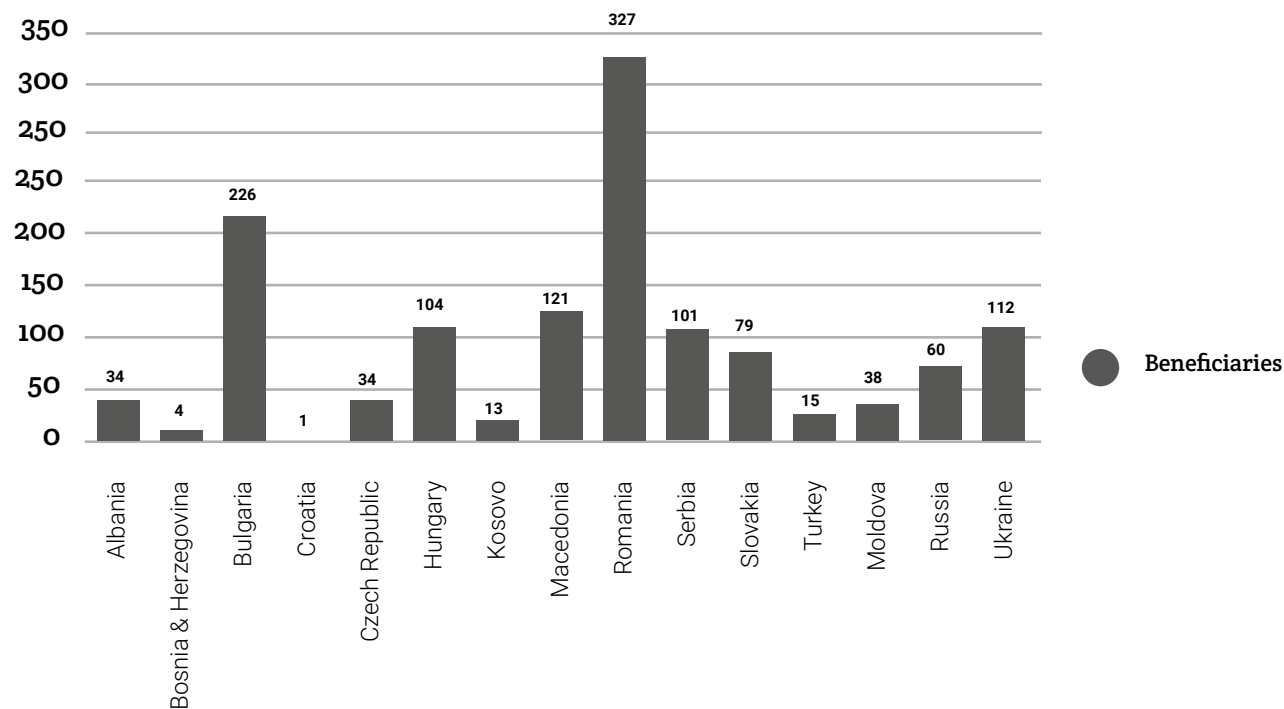
Select Roma Health Scholarship Program students meet annually to exchange knowledge about the medical profession and share their experience in medical schools in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia. In 2016 they convened in Budapest to discuss the latest developments in medical practice and research.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas

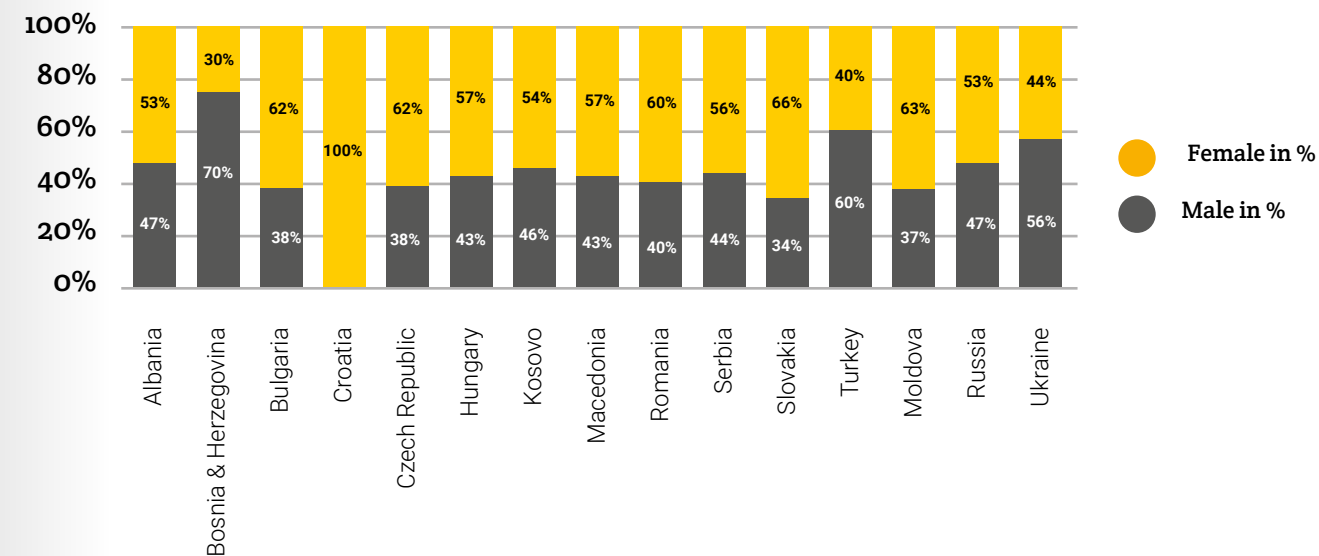


REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program in 2016-2017						
REF SP Scheme	Number of submitted applications	Eligible applications	% of eligible applications	Awarded scholarships	% of awarded scholarships from the pool of eligible applicants	% acceptance rate from the pool of submitted applications
RMUSP	1,788	1,465	82%	953	65%	53%
RHSP	170	110	65%	97	88%	57%
LHP	318	272	86%	208	76%	65%
RISP	38	21	55%	11	52%	29%
Total number	2,314	1,868	81%	1,269	68%	55%

REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program beneficiaries all schemes per country 2016-2017 academic year



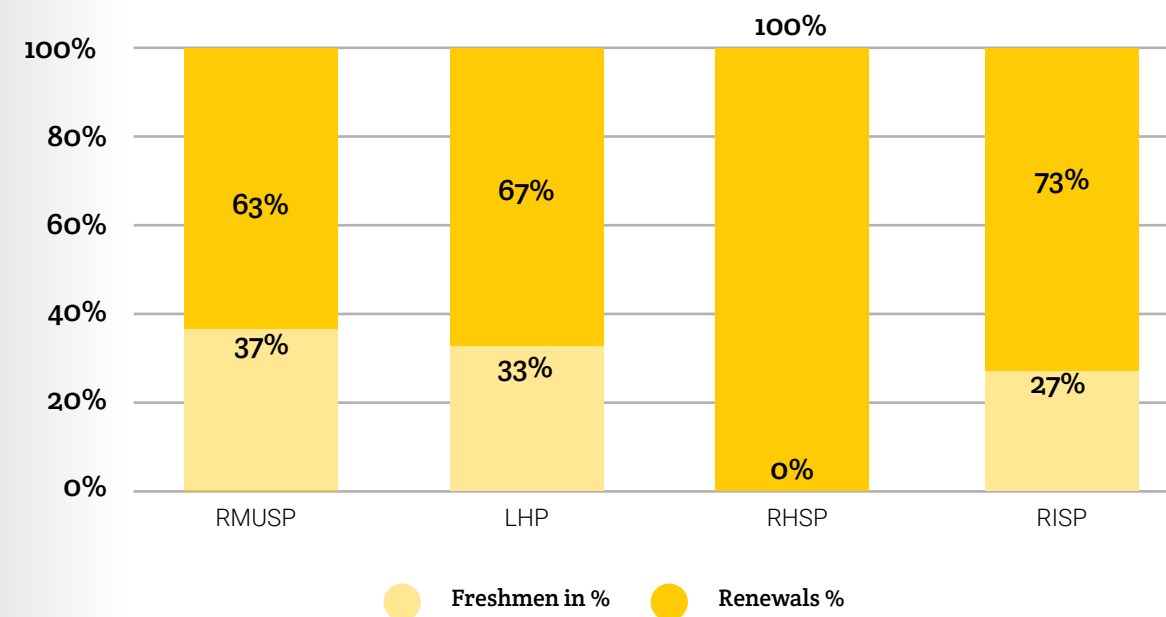
REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program by gender in 2016-2017



The figures representing the REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program by total number of beneficiaries per country and by gender present the number of scholarship recipients in each country in the 2016-2017 academic year. Out of a total of 1,269 beneficiaries 537 (42%) are male and 732 (58%) are female. There are several factors explaining the differences in these numbers from country to country. For each scholarship cycle, the total number of scholarships is determined by the availability of funds in the REF SP. The number of scholarships allocated in each country is decided based on the following factors:

- Demand for scholarships as expressed in the past years in the country, measured by number of applications, which also reflects the ratio of upper secondary school completion among Roma;
- Existence of alternative scholarship programs in a given country, as well as the existence of student loan schemes;
- Estimated Roma population size in each country relative to the total Roma population;
- The focus of specific REF SP donors on specific countries.

REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program: Freshmen vs. renewals per scheme in 2016-2017

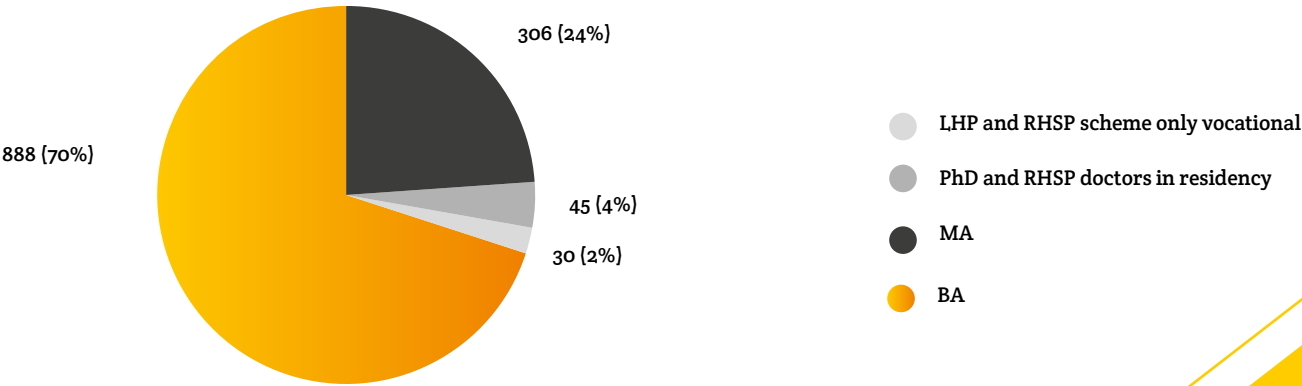


There are two types of reasons for which applicants can be rejected in REF SP selection: either they do not comply with the eligibility criteria of the program, or they are not accepted on competition grounds. Applicants can be rejected as ineligible either at the initial stage of selection based on the information provided in their applications or at the last stage of selection based on the information about their actual enrollment status in a higher education institution as stated in official enrollment certificates issued by the respective institutions. Applicants rejected on competition grounds are eligible in the competition for scholarship support but the reason for rejection is, on the one hand, due to their application's lower score received in the evaluation process and, on the other hand, because of REF SP's budgetary limitation and incapacity to satisfy the whole demand for scholarship from the pool of Program's eligible applicants. From 2,314 applications received in 2016-2017 academic year across all four schemes of the REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program, 29 percent were rejected due to non-compliance with the eligibility criteria of the Program. From the remaining 1,645 applications deemed eligible and in competition, 16 percent were rejected and not awarded a scholarship.

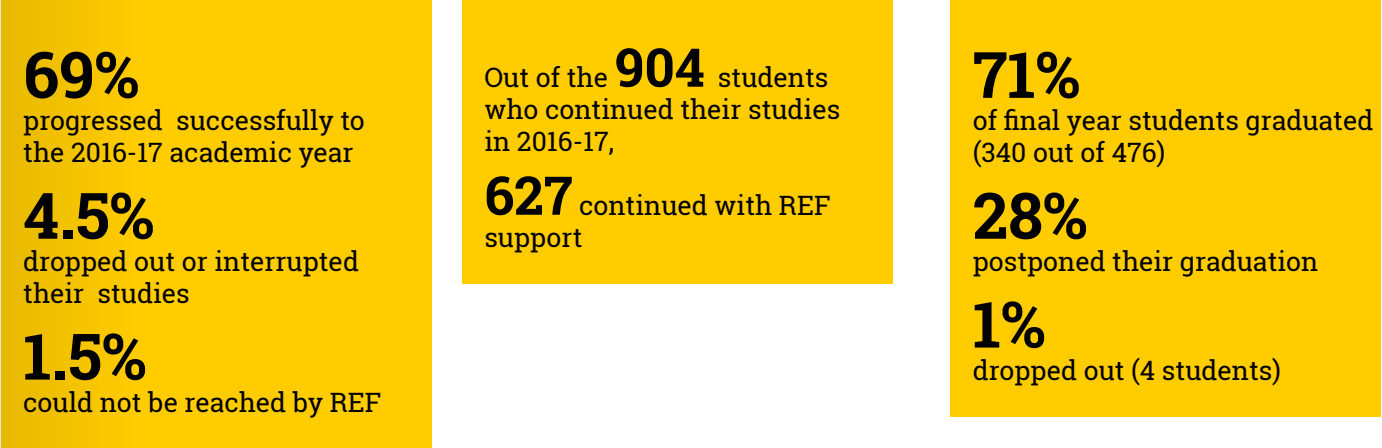
Scheme	Applications rejected on eligibility (%)	Applications rejected on competition (%)
RMUSP	29%	18%
RHSP	43%	0%
LHP	20%	14%
RISP	50%	21%
Total	29%	16%

In addition to the financial support for covering studies and living expenses during the academic year. Under the **RMUSP, LHP** and **RHSP** schemes, beneficiaries also are eligible to apply for **grants supporting their further academic, personal and professional development**. For this purpose, the REF SP supports scholarship beneficiaries to participate in conferences, attend foreign language and computer courses, participate in research projects, as well as summer schools, and participate in internships within their own countries or abroad. For more details on these grants, please read "Tertiary education scholarship students – Professional development and giving back to communities" in the feature stories.

REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program:
Levels of study in 2016-2017



REF SP BENEFICIARIES' PROGRESS FROM ONE ACADEMIC YEAR TO ANOTHER



The ratio of students in non-graduation years who interrupted their studies or dropped out has diminished compared to previous years. This positive development can be attributed primarily to the closer monitoring of students' academic progress from one semester to another by REF SP through students' intermediary reporting. However, the ratio of students who drop out, interrupt studies or postpone graduation varies from country to country. The specific dropout rates in each country, as well as specific reasons for dropping out or interrupting studies, are presented in the country chapters of this report.

In 2016 the program continues to analyze the graduation data of its beneficiaries over the last four academic cycles (2012-13 till 2015-16 academic years). Analysis has been conducted for Albania, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Macedonia and Romania so far, and here are the outcomes: among 709 students in graduation year, 560 (39%) successfully graduated and 149 (11%) postponed their graduation. The program continues to update the analysis and include the other countries from the program portfolio.

Toy Libraries at the center of early development of young Roma children – Launching the Roma Toy Library Network in 2016

ANASZTAZIA NAGY, REF SENIOR PROGRAM OFFICER

Improving the home learning environment is central to REF's work and supported by the operation of Toy Libraries. The Toy Libraries supported by the Roma Education Fund have a crucial role in reaching out to Roma parents and children from vulnerable communities who have limited access to services. Toy libraries are just one component of a package that REF offers to national governments and local authorities as it advocates for compulsory and free-of-charge early childhood education and care (ECEC) for all children below school age. REF grantees supported 8,727 Roma children ages zero to six with ECEC services in 11 countries in 2016.

Playing in Toy Libraries and borrowing quality educational toys for home play helps children to develop important skills for healthy physical and cognitive development, as well as learning social lessons about sharing and responsibility. Onsite activities offered for parents like the popular "play and stay" sessions when parents and children can learn about toys help to improve the interaction between children and parents and encourage parents to apply the practices at home.

Adela, a Your Story facilitator from Slovakia, described the program, "First and foremost, each of the participants found a place to relax, switch off from the domestic duties. A place, where they were feeling safe and they could enjoy fun. The space to talk and to learn new things, consult with each other."

Parental clubs or literacy sessions, which support parents to learn up-to-date information about childcare and provide opportunities for regular discussions about important topics for their community also are conducted at the sites. Taking part in Toy Libraries motivates parents to change and improve the home learning environment of their children and also ensures a community for mothers that focuses on children under age six.

"They started to read with their children," said Adela, "They returned back to their childhood, created playgrounds in their minds. They live with their children in a very close relationship; they need more time to realize that it is important to spend also a little time only for themselves."

One of the mothers said, "When I started to go to the Toy Library as

a mother I first borrowed only colored baby toys, which my daughter liked. Then, slowly, there were puzzles and logic games in our hands." Later, she found herself sitting at home and playing together with her children. She reported that she had not played with her children because there was always something to do at home. But she learned to use the games in the Toy Library and she was so engrossed that she almost felt like a child again when playing together with her children. At home the father became involved with the games and later he also visited the Toy Library.

Members of the Roma Toy Library Network are led through a Stay and Play session at its inaugural meeting in Belgrade, Serbia in 2016. REF currently supports more than 40 Toy Libraries in the region as a way to promote healthy educational outcomes in some of Europe's most disadvantaged communities.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Srdjan Ilic

3,013
Roma families
as Toy Library members

Almost **40**
Toy Libraries
in 8 countries

3,500 good quality
educational toys
and **2,500**
story books

Borrowing/lending toys



Mobile toy libraries
for remote communities

Your Story reading sessions,
literacy courses and
parents' clubs

The Roma Education Fund started supporting the first Toy Library for Roma in 2010 and since then the libraries have expanded to eight countries and 39 Toy Libraries across Central, Eastern and South Eastern Europe and the Balkans.

As a result of the first Roma Toy Library conference organized in June 2016, bringing together practitioners from REF-supported Toy Libraries from eight countries, REF has supported the creation of the Roma Toy Library Network. The network aims to spread the message about the importance of early childhood education of Roma children. Furthermore, the network will offer ongoing learning and professional support for its members and a platform of common advocacy at national and international levels.

Ready, Set, Go! – Impacting disadvantaged communities through investments in local infrastructure, education activities and community outreach

Five hundred sixty children and their families in rural Romania's most disadvantaged communities are the direct beneficiaries of Ready, Set, Go!, a quality educational program provided by the Roma Education Fund and their partners, with the financial support of Norway Grants under the RO 25 Poverty Alleviation Programme. The project team in Bucharest has documented the progress of its interventions across Romania throughout 2016 and what follows are a selection of some of their photographs, showing how Ready, Set, Go! has started to impact participating communities.

BUILDING KINDERGARTENS IN RURAL ROMANIA



A construction worker checks the blueprints for a kindergarten to be refurbished in one of the 11 sites in rural Romania.

The town kindergarten undergoing construction in Galbinasi, a village in Calarasi County, one of the country's most disadvantaged communities. Twenty percent of its population of over 3,700 inhabitants is Roma.



REACHING OUT TO DISADVANTAGED COMMUNITIES

Ready, Set, Go! overcomes parents' prejudice about education and negative experience they may have had in the past by empowering and involving them in the education of their children. As trust builds, eventually parents and Ready, Set, Go! educators will become one team for early education.



Ready, Set, Go! makes sure kids enjoy early education by also providing basic items such as backpacks.

Ready, Set, Go! enrolls children from disadvantaged communities in kindergartens, providing basic school supplies, hygiene and even food. Ready, Set, Go! believes that going to kindergarten is fun and important. Kids are encouraged to express themselves using supplies and toys provided by Ready, Set, Go!



YOUR STORY – LITERACY EMPOWERMENT FOR MOTHERS



Your Story empowers mothers to read and tell stories with their children. In Galbinasi, parents hold Your Story books. For most of them it is their very first book.

Children, mothers and educators in Galbinasi participate in Your Story activities. Magic Bus is one illustrated book used by Your Story. Families from disadvantaged communities get into the habit of telling stories together.



Over 50 titles of books are now available to caregivers who are now learning how to read stories to the children and how to support their educational development. Drawings and visual aids are essential to Your Story, a literacy empowerment model of Ready, Set, Go! that brings mothers together to read and discuss stories aloud.



HOME SCHOOL COMMUNITY LIAISON

Home School Community Liaison module turns parents into educators and lets them present lessons in the kindergartens. Home School Community Liaison is aimed at building parents' trust in how the school works for and with their kids. Home School Community Liaison empowers families to become more involved in the teaching and learning at the kindergartens.



Kids become more responsible while having fun: here, a group plants flowers and vegetables in a Home School Community Liaison activity.



A mother demonstrates oral hygiene in a health education class she is teaching as part of the Home School Community Liaison component of Ready, Set, Go!



Ensuring readiness and success for primary school in Croatia – Integration in Medimurje County

SINISA-SENAD MUSIC, REF COUNTRY FACILITATOR FOR CROATIA

Full membership in the European Union entails many responsibilities, among them respecting minority rights and improving opportunities for disadvantaged groups. For Croatia, the EU's newest member that is home to some 22 minority national groups, it is not different: nominally, equal opportunities for quality, inclusive education are embedded in its legislation governing its school system.

However, reality can be different for some minorities. For instance, while the government has invested in social development in a few key policy areas, more comprehensive development work has been avoided, in particular when applied to Roma, who make up 16,975 individuals according to the 2011 Census, with other estimates hovering around 40,000. For example, many Roma children are taught in segregated classes and they do not automatically qualify for free textbooks. Less than 30 Roma attend university in a country of 4.3 million, meaning there is less than one Roma university student for every 100,000 Croats.

While some policies are in place to promote better educational outcomes for Roma pupils, much more can be done to improve educational and life outcomes for Croatia's Roma population. REF has worked together with Croatian education officials for years to address the problem of school segregation. For instance, in 2015 Croatia made a positive step by legislating that all children must attend one year of preschool free of charge before enrolling in primary school. However, not all Roma children have benefited from this significant change. Some local governments do not provide transportation from Roma settlements to institutions organizing preschool – that is mandated to local governments – and transportation is very problematic for Roma communities often physically segregated from the majority population.

An outstanding example of how individuals can make a difference in this struggle is the case of Mursko Sredisce, a small locality with almost 7,000 residents in Medimurje County and where 300 Roma live in Sitnice, a segregated neighborhood. It was not always the case that children from the Roma settlement enrolled in the town's Maslacak kindergarten where they attend a full-day, integrated, quality program organized by Miljenka Zupan, a teacher and pedagogue, and Spomenka Cilar, principal of the kindergarten.

When Miljenka began to enroll Roma children in the kindergarten, she – with the help of kindergarten principal, Spomenka Cilar, local government representative Dolores Vrtlaric and Roma representative Milorad Mihanoivic – managed to persuade the local and regional

government to find a way to provide free transportation for Sitnice's residents. With REF's support she then could focus on providing Roma children the building blocks of numeracy and literacy in an integrated school setting. A later evaluation showed that Roma and non-Roma children were better prepared for school. Miljenka's commitment made a huge difference to what was achieved and paved the way for a change in local attitudes toward Roma children. After seven years of REF paying transport costs, all stakeholders saw the need to find a permanent solution for transportation if they wanted to give a chance to future generations of children coming from Sitnica.

Something important happened when the impending decision to discontinue bussing was made public: Miljenka was no longer alone to argue with the local, regional and national government. Roma parents also played an important role. Some, for the first time, voiced their worries, fearing that the transportation would stop and their children would be left behind.

As REF's facilitator in the field in Croatia, this evolution was extremely rewarding to witness. Roma parents were fighting for their children's right to education. Some parents even declared they would find a way to transport their children from Sitnice to the kindergarten if need be. (Many Roma parents are social benefit recipients, and according to Croatian law, if you possess a car – the value of the car is unimportant – you are disqualified from social benefits.)

REF was alerted to the situation and scrambled to arrange a meeting among representatives of Medimurje County, the mayor of Mursko Sredisce and a representative of Government Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities to find a solution to finance the transportation. After a round of advocacy, the decision was made: REF, together with the Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities and the town of Mursko Sredisce, would find the money to finance transportation until the autumn 2016, but only with the condition that Medimurje County take over this expense from October 2016 and integrate it into the county's regular budget.

Today, Mursko Sredisce organizes free-of-charge transport to and from kindergarten and this expense is covered from the Medimurje County's budget. Children from Maslacak have better results in primary education than those who did not attend the kindergarten.

Phasing out school segregation one child at a time at Konik Camp

NATAŠA KOČIĆ-RAKOČEVIĆ, REF COUNTRY MANAGER FOR SERBIA AND MONTENEGRO

For several years REF has committed financial support and technical expertise to interventions aimed at improving the educational outcomes of Roma and Egyptian (RE) families living in Europe's longest continuously running refugee camp in Podgorica, Montenegro. In the summer of 2016 REF managed to close the primary school within the camp, ending an era of school segregation.

Shqipe Kabashi arrived at Konik Camp with her husband and children in the summer of 1999 as violence in Kosovo spiked. Konik Camp is a place that few would voluntarily call home. Public services are sporadic and housing is wholly inadequate. Opportunities for residents outside the camp are few and far between. No one dreamed that Konik would be their home for so long.

Even with a vocational diploma in mechanical engineering, it was not until 2003 that Shqipe found work as a teaching assistant interpreting between Albanian and Montenegrin at the rudimentary branch school serving grades one to four at the camp. "I was marginalized by the teachers and had no other role in the classroom," she said. "No RE girl could or did want to complete the fifth grade, let alone complete primary education."

Neither prioritized by the government of Montenegro nor by donor agencies, the camp sank into administrative and political limbo for many years. People like Shqipe, with a husband and five children, were left to stagnate in the camp where over 90 percent of the Konik camp inhabitants could not access the social system or obtain work permits. By the time yet another fire swept through the camp in the summer of 2012, everyone agreed that a new impetus was required to find a solution.

The promise of EU candidate status to Montenegro served as the opening. Suddenly, the government was motivated to enshrine quality, inclusive education for Roma children – one measure among many at the core of its National Roma Integration Strategy and an important benchmark in the application for membership – in its education system. The Ministry of Education and the city of Podgorica agreed that the branch school in the camp should cease operation gradually. Grade by grade, year by year, the primary school would be emptied until all of Konik children were enrolled in Podgorica's mainstream schools.

REF met Shqipe and her family when it began to recruit a community outreach team of Roma and Egyptian mediators to this substantial desegregation project. The team was to conduct an awareness-raising campaign with parents and children on the importance of education as well as facilitate interactions with education authorities in Podgorica, no easy task considering the anxiety of parents regarding how their children would be treated in mainstream schools and how the majority might react.

Quickly recognized as an opinion leader on matters of education who had sent all five of her children to school, Shqipe was hired by REF. No longer a bystander, she was asked to mitigate resistance to change in the camp.

With REF's financial support, yellow minibuses began to arrive at the camp every morning to pick up first-graders and transport them to schools scattered throughout the city. Such a policy deliberately seeks to avoid a predominance of Roma in any class as well as subsequent white flight by majority parents alarmed by the presence of too many Roma children in an educational setting.

She said, "At first the idea of sending the children outside the camp was very difficult to accept. But I kept visiting their homes trying to bring parents to their senses – to explain why it is important for children to be in school. In most cases I managed to persuade them. Suddenly the same parents who had objected so strongly were bringing their children to the buses and advising them to be attentive during class."

Term by term, Konik's school was home to fewer and fewer Roma and Egyptian students and Shqipe's message never faltered. She emphasized, "Young people! Regularly attend classes and educate yourselves. Learn – so that you know your rights, or the rights of other members of your group, so that you could help them to exercise those rights. You have to know that education is life, and that a dignified life can only be achieved if we are educated. I am telling everyone what my parents told me, and what I tend to tell my own children, and I hope that many people from Camp I and II have the same message for their children."

Konik's primary school closed for good in the summer of 2016 – a great victory for REF and the community. After four years of intervention, 316 pupils successfully integrated into seven mainstream primary schools and 71 percent successfully completed the 2015-2016 academic year. Contrast this with data from an evaluation by UNICEF from 2012, where half of RE pupils dropped out by fourth grade and 90 percent after fifth grade.⁵

To this day Shqipe supervises the daily transport of children to and from schools around Podgorica. Shqipe explained, "I communicate with the teaching staff, take care of regular school attendance and make sure that parents send their children to school. I care about them and think I influenced the parents, taking time to explain the importance of education through workshops and addressing with the ever-present fear that school is unknown and bad."

One child at a time, Shqipe has made a real difference. Among them is Abibe Krasniqi, who according to Shqipe, is "a fourth grader with straight As. I took photos of her report card and now I show it to all the other parents. For the last four years I have been seeing her off to school. Her parents thanked me, but this is their own success, and I am happy that I can be at least part of it, that I can rejoice with them."

REF's work in Konik Camp is made possible in part by funding from the European Union and through a coalition of partners led by Help e.V.

5. Nagy Anasztazia (2013) "From Exclusion towards Integration of Roma and Egyptians from Konik Refugee Camp in Montenegro." Available online: <http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/news/ref/exclusion-towards-integration-roma-and-egyptians-konik-refugee-camp-montenegro>

Equal opportunity backlash in Bulgaria – Did Roma secondary school students and the €30 scholarship topple a government?

OGYNAN ISAEV, REF COUNTRY FACILITATOR FOR BULGARIA

Bulgarian presidential elections were approaching in early November 2016 and the public mood was grim after 25 years of socio-economic restructuring and instability. The announcement in late October from the Bulgarian Ministry of Education and Science about a new national program of scholarships for 700 Roma secondary school students did not seem controversial. It was envisaged that the project would open doors for mainstreaming more Roma policies and wider inclusion of Roma in Bulgaria's economic fabric.

REF's track record supporting and/or implementing national scholarship programs in the region – with significant gains in recipients' GPAs and graduation rates – had convinced the ministry that REF was a partner who could provide not only financial support to its equal opportunity programs but also deliver a complete package of technical assistance. The timing seemed to be right for an initiative that would help secondary school-age Roma students with a €30 scholarship as well as access to quality academic support.

A backlash began soon after the launch, motivated by national politics and the misperception that the state was unfairly making a financial contribution to a program that discriminated against Bulgarians. Soon every major news outlet was talking about the "€30 scholarship" – significant to any working-age Bulgarian earning the minimum wage of €170 a month.

Bulgarian Minister of Education and Science Meglena Kuneva was forced to defend her commitment to equality in education and her backing of the program. She deflected the media's negative coverage of the "€30 scholarship", and to her enormous credit, Minister Kuneva clearly argued why Bulgarian Roma are disadvantaged – because the mother tongue for many is not Bulgarian. Nonetheless, the educational system continues to insist that there are no performance gaps between students who speak the official language fluently and those who speak it partly if at all, which leads to low performance in other school subjects.

The protesters and their backers claimed the measure was unconstitutional, but the government could refer to Bulgaria's Protection Against Discrimination Act, of which Article 7, Paragraph 1, Section 17 states: "Guaranteeing the participation of persons belonging to ethnic minorities in education and training does not constitute discrimination measures, as far as such measures are necessary." This is in line with the Race Equality Directive 2000/43/EC and Bulgaria's responsibilities as an EU member.

But this did not stick. Voters cast their ballots in two rounds of voting November 6 and 13. Minister Kuneva had to leave her post and REF feared for the fate of its new secondary scholarship program in Bulgaria.

With all its work at stake, and a clear opening for dialogue, REF and its allies assembled a coalition of civic actors, independent actors and international partners to lobby for the program. Together, the coalition voiced its readiness to fight for justice in Bulgaria's schools, universities and ultimately labor market, and appeared regularly in the Bulgarian media to dispute what equal opportunity means in Bulgaria. On the ground and in the schools, the enthusiasm of potential applicants for the scholarship had been dampened by the controversy. Many Roma students who might have qualified to apply were wary of doing so, for fear of being viewed as "privileged." They certainly remembered the unprovoked beating of Mitko, a Roma boy attacked by an extremist who recorded the event and shared it across social media earlier in the year, much to the condemnation of international human rights groups.

The new government buckled to the pressure and agreed to not cancel the program – but with an important caveat: so long as the Ministry of Education's contribution of some 40 percent was earmarked solely for administration costs and honoraria for Bulgarian tutors and mentors providing academic support, with REF covering scholarship fees for Roma students, then the program could continue.

If there is a silver lining to this story, then over 1,400 Roma students did apply and 700 were found eligible, were accepted and now are enrolled in Bulgaria's public secondary schools.

Tertiary education scholarship students – Professional development and giving back to communities

MERZIHA IDRIZI, TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIPS PROGRAM OFFICER

The philosophy standing at the core of REF's Tertiary Education Scholarship Program (REF SP) is the expectation that Roma youth, while benefiting from the support invested into their education and development, accept and share REF's values and mission, and consequently have a lasting, moral responsibility to support the Roma community. For this reason, in addition to the financial support for covering studies and living expenses during the academic year, student beneficiaries under three of the four scholarship schemes (RHSP, RMUSP and LHP), are eligible to apply for grants for implementing **small-scale projects benefiting Roma communities or grants supporting their further academic, personal and professional development.**

Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP) additional support grants

RHSP beneficiaries in 2016 had the opportunity to participate in computer and foreign language courses, attend academic conferences and win a grant for implementing small-scale projects. The number of additional support grants awarded under the RHSP scheme increased significantly by 60 percent, 42 grants in 2016 compared to 14 in 2015. Reasons contributing to the increase include: an earlier launching of the competition, keeping the application cycle open throughout the academic year and an overall increase in the quality of submitted applications.

Twenty students from the RHSP countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia) benefited from the opportunity to attend computer and foreign language courses, mostly English and German, and 15 beneficiaries of the academic conference grants participated in medical congresses organized in their home country or abroad, with some presenting their own research in the medical field.

Seven groups were awarded small-scale projects grants, which are meant not only to acquire a new set of skills to further personal and professional development but also to promote and strengthen the philosophy of community participation among RHSP current beneficiaries and alumni, and provide them the opportunity to gain experience in designing and implementing a project supporting local Roma communities. The maximum amount of the RHSP Small-Scale Project grant is €2,500 per project.

RHSP small-scale projects in 2015-2016

Country	Project scope
Bulgaria	Health education awareness campaign and prevention of heart disease
Bulgaria	Awareness raising campaign: healthy lifestyle; reproductive health education and repercussions of childbirth before age 18
Bulgaria	Informational meetings on improving oral hygiene among the Roma children
Bulgaria	Informational meetings on reducing infant mortality
Macedonia	Awareness raising on chronic diseases and their symptoms and prevention
Serbia	Campaign: vaccinations/immunization benefits and risks
Serbia	Support for young current and future Roma mothers; workshops on infant and child nutrition and disease prevention

RomaVersitas – A competitive pathway to the labor market

VIVIEN GYURIS, REF PROGRAM OFFICER

RomaVersitas is an academic service and support program for Roma university students. It provides a combination of after-school tutoring, mentoring, extracurricular activities, and opportunities for personal and educational growth. The aim is to help Roma students to enter, remain in and graduate from tertiary education. For participating Roma students, RomaVersitas is an important bridge between university and the labor market, as well as an opportunity to develop and express their Roma culture, identity and pride.

The first RomaVersitas Foundation was registered in Hungary in 2001, with the aim to provide soft skills for Roma students studying at tertiary and secondary education levels to successfully graduate. Since then, 1,900 students have benefited directly from the services of the RomaVersitas network and 740 students are currently active in 15 RomaVersitas centers in eight countries (Albania, Bulgaria, Hungary, Kosovo, Macedonia, Moldova, Romania and Serbia) where they enjoy services and support for academic achievement (mentoring, tutoring); transition to the labor market (soft skills development, foreign language/English, digital literacy, job search skills) and community and identity building (thematic workshops, volunteering and networking).

RomaVersitas students and alumni are education, activist and leadership role models for everyone in their communities. One of these students is **Jelena Rakic**, a 24-year-old at the Faculty of Philosophy at the University of Novi Sad. Pursuing an MA in psychology, Jelena comes from North Eastern Serbia where she studied economics in high school. In addition to her membership in RomaVersitas, Jelena is also a four-time recipient of the Roma Memorial University Scholarship.



Jelena Rakic

I chose psychology as I love helping other people. I like being able to combine my formal knowledge of psychology with informal education skills taken from interpersonal, industrial and organizational psychology.

I expect to learn more this year as I finish my degree and I'm looking to apply my knowledge in the professional field. I've already begun looking for a job.

I began by volunteering for a few months to provide social services, and that led to a five-month position working as a research assistant collecting qualitative and quantitative data about Roma students, which I enjoyed very much.

RomaVersitas has helped me very much. For example, using SPSS and working with statistics was not my strong point and it was difficult to understand and a hard class to pass. I needed some help and RomaVersitas found me a tutor who could explain how to use SPSS for analysing data. These skills will be incorporated into my MA thesis on the work ethic of organizations. It was my finest moment when I passed the statistics exams which were so hard that they nearly ruined my self-confidence and willingness to study more.

I know what it's like to be poor. I'm an only child and my mother and I had some very hard times together. She works in a low-paid position as a pedagogical assistant in a primary school. My mum is so proud of me but my other relatives don't understand why I study – they don't understand how this makes changes, even incremental changes, on the personal, social and local level. They say, "It's nice you still go to school," and "Jelena is still learning," but I believe education is the key for escaping poverty, both mental and economic.

I will never say that I am Serbian. I am Roma. I am not dangerous. I am proud. In my hometown we don't need to hide, everyone knows who we are. I like to show my identity. That's part of me and my family. That would mean forsaking them and myself. It would be like cutting off a part of myself.

We are Roma pupils and we must combat stereotypes. People say Roma smell, they have lice, they don't want to learn, they curse. But because of these stereotypes we must prove ourselves at all times and not be put in the back row because we are "black." Other students have experienced these problems and now they are on the faculty, successful and can fight these stereotypes.

For instance, on a job search, we must show that we are competitive on the labor market. That's why I go to English courses and a workshop on transactional analysis, both of which are part of the RomaVersitas package.

I plan to find a job in HR and, once I have some experience, pursue a PhD later. It even might be in IT as the sector is growing here in Novi Sad.

The second RHSP Regional Students' Conference was held in Budapest in summer 2016. Thirty students selected from the four RHSP countries had the opportunity to interact with guest speakers and get familiar with research on Roma and health policies at the EU level. They reviewed healthcare practices and the work of the Roma Health Mediators with Roma communities in the region and learned about the RHSP advocacy and mentorship components' experiences and outcomes. Their motivation and inspiration to continue following the path to become medical professionals was boosted through motivational stories of RHSP successful alumni.

Professional Development Activities Grants for Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP) beneficiaries

In 2016, 23 grants were awarded to RMUSP beneficiaries to enhance their academic and professional development by participating in extra-curricular activities and by building an academic or professional network outside university. While the majority (19 students from eight countries) attended foreign language courses in English or German, four students took advantage of the opportunity to participate in academic and professional conferences. Among these, students presented papers or research on topics as varied as law, human resources management and early childhood development.

Law and Humanities Program (LHP) additional support grants

The LHP scheme provided two-day, in-country trainings in each of the three LHP countries (Moldova, Russia and Ukraine) and 34 students attended foreign language courses in locally-accredited language schools during the 2015-2016 academic year.

Four small-scale projects were supported (at up to €2,500 per project), implemented by groups of past and present LHP beneficiaries who promoted access to healthcare for Roma living in poor regions (Moldova); assisted Roma families in gathering the documentation necessary to register and obtain residential permits for the land they used to inhabit before being demolished by authorities (Russia); raised awareness among Roma youth regarding the importance of education and commemoration of Roma genocide victims during the Second World War including the creation of a book about Roma victims of Nazi concentration camps, containing facts referenced from historical and archival accounts (two projects in Ukraine).

The annual two-day LHP student conference in Budapest, Hungary brought together 50 LHP beneficiaries and alumni from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine in July 2016, where participants discussed issues related to Roma culture, identity and gender relations in the Roma community.

Albania

EUROSTAT 2017 / UNDP 2011

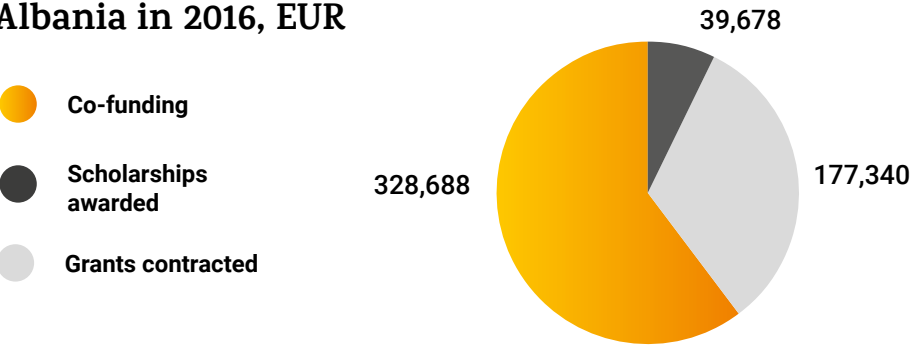
Population (2017)	2,876,591
Roma population official	8,301
Roma population unofficial	25,000
Preschool enrollment rate (3-6 years) Roma/Non-Roma	34%/57%
Primary education enrollment rate Roma/Non-Roma	48%/91%
Secondary education enrollment rate Roma/Non-Roma	13%/60%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Secondary education scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas
- ✓ Adult Education/Second Chance

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REFBoard (EUR)
Union for Development and Integration of Roma Minority in Albania “Amaro-Drom”	Closing the Gaps between Roma and non-Roma Children in Early Childhood Development in Albania	83,296
ARSIS – Social Organization for the Support of Youth	Improved Educational Achievements of Roma and Egyptian (R/E) High School Students	263,372
Disutni Albania	RomaVersitas Albania	109,620
Roma Women Rights Centre – RWRC	Increasing Education Level of Adult Roma in Albania	61,740
Romani Baxt	Improve the Access of Roma Children to Quality Preschool Education	81,325
Save the Children	Early Childhood Care and Development for Roma Children in Albania	145,746
RomaVersitas Albania	RomaVersitas Program in Albania	194,340

REF investments in Albania in 2016, EUR



BACKGROUND

With a population of 2.8 million, of whom around 8,301 identify officially as Roma in the 2011 Census, Albania has undergone deep structural reforms in the last decade. The harsh socio-economic environment has increased social inequality in Albania, but prospects for education reform are inevitable given Albania’s ambition to join the EU.

The education sector in Albania is coping with strict budgetary controls and the majority of the population remains underserved by education services outside Albania’s few prosperous towns and cities. Overwhelmingly rural and conservative, education is undervalued in Albania, and girls are most heavily affected by traditional attitudes to gender, family and employment. Albanian children attend school for nine years – five years of primary and four years of secondary – before their education obligation ceases.

To increase the number of Roma secondary school and university graduates, Albania’s Council of Ministers approved a decision in late December 2016 on providing scholarships for Roma students in vocational/professional schools. In an earlier decision of 2016, the Council amended the criteria that determines eligibility for state-supported university scholarships for excellent students, those studying priority programs, such as agriculture, medical studies and engineering, and students in need, including Roma children. Through countless meetings and interactions with government representatives, REF made a significant contribution to new policy decisions that should bring positive benefits to Roma children.

REF IN ALBANIA

RomaVersitas in Tirana, Elbasan and Korca: Building the self-esteem and identity of Roma university students

The RomaVersitas Program in Albania is currently in its third year of implementation, with active centers in Tirana, Elbasan and Korca. The objective of the RomaVersitas project is to increase the retention rate, academic performances and graduation rate, while building the self-esteem and identity of full-time students enrolled in tertiary education in Albania. Mentoring and tutoring sessions are offered to the students, based on an individually tailor-made manner, to improve their professional and personal skills and increase their knowledge of Roma identity and history. Students also volunteer in community-building activities. The ultimate objective of all RomaVersitas Centers is to facilitate the smooth transition of Roma university students into the labor market after their fields of studies.

In 2014-2016, 107 Roma BA-level university students benefitted from the program (71 females and 36 males) and 39 MA-level students (18 females and 21 males). Students have attended courses on Roma study (identity and language), digital literacy and English language, and participated in thematic workshops on CV writing and interviewing, time and project management, communication skills, debating and presenting, anti-Roma racism and conflict-resolution. The success of the Albania RomaVersitas project owes to the excellent cooperation with the Ministry of Education, Ministry of Social Welfare and Youth, the “F.S.Noli” University of Korca and Tirana University.

40% OF ADULT LEARNERS EMPLOYED AFTER ACQUIRING A DIPLOMA

Addressing the illiteracy issue – 50 adult students to complete Second Chance program

According to 2014 census of Open Society Fund Albania, 74 percent of Roma in Albania are unemployed, as compared to the general population of 15 percent.⁶ The census shows that 76 percent of the Roma population ages 18-65 in Durres and 51 percent in Tirana are unemployed. One of the key reasons of unemployment is the lack of education - around half of unemployed Roma are illiterate, with women scoring slightly higher than men.⁷ Among Roma children, low school attendance is also a hampering factor. Around 40 percent of the Roma children in Albania have never attended school.

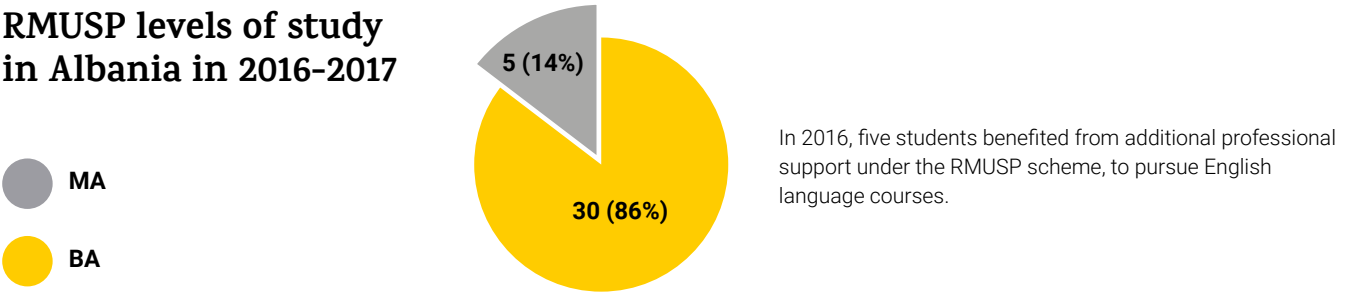
To address adult illiteracy, REF runs a Second Chance project for Roma adults in Tirana, Fushë Kruja and Durrës, implemented by the Roma Women Rights Center. The objective of the project is to increase the education level and employment prospects for 50 Roma between the ages 16 and 35 who need no more than two years to finish lower secondary education. In the 2016-2017 academic year, 50 students (35 male and 15 female) participated in a part-time basic education program and received tutoring and mentoring support for completing nine years of compulsory education. Adult students also take part in sports activities with students from RomaVersitas Albania.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Out of the 84 scholarship applications received from students in Albania for the 2016-2017 academic year, 35 were awarded scholarships.

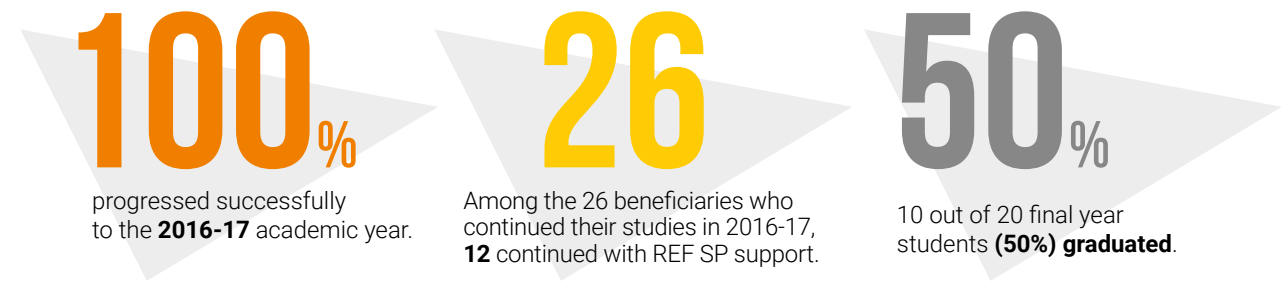
Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	84	71	35	49%

RMUSP levels of study in Albania in 2016-2017



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another in Albania, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting their studies or dropping out.



Among the other 10 beneficiaries who were expected to graduate in 2016, 6 students have postponed their graduation to the following year or put their studies on hold, and 4 students dropped out as they left the country.

6. Census 2011 ,

7. Source: 2014 census of OSFA

Spotlight

ERANDO BEQIRI

Erando Beqiri is 17 and dropped out of school to work abroad. Currently attending the ninth grade after two years of assistance through a REF-supported grant to the Roma Women Rights Center in Tirana, Erando receives a financial and academic support package that includes the reimbursement of travel costs, books and school supplies as well as tutoring in subjects in which he has difficulty.

I now understand that education is necessary – not only to have a diploma but also to find a good job. Next year I plan to study part-time at Konstandin Kristoforidhi High School while also working to support my family.



SUELA HOXHA

Suela Hoxha is 28 and dropped out of school to help support her family. The REF-supported Roma Women Rights Centre has helped her with a package of financial and academic support to complete ninth grade and she plans to register in a part-time professional school next year.

I needed to be educated in order to be a good example to my daughter. Education is the only way to be integrated and to feel equal with others.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

EUROSTAT 2017/ UNDP/WORLD BANK/EC REGIONAL ROMA SURVEY 2011

Population	3,791,622
Roma population official (BiH Ministry for Human Rights and Refugees, 2010)	17,000
Roma Population unofficial estimate (OSCE)	40,000 – 50,000
Preschool enrollment rate (3-6 years) Roma/Non-Roma	6%/13%
Roma girls enrollment in primary education	47%
Roma dropout rate/ primary school (Education for All 2015 National Review, 2014)	46.2%
Secondary education enrollment rate Roma/Non-Roma	15%/72%

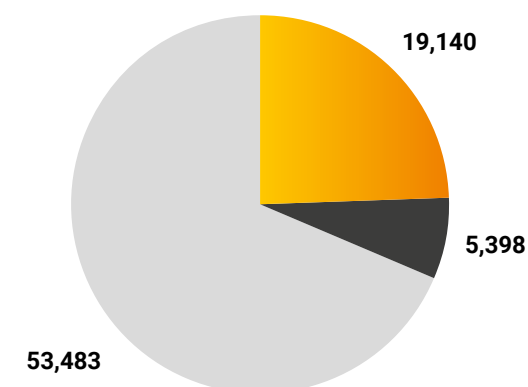
- ✓ Primary education / Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary education scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Center for Support of Roma Romalen Kakanj	Inclusion of Roma Children in Compulsory Primary Education System in the Area of Kakanj Municipality	80,930
Euro Rom	Secondary School Scholarship Program	373,504
Municipality of Mostar	Education for All	60,983
Sa E Roma	Development of the Roma Community in Tuzla Canton 2016-2017	41,957
Roma Support Center Romalen	Maintaining and Increasing the Number of Roma Children in Primary Schools in Kakanj Municipality	43,890
City of Mostar, Department for Social Activities, Local Administration	Education for All – 2	53,454

REF investments in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2016, EUR

- Co-funding
- Scholarships awarded
- Grants contracted



REF IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Working with Roma and non-Roma parents in primary schooling – a key factor for changing stereotypes and creating inclusive atmosphere

Involvement of parents in their children's education has proven to be one of the key factors in improving attendance and decreasing the dropout rate. REF supported such projects in Mostar, Kakanj and Tuzla in 216.

20%

overall improvement in GPA in primary education after project intervention

The REF-supported project "Education for All," co-funded by the City of Mostar, worked with pupils, parents and teachers to provide social, educational and cultural opportunities to all Roma children through their full inclusion in primary school education. An after-school program run in the participating primary schools contributed to a reduced dropout rate, improved retention rate, improved school success and inclusion of children in extracurricular and other social activities. Together with a social worker, the project team worked closely with families through individual and small group meetings, psychosocial support and workshops.

In the Municipality of Kakanj, REF continued to support a project from 2015 because of a positive shift in communication between parents and the school community. Whereas very few Roma parents had cooperated with the school prior to the project, their attitude changed during project implementation. Now they visit the school often in order to get information about their children's education, participate in the parents' meetings and have increased direct communication with teachers and school administrators.

Likewise, parental involvement has changed the teachers' attitude towards Roma children. Roma mediators have become recognizable as sources of education information in their communities and established good communication with families, teachers and principals. A database developed through the project provides all data on Roma pupils and enables monitoring of their grades, attendance rate and even socio-economic status of each family.

The largest number of Roma in Bosnia and Herzegovina live in Tuzla Canton where REF supports a project that scales up a previous REF-supported intervention implemented in 2014. It was co-financed by the Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport–Tuzla Canton while the Pedagogical Institute takes part in trainings for teachers. The main objectives of the project were increased enrollment, attendance and academic success of Roma pupils in primary schools through the improvement of their school performance and involvement of their parents in the education process

"Education for all" in Mostar

127 primary school beneficiaries received learning project-based support in both 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year. **0% dropout** rate
100% were enrolled in mainstream schools
 GPA improved from 2.3 to 2.7 (5.0 scale)

"Inclusion of Roma children in Kakanj municipality"

165 primary school beneficiaries received tutoring and other project-based support in both 2015-16 and 2016-17 school year.

All graduates continued to secondary education
 Out of **117** children who were not enrolled previously in school, the project succeeded in enrolling **64** children - a decrease of **51%** in the number of Roma children out of the school system.

Ensuring full completion of secondary education among the Roma in Tuzla Canton

Tuzla Canton is also the site of an ongoing REF supported Secondary Scholarship Program, implemented by Association of Roma “Euro Rom.” The Ministry of Education, Science, Culture and Sport–Tuzla Canton provided baseline data and REF provided professional supervision and technical assistance to the program, in addition to financial support. In 2016 all final grade students passed the state Matura exam, opening up the possibility to continue with tertiary education.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Six applications were submitted from students in Bosnia and Herzegovina, out of which four were granted scholarship for the 2016-2017 academic year (two BA and two MA students).

The scarcity of applications to the REF SP from Bosnia and Herzegovina is mainly due to the low number of Roma students pursuing and completing secondary education. For this reason, REF Grant Program is addressing this challenge by implementing a secondary education level scholarship program to prepare greater number of Roma youth for tertiary education.

Secondary education beneficiaries in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Tuzla Canton

25% overall improvement in GPA in secondary education after project intervention (based on school certificates)

58 beneficiaries in 2015-16 and 74 secondary school scholarship students received project-based support

GPA improved from 2.2 to 3.5 (5.0 scale)

100% graduation rate

This is the first time ever that all Roma senior secondary school students successfully passed state Matura exam. Two secondary school graduates transitioned to tertiary education: one to English Language and Literature and one to Teacher Education.

Spotlight

Mujo Fafulic, Center for Support of Roma “Romalen” Kakanj

There are 320 Roma families living in five Roma communities in the area of Kakanj Municipality. The dire socio-economic status of the Roma population in Kakanj is a huge challenge. Most Roma families have neither regular income nor health insurance. Their housing is substandard and unemployment is endemic. The majority of parents cannot afford the basics: books, clothes, shoes, school supplies and meals. Worryingly, most parents, being uneducated themselves, do not value education; it takes a lot of persuasion to win their trust when it comes to educating their children.

So far, after-school classes have been the main tool to help Roma children catch up with the national curriculum. Teachers are engaged for this activity while mediators are a link between the Roma community, schools, institutions of authority and our organization. Mediators are also in charge of monitoring school attendance, workshops with parents and other project activities. Children enrolled through our program receive a hot meal and snacks, a measure that has improved attendance.

In the beginning schools were pessimistic about our project to increase the number of Roma children enrolled in the education system; mediators could not cope and participating children did not regularly attend school. To remedy this, we mobilized the mediators to visit the schools on a daily basis, and also slowly persuaded parents and children to attend school more regularly. Thanks to after-school classes, the children's grades improved by a minimum of one grade in specific subjects. Moreover, cooperation between the schools, mediators and our organization reached a new level, not to mention increased awareness and communication on both sides regarding their respective customs and expectations.

In two years of operations, Roma parents have become much more involved in their children's school lives. The schools and their staff have

gotten to know Roma children and their needs, and they have come to recognize the importance of Roma holidays and traditions.

Several things have stuck with me since working on this project. Several parents told me that if there were no school meal provision in this project then their children would be hungry all day. And I remember a girl who cried when she received a backpack with her school supplies because she was so happy.

We sincerely hope that such investments in education will continue to be perceived as the highest priority to address the socio-economic exclusion of Roma from Bosnian society.



Bulgaria

EUROSTAT 2016/ NATIONAL STATISTICS OFFICE

Population	7,364,570
Roma population official	325,343
Roma population unofficial	800,000 – 1,000,000
All citizens with secondary education diploma	43.4%
Roma with secondary education diploma	6.5%
All citizens with tertiary education diploma	19.6%
Roma with tertiary education diploma	0.5%

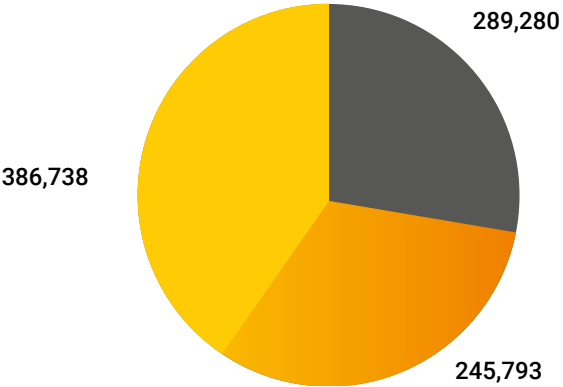
- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education / Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary school scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Kyustendil Municipality	For Better Education – 3	90,729
New Future – Novo Badeshte Association Montana	My Dream	19,890
Foundation of Regional and Cultural Development Nangle –2000	Early Childhood Development of Roma Children in Kindergartens in Berkovitsa	56,885
Equal Opportunities Initiative Association	Equal Opportunities for Roma Children in Kindergartens and Preschools in Sofia in Transition to Mainstream	65,532
Center for Local and Regional Policies	The Sooner Educated the Better Successful	92,534
CEICSEM – Centre for Educational Integration of Children and Students from Ethnic Minorities	Support for Roma Students to Complete Successfully their Secondary Education	343,320
RomaVersitas Association	RomaVersitas – A Step Further to Shape the Roma Elite in Bulgaria	236,593

REF investments in Bulgaria in 2016, EUR

- Scholarships awarded
- Co-funding
- Grants contracted



BACKGROUND

Participation in early childhood education and care in Bulgaria remains at 89.3 percent in 2014, below the EU average (94.3 percent). Two years of kindergarten education from the age of four has been obligatory since the 2012-2013 school year, though it is not free of charge. Free transportation is provided within the municipality or to an adjacent municipality for children who come from areas without a kindergarten.

Kindergarten fees, lack of kindergarten capacity and lack of parental awareness about the importance of early childhood development remain as obstacles for the preschool education of Roma children, with the result that many enter primary education without proper preparation.

REF IN BULGARIA

Securing active e-application for kindergarten for 569 Roma families.

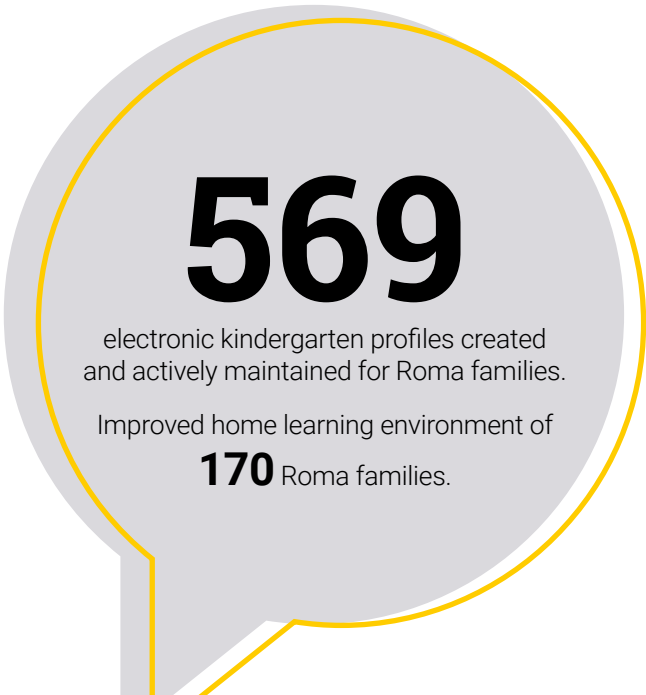


REF supports a network of municipalities and committed Roma civil organizations to improve early childhood education of Roma children through enrollment to kindergarten education and parental activities. In 2016 Toy Libraries were set up at four localities: in Nikola Kozlevo, Tsarkvitsa, Sofia and Berkovitz and complemented the Your Story sessions benefitting 254 mothers and the enrollment assistance and focus on school readiness of Roma children. These activities support the improvement of the home learning environment, and access to quality story books and educational toys contribute to the early stimulation of young children, particularly in the remote areas of REF-supported projects.

Currently four municipalities with 37 kindergartens support the objectives of REF and ensure access to an integrated kindergarten education of Roma children. For example, the municipality of Nikola Kozlevo ensures the free enrollment of five-year-olds into kindergarten, while fees for four-year-old children are covered by the REF-supported project "The sooner educated, the better successful."

Fakulteta is the biggest Roma district of Bulgaria with more than 15,000 Roma. "Equal Opportunities Initiative" in the Fakulteta district of Sofia assists Roma parents in overcoming the challenging practical hurdles for accessing and using the compulsory electronic system for applying to kindergartens. The project has continued to increase

the share of Roma children in the kindergarten e-system of Sofia and provided technical aid during the enrollment process, while also assisting children and families in a having a smooth transition process from preschool education to mainstream elementary schools. Currently there are about 569 active profiles of Roma children in the e-system who are waiting to be placed in mainstream kindergartens.



REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Out of the 497 scholarship applications received from students in Bulgaria for the 2016-2017 academic year, 227 students were awarded scholarships.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	440	388	201	52%
RHSP	54	26	25	96%
RISP	3	2	1	50%
Total:	497	416	227	55%

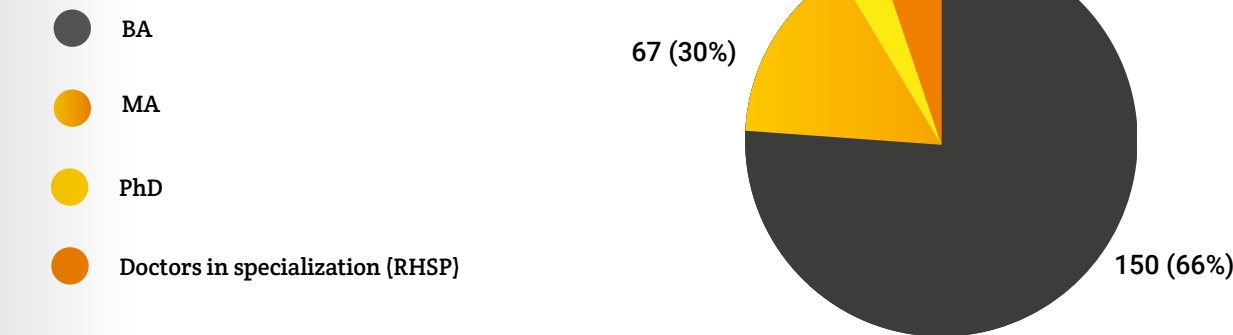
The applications from Bulgaria accounted for 22 percent of all submitted applications and 18 percent of all selected within REF SP, which reflects the large size of the Roma population and the participation of the country in three out of the four available REF scholarship schemes. Bulgaria is the second largest country in the SP portfolio, and the particularly high scholarship demand and competition, as well as funding limitations, resulted in only 52 percent of all eligible applicants to be selected for the SP's largest scholarship scheme, RMUSP.

Seven of the RHSP beneficiaries in Bulgaria have reached the final stages in their medical studies, and they work as resident doctors to obtain medical specializations. Among the BA level students, the RISP student pursues International Business and Management studies at Hanze University of Applied Sciences in the Netherlands.

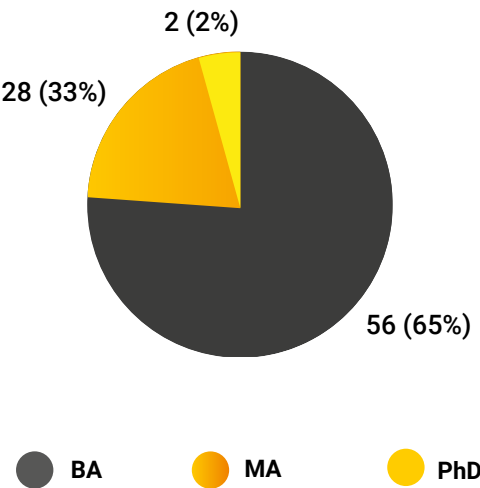
In addition to the financial support for covering tuition fees and living expenses during the academic year, 16 RMUSP and RHSP beneficiaries from Bulgaria received Professional Development Activities Grants to support foreign language and computer courses, participation in conferences and seminars, internships, and research projects. Among these, three conference grants were awarded (a student presented a paper at a national conference on law, a second student presented at a national conference on Human Resources Management, and third attended an educational conference on esthetic medicine).

Four RHSP beneficiaries from Bulgaria received small-scale project grants aimed at advancing development of Roma communities at the local level, including the prevention of chronic heart diseases, promotion of healthy lifestyles, risks of reproductive health before age 18, oral hygiene among Roma children, and reducing child mortality.

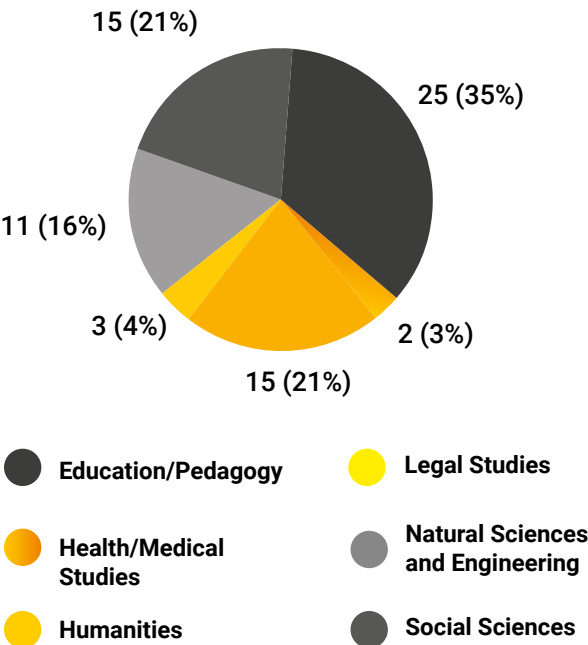
RMUSP levels of study in Bulgaria in 2016-2017



RMUSP graduates’ levels of study in Bulgaria in 2015-2016



RMUSP graduates’ fields of study in Bulgaria in 2015-2016



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES’ ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 the REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries’ progress from one academic year to another in Bulgaria, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation, and cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

97% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

Out of the **186** students who continued their studies in 2016-17, **112** continued with REF Scholarship Program support.

86 out of **87** final year students graduated (99%). One student prolonged thesis writing by one year.



Spotlight

Natalia Tsekova
BA Drama, Academy for Film and Theater Arts, MA Public Speaking,
RMUSP Alumna

Growing up in a tight-knit family in rural Lesnovo, Natalia Tsekova became the first Roma female to graduate from the drama academy in Sofia. She recently wrote and performed a solo play, Roma Wheels, exploring Roma culture, identity and roots.

I learned Romanes from my grandmothers during what I consider to be a very happy childhood. By fourth grade I was convinced I would be an actress and I entertained the family with rehearsals and roles. Everyone believed in me.

I applied to the academy in Sofia and was accepted, but I was in for a shock. I was unaware of the high tuition and living costs. Somehow my family managed to help me get through my freshman year. But it was REF support of my tuition and living costs that made the difference.

I loved every moment of the academy – the leading roles, the wonderful camaraderie, the fantastic training. I was nominated as the best in class and even toured with the academy troupe to Beijing and Vienna.

After graduating, I was nagged by a sense that something was missing in the communication between Bulgarians and Roma. I believed I could address the biased portrayal of Roma with a performance and I enlisted my peers and colleagues to help me. I embarked on a journey to understand and share my experiences with integration and ethnicity. As an artist I’m disappointed that there is no Roma academy or theater in Bulgaria that could serve as a channel for dialogue and tolerance, and I would like to change that and create a spiritual center for Roma culture in all its forms.

My next project is to adapt and perform the Sanskrit epic, Ramayana.

Croatia

EUROSTAT 2017

Population	4,290,612
Roma population official	16,975
Roma population unofficial	40,000
Early school leavers	2.8%
Tertiary educational attainment	30.9%
Early childhood education	72.4%
7,192 Roma children enrolled in preschool, primary and secondary schools in Croatia in school year 2015-2016 (Source: Croatian Ministry of Science, Education and Sport)	

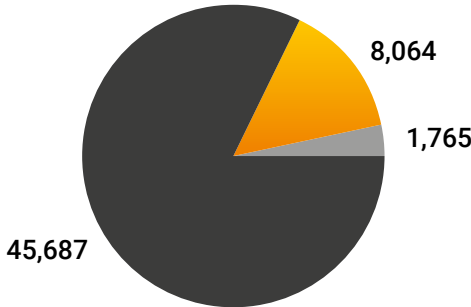
- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Oaza – Association for Homeless and Socially Vulnerable People	Educating and Integrating	12,507
Sfera	EDU – K: Education, Diversity, United – Kuršanec (Phase II)	13,789
Municipality of Kutina	Knowledge for Future	36,568
Oaza – Association for Homeless and Socially Vulnerable People	Educating & Integrating – 3	40,000

REF investments in Croatia in 2016, EUR

- Co-funding
- Scholarships awarded
- Grants contracted



BACKGROUND

With an average age of just 22 and more than 55 percent of Roma under age 19, Roma form the youngest cohort of any national minority in Croatia. More than half of Croatia’s Roma live in segregated settlements and this has a direct effect on their access to education services. Despite encouraging signs from the Croatian government whereby one year of kindergarten was to be free, free transportation to kindergarten remains a contentious and expensive issue. While local governments are tasked with this responsibility, they have been slow to respond and REF has sought to address this barrier. As the newest EU member, Croatia must honor its commitments, among them ensuring access to quality, inclusive education for its minority groups.

REF IN CROATIA

Kutina - The only town in Croatia to fund the bussing of children to integrated preschools

REF partnered with the town of Kutina and supported the project “Knowledge for Future” in 2016 with the goal to increase the number of Roma children in preschool education, improve grades for Roma pupils in primary school with provision of tutoring classes, raise the number of Roma in secondary education and encourage Roma youth to participate in extracurricular activities. Kutina has been proactive in integrating the Roma community and is the only town in Croatia to undertake measures to prevent segregation in preschool and primary school by financing the transportation of children.

REF has been covering the transportation costs of Roma children from Roma settlement Sitnica to the kindergarten “Maslacak” in Mursko Središće for more than seven years. With the cooperation of the Mayor’s office, Medjimurje County’s Office for Human Rights and Rights of National Minorities, along with Roma representatives from the settlement, REF’s goal was accomplished in 2016, when the transportation costs were officially introduced and covered by Medjimurje County in the 2017 budget.

“Oaza” primary education project secured transition of all students to secondary education

5% improvement of the GPA average of Roma pupils after project intervention
(based on school certificates)

100% transitioned to secondary education

35 boys/34 girls transferred to integrated educational facilities

REF continued to support the “Educating and Integrating” project in 2016, which began in the previous academic year at Skurinjė Primary School in Rijeka. The project provided after-school tutoring and workshops in culture, arts and sports for Roma children in grades one to eight, and also organized activities with Roma parents in their community. In addition, REF provided capacity building for the Association for Homeless and Socially Vulnerable People “Oaza” to develop an advocacy platform with the aim to harmonize preschool guidelines with the National Strategy for Roma Inclusion.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

A scholarship scheme for supporting Roma tertiary education students is implemented by the Croatian government, which currently satisfies the demand for scholarship support from the Roma community. However, in 2016 two applications were submitted from Croatia to REF SP, out of which one was rejected due to unsuccessful enrollment at the university, and one student was awarded a scholarship to the University of Zagreb in the field of Pedagogy in Romani Studies

Spotlight

Maja Odrčić Mikulić,
President of NGO Sfera

A few years ago I started as a volunteer teacher. After my first day I said: I have to do something because those children will never know what is going on outside of the settlement. I quit my job, joined the NGO and, now with REF support, I feel change in the community.

I am in the settlement every day, parents trust me, pupils also, and I think that after a long time, Roma inhabitants from Kuršanec are also starting to believe that changes are possible. Working on this project helped me to meet incredible people, people who share my vision of the world without prejudice, where everyone can achieve their dreams. Most of these people are now my associates and we are making a difference together. And in the end, working on the project gave me the opportunity to learn, to create, to lead (all of the things I never thought I was capable of!).

More importantly, parents are more engaged, some have joined our association and they participate in our activities as volunteers. A few mothers decided to finish their school so they can ensure a better life for their families. So things are changing!



Czech Republic

EUROSTAT 2017 / OECD 2015

Population	10,552,367
Official Roma Population	11,718
Unofficial Roma Population	150,000-250,000
Early school leavers from education and training	6.2%
Tertiary educational attainment	30.1%
Early childhood education and care	86.4%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education / Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary education scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ REF-implemented project - VELUX

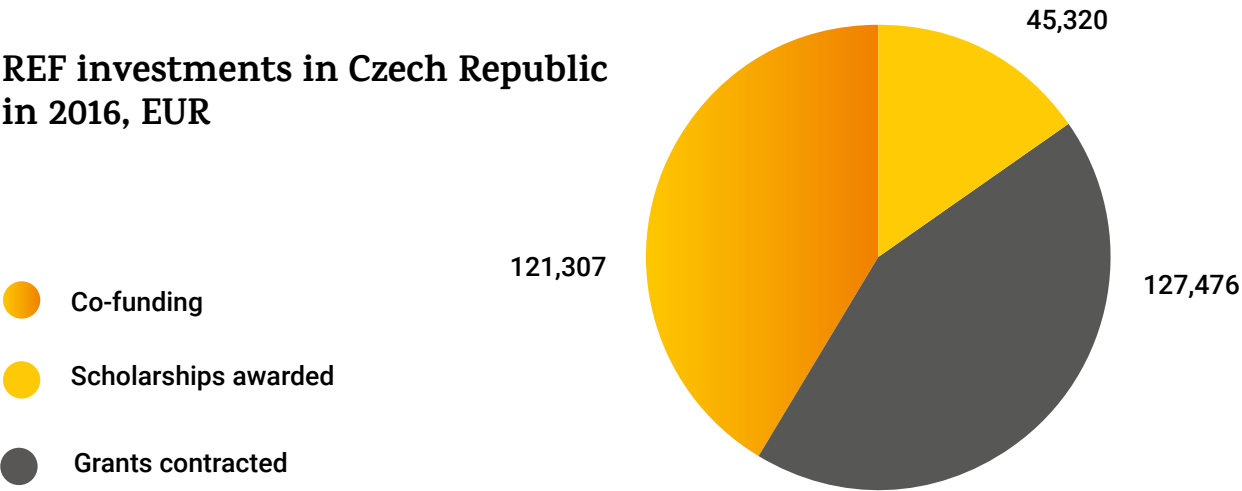
ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
People in Need – Prague	Av, džas andre školka! – Let's Go to Preschool!	90,266
Bílý nosorožec/Beleza Ostrava	Together to Preschool	59,212
Inclusio o.p.s.	Imagion Prague	17,898
Association for Creativity in Education	Creative Partnerships – Support of Education of Roma Pupils	3,863
Vzájemné soužití o.p.s. (Life Together)	Let's Change It Together	11,264
Romano Jasnica	Support of Roma Children in Ustí Region	120,145
Slovo 21	Dža dureder	86,660

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECT

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount
VELUX FOUNDATIONS	REF Hungary	Pedagogy Scholarship Program in Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	1,139,000

REF investments in Czech Republic in 2016, EUR



Left: Denisa Horváthová, RMUSP alumna, graduate from BA and MA in Business Economics and Management at the Jan Evangelista Purkyně University, Faculty of Social and Economic Studies in Usti nad Labem. She currently works at the NGO Slovo 21 and will soon volunteer to work a year abroad with European Voluntary Service in Portugal. Right: Filip Sivák, RMUSP alumni, BA from Czech Technical University. He is currently paying his way through school as a consultant at Profinit, a Prague-based IT company.

Photo © 2017 Romea | Jan Mihaliček

BACKGROUND

The Czech Republic exhibits one of the lowest participation rates in child care for children under age three among EU countries (Roma Early Childhood Inclusion, European Commission Country Report Czech Republic 2015). Czech policies have addressed neither the shortfall in available places in Czech kindergartens nor recognized the critical role of education and care during the first years of disadvantaged children's growth and development. No systematic monitoring of the participation rates of children from disadvantaged backgrounds in kindergartens is conducted by the Czech education authority. Only 32 percent of Roma children aged three to six are enrolled in preschools – less than half the rate of non-Roma children (69 percent) of the same age.

REF IN CZECH REPUBLIC

REF early childhood development projects reduced the dropout rate among children in early childhood facilities

11% dropout rate among kindergarten beneficiaries

322 kindergarten-age children supported with project-based activities

811 parents involved in early childhood development clubs, Your Story sessions and other community activities

To address the ongoing structural obstacles to the universal provision of quality early childhood education and care, REF has been funding projects in the Ostrava region since 2012 to support Roma children's enrollment into integrated mainstream public preschool facilities and to ensure their transition to mainstream elementary desegregated school environment.

Under the project "Together to Preschool", Roma children are prepared for attendance of mainstream kindergartens and subsequently mainstream primary schools. What makes this project unique is the partnership with and the financial contribution of the Ostrava municipality, as well as the cooperation with its sub-cities, preschools and primary schools. As there is a significant shortfall in kindergarten capacity in the Czech Republic, the project cooperates with 11 kindergartens to reserve spots for the beneficiaries of the project, thus ensuring that these children have a chance at quality early childhood education.

REF's early childhood education and care package is also applied in Ústí nad Labem, an impoverished region midway between Prague and Dresden and home to the largest Roma population in the Czech Republic. The project "Support of Roma Children" provides kindergarten meals to children and works with Roma families and kindergartens, resulting in stronger cooperation by all parties and strengthening families' commitment to mainstream education.

479 students receiving tutoring and mentoring support

4 universities in partnership with the project for volunteering

5% average improvement of the GPA after the project intervention

20 mainstream primary schools participating

99 male/98 female students

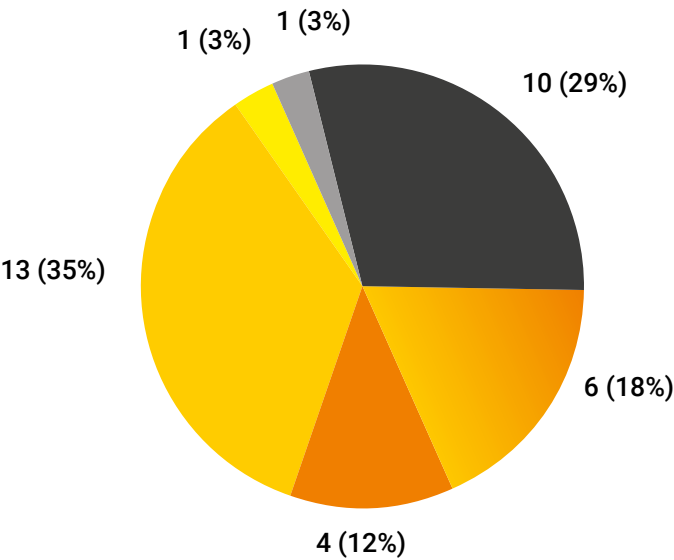
REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

The REF SP received 55 scholarship applications in the Czech Republic for the 2016-2017 academic year, all for the RMUSP scholarship scheme, and female students made up almost two-thirds of the 35 students who were awarded scholarships. The majority of students (30) pursue Bachelor level studies, while four are in Masters and one in Doctoral programs.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of Beneficia-ries from Eligible
RMUSP	55	43	35	81%

RMUSP fields of study in Czech Republic in 2016-2017

- Education and Pedagogy
- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Humanities
- Health
- Legal Studies



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 the REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries` progress from one academic year to another in the Czech Republic, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation, and cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

56% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

Out of the **10** students who continued their studies in 2016-17, **9** continued with REF Scholarship Program support.

8 out of **15** students graduated successfully, with degrees in the humanities, health/medicine and education/pedagogy.
7 students postponed their graduation due to thesis writing.



Spotlight

Iveta Babická, RMUSP alumna, MA Special Education

Iveta Babická is the oldest of four children. She originates from a Romanes-speaking household in eastern Slovakia and acknowledges the sacrifices her parents made to ensure that she and her siblings had a good education.

Already at elementary school I faced a lot of difficulties due to my identity. Even with a RMUSP scholarship, studying in university was always a huge challenge, as I had to combine it with work, family life and paying all the bills.

I first began to work as a teacher's assistant a few hours a week. The headmaster of the school liked my teaching and encouraged me to study more and formalize my knowledge. I pursued a BA and then an MA in special education, which you might know is a particularly thorny

area in the Czech Republic as Roma children are disproportionately represented in Czech special schools. REF's scholarship support made it possible for me to finish my studies and without it I would not have finished.

Since September 2016, I have worked as a deputy director of an elementary school. I have organized charity events for orphans who are in need. We also organize a Roma day that is open to the public at my school, where we invite a speaker and cook and sample Roma food. I work with many Roma parents and their children, helping them to get a good education and explaining why it's a number one priority.

I've also been selected by my school director to study further, specializing in school management in the near future.

Hungary

EUROSTAT 2017

Population	9,800,942
Roma population official	315,583
Roma population unofficial	500,0000 -1,000,000
Early school leavers (2015)	11.6%
Tertiary educational attainment (2015)	34.3%
Early childhood development and care (2014)	94.7%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education/ Desegregation
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas
- ✓ REF implemented projects – VELUX, CEI
- ✓ Roma Graduate Preparation Program at Central European University

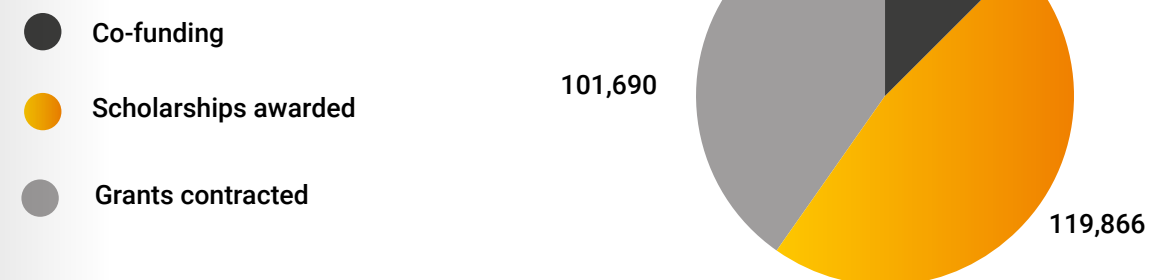
ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
RomaVersitas Foundation	RomaVersitas Hungary	124,334
ORIGO – Community Developer Association	ORIGO – Desegregation Project for the Roma Children	32,340
Öko Tisza Social Service	Integrational and Catch-up Project	20,000
Chance for Children Foundation	Invisible Study Hall	31,240
Khetanipe	Further Steps for István Akna	120,987
CSEPP Esélyegyenlőségi Alapítvány	Storytelling Project	3,200
Ceramics Volunteer Group	Ceramic Program in Gyöngyöspata	1,736
Give Me Your Hand	A Good Start for Roma Children	56,442
Vazdune Cherhaja Rising Stars Romani Women's Association	Complex Desegregation Program in the Mátészalka Microregion	52,698
Central European University	Roma Graduate Preparatory Program – RGPP	330,000

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount
VELUX FOUNDATIONS	REF Hungary	Pedagogy Scholarship Program in Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	1,139,000
Central European Initiative	REF Hungary	Professional intergovernmental know-how exchange on the implementation of large scale Scholarship and Mentoring Program for Roma Students	38,550
EU Horizon 2020	REF Hungary	Higher Education Internationalisation and Mobility	89,600

REF investments in Hungary in 2016, EUR



BACKGROUND

In 2011 a new Public Education Act⁸ dramatically reshaped Hungary's education system, on the one hand lowering the compulsory kindergarten age to three, much to the applause of early childhood development experts, but on the other hand lowering compulsory school-age, meaning students could leave school no matter their level of achievement at age sixteen. At the same time, no provisions were made for an increase in student numbers at kindergartens in Hungary.

In 2015, in response to an unfavorable European Court of Human Rights verdict,⁹ the government of Hungary essentially legalized segregation with another amendment to the Public Education Act.¹⁰ 2016 witnessed an increase in church-run schools opening across the country and, due to the selectivity of the school system, the segregation index has risen further.¹¹

In the last decade there has been a rapidly growing awareness among civil society actors and policy-makers who acknowledge segregated schooling as a major barrier for access to equal educational opportunities for Roma communities throughout Europe. In 2016 the DG Justice opened an infringement procedure, suing the Hungarian government for its discriminatory policies in education that have resulted in segregation.

Children react in Gyöngyöspata, Hungary, during a week-long summer day camp supported by REF in 2016, where they learned new creative skills, including pottery. Gyöngyöspata was the site of several high-profile killings of Roma in 2011 and the fear of further violence is tangible. Spatial and school segregation remain to be overcome.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas



8. Public Education Act No 190 [2011. évi CXCV. Törvény a nemzeti köznevelésről], (2011). 8. § (2)

9. Kiss and Horvath v. Hungary

10. Available online: <http://romasajtokozpont.hu/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/kormanyrendelet.pdf>

11. Education and Training Monitor 2015 Hungary http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/docs/2015/monitor2015-hungary_en.pdf page 3

REF IN HUNGARY

Expanding Access to Primary Education through Desegregation projects

Early Childhood Education
255 children involved in Toy Libraries
725 children in ECEC
15 participating municipalities
260 parents involved in Your Story sessions

Primary education beneficiaries in Hungary
275 primary school students
80% transitioned to next grade
20% grade repetition
Over **50** integrated schools involved

The experience of REF reveals that a specific set of conditions is essential for advancing the desegregation process: motivational work with Roma parents; collaboration between Roma NGOs, educators, and school administrators; enhancing access of Roma children to mainstream integrated schools and provision of academic support services; and development of a policy framework at the central level of government, including financial commitment to the process.

REF continued to support desegregation projects that involve actions to enroll Roma children in integrated schools, retain them at these schools and ensure achievement comparable to their non-Roma peers in 2016.

Since 2014 REF has helped Roma parents enroll their children in mainstream primary schools in Olaszliszka, which was at the frontline of violent, right-wing activity against Roma in Hungary: in 2006 and remains synonymous with the conflict between Roma and non-Roma in Hungary. The local public school in Olaszliszka, which is nearly 18 percent Roma, is currently segregated; only five out of 126 children in the school are non-Roma, and white flight had led non-Roma parents to enroll their children in nearby schools in Sáropatak. Tutoring and mentoring sessions supported by REF have helped Roma pupils to attend a desegregated primary school.

Similar activities, as well as after-school programs, reached children and their families in Abony, 80 kilometers from Budapest, in Pécs in southern Hungary, and in Nagyecsed, home to some of the poorest Roma settlements in Hungary, where REF-supported projects worked to ensure the integration of preschool children, school starters and the transition of children between different school levels (from kindergarten to primary school, from lower grades to higher grades and between primary and secondary).

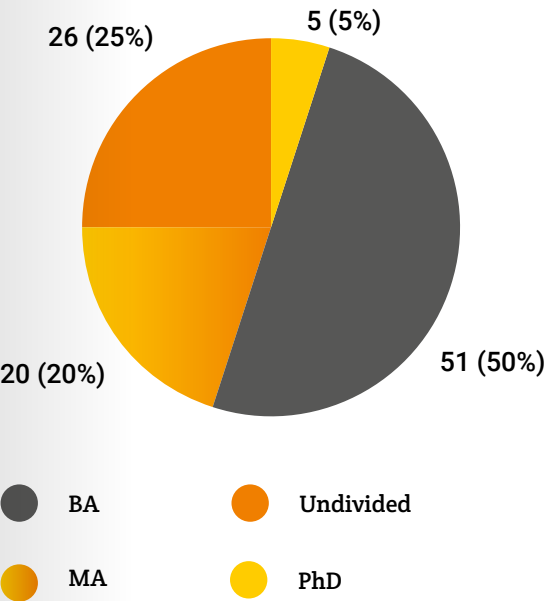
In the heart of Budapest, in the eighth and ninth districts where the percentage of Roma and socially marginalized children is one of the highest in the city and the majority of primary schools are segregated due to white flight, the Chance for Children Foundation implemented a project which had the immediate goal to increase the school success of Roma children ages 5-16. Tutoring provided by 36 volunteers from four universities aimed to ensure that the children enroll into integrated schools and, by doing so, improve their chances for continuing their studies and reinforcing their social inclusion. Out of 24 children, the project managed to integrate 15 in non-segregated primary schools.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

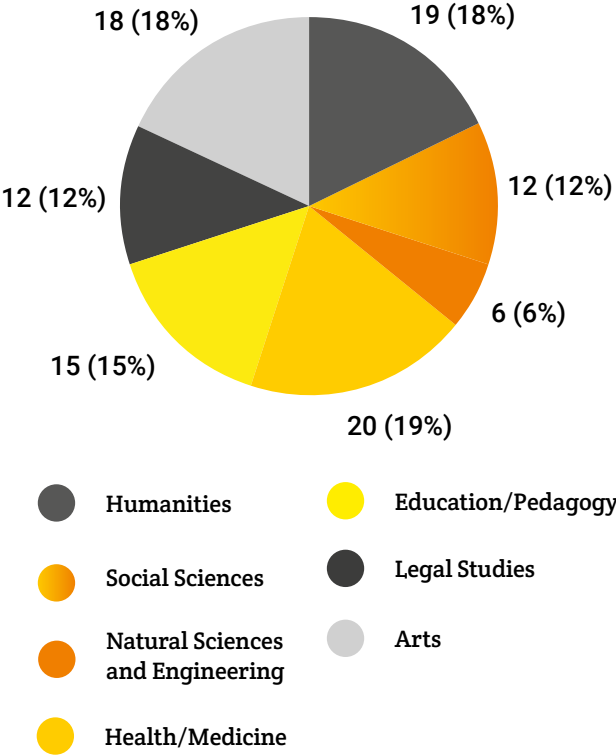
Out of the **166** scholarship applications received from students in Hungary for the 2016-2017 academic year, **104** were awarded scholarships, including two students who received support to study in universities in Copenhagen and Milan.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	160	124	102	82%
RISP	6	3	2	67%
Total	166	127	104	82%

RMUSP levels of study in Hungary, 2016-2017

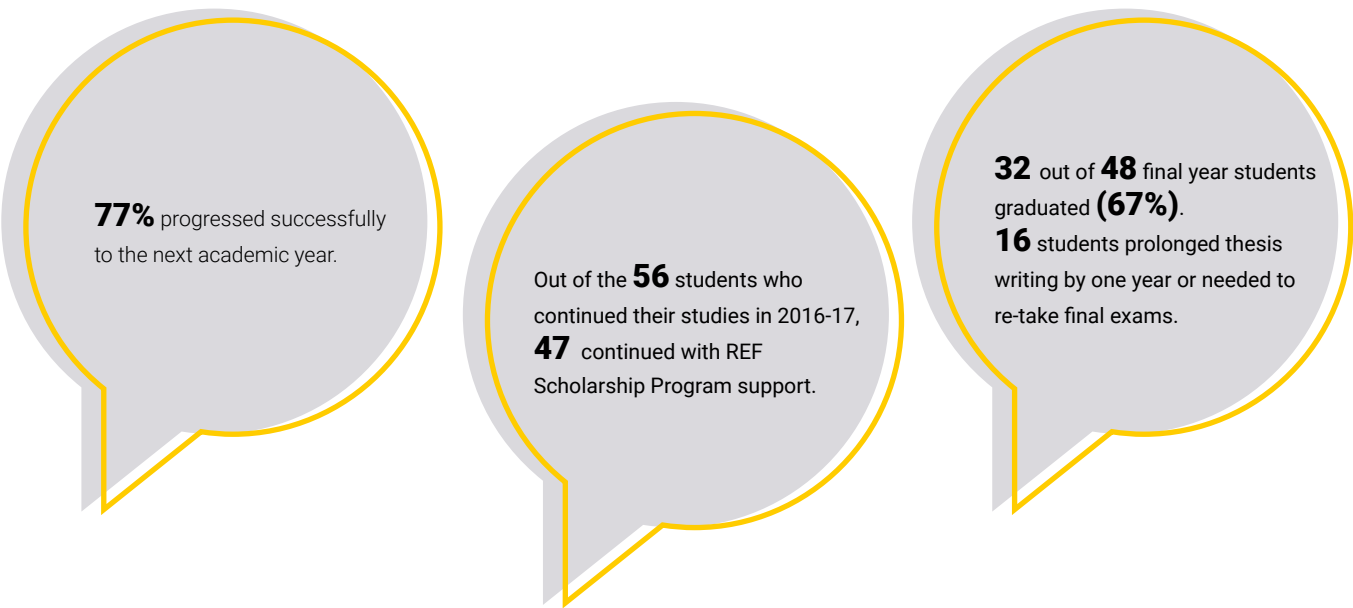


RMUSP fields of study in Hungary in 2016-2017

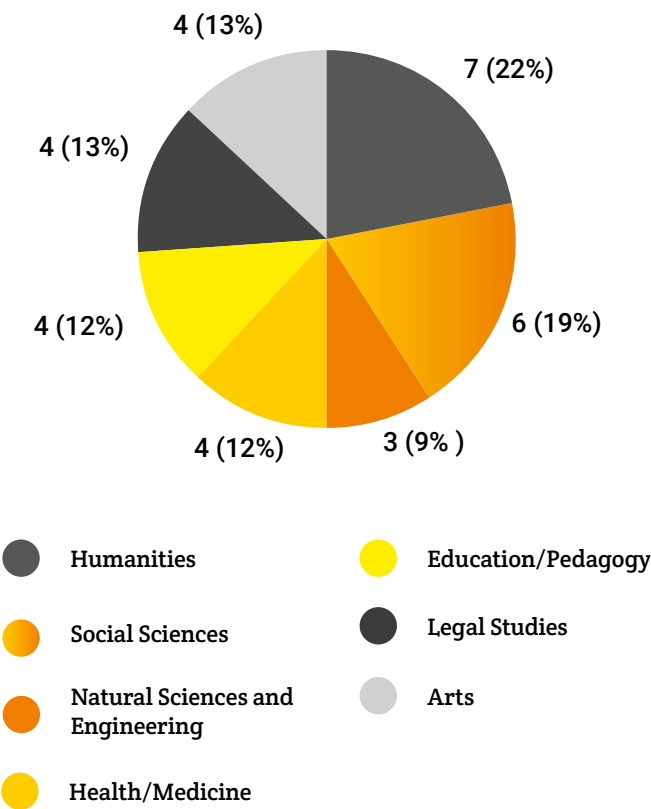


MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES’ ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

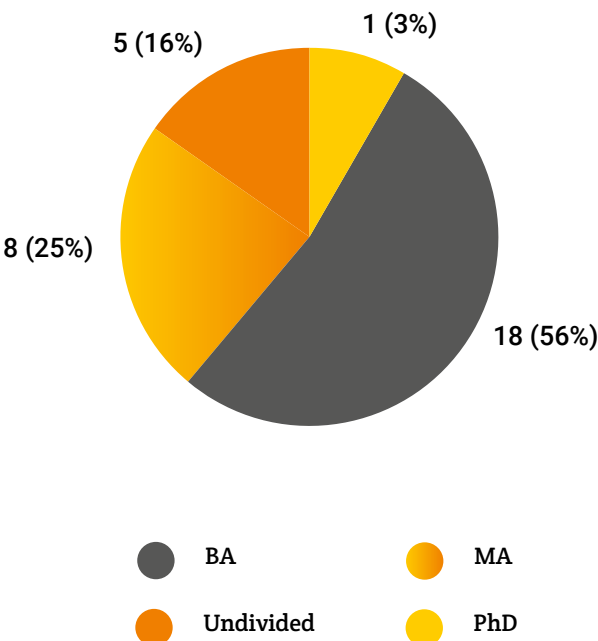
The REF SP tracked beneficiaries’ progress in order to monitor students’ academic advancement, successful graduation, and cases students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.



RMUSP graduates’ fields of study in Hungary in 2015-2016



RMUSP graduates’ levels of study in Hungary in 2015-2016



Spotlight

Monika Chen, RISP beneficiary, BA Business Management, MA Luxury Brand Management

Monika Chen grew up in an extended Roma family in Budapest. She studied Business Management at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, and now she is pursuing an MA in Luxury Brand Management at the Domus Academy in Milan.

My family was a shield against the world and they encouraged me to study. My mother deeply believed in perseverance and instilled the family with her values of kindness and courage. She taught me to study, be brave and follow my dreams without stepping over other people. However, it was my youngest aunt who was the first of us to go to university.

I knew that I was different thanks to my Chinese characteristics, but it never made me feel that I was worth less than others. I wanted to be noticed for my accomplishments, not my identity. Even if it was difficult to relate to my Asian origins because of my father's absence, my family deeply respected Roma traditions and that was embedded in me as family, community and togetherness. I found my place and became proud of who I am. Knowledge is the only thing that no one can take from us.

I aspire to be a successful businesswoman. I want to be powerful enough to show an example to other Roma young people. I was able to study Business Management in Scotland with RISP support and have managed to continue with luxury brand management at the Domus Academy in Milan. The support of the Roma Education Fund made it possible that I graduate from St Andrews, the UK's third-ranked university, as well as be on the Dean's list. I was also able to teach a module on Enterprise and Creativity during my time there.

As a child I spent a lot of time at the Hungarian Roma Parliament on Tavaszmező Street in the eighth district. The founder was always close to our family and I assisted the Roma National Council as an assistant to the chairman during high school. This summer I plan to teach English at "Egyemi," a school helping underprivileged Roma children in the eighth district. I like being able to help those who helped me on my journey.



Kosovo

CENSUS 2011 / UNDP/WORLD BANK/EC REGIONAL ROMA SURVEY 2011

Population	1,865,041
Roma population official	37,000
Preschool enrollment rate (3-6 years) Roma/ Non-Roma	54%/76%
Primary education enrollment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	85%/98%
Secondary education enrollment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	53%/91%

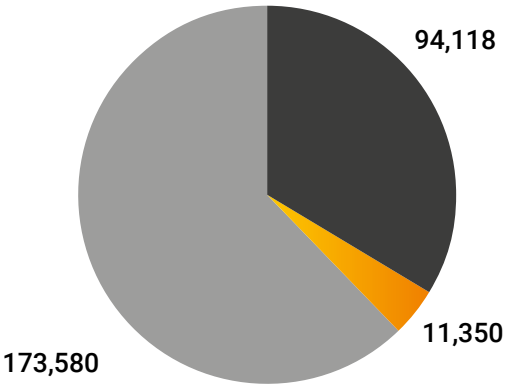
- ✓ **Early childhood education**
- ✓ **Primary education/Desegregation**
- ✓ **Tertiary education scholarship program**
- ✓ **RomaVersitas**

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Kosova Education Center – KEC	TOGETHER – Support to Integration of Roma,Ashkali and Egyptian Children in Preschool Education	100,019
Ministry of Education, Science and Technology in Kosovo	National RAE Secondary Scholarship Program in Kosovo	282,380
Advancing Together	RomaVersitas Kosovo	149,400
Kosova Education Center – KEC	Together for Equity in Early Childhood	145,078

REF investments in Kosovo in 2016, EUR

- Co-funding
- Scholarships awarded
- Grants contracted



BACKGROUND

The Constitution stipulates the right of communities to public education in the official language of their choice at all education levels. Furthermore, two competing and separate education systems still prevail in Kosovo. Kosovo Albanian students and the majority of other non-Serbian communities follow the official Kosovo curriculum, while Kosovo Serbian students, Gorani students and some Roma students are educated according to schools run by Serbia (OSCE Mission in Kosovo 2009). According to UNICEF’s Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey, 16.1 percent of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian (RAE) children ages three to six years attend early childhood education programs and 53.9 percent of children in the first grade of primary school attend preschool education. Furthermore the percentage of children of primary school age out of school is 21.6 percent for Roma, 14.3 percent for Ashkali and 10.3 percent for Egyptian, while for Albanian children it is 9.6 percent.”¹²

REF IN KOSOVO

“Together for Equity in Early Childhood” – Increasing parental competences of 115 Roma families

The REF-supported Kosova Education Centre (KEC) with the project “Together – Support to Integrate RAE Communities” aims to improve the participation of Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian children and their caregivers in pre-primary education. As a result of components developed by REF for early childhood education and care, KEC reported stronger and more frequent communication with families and an improvement in parenting skills. For example, Your Story’s literacy empowerment activities led to some mothers establishing small home libraries for their children.

To more effectively track the learning outcomes of beneficiaries and to be able to assess the impact of the project on children and parents, REF and KEC plan to apply the International Development and Early Learning Assessment (IDELA) tool developed by Save the Children. The assessment will enable us to track the development of children aged 3.5-6.5 years in four domains: physical, early literacy and numeracy, social-emotional and the change in parental practices due to project intervention. The results will position REF and KEC to further advocate for the inclusion of Roma children in preschool, as reaching the most vulnerable children in their earliest years is one of the greatest challenges of early childhood systems.

Early childhood education and preschool services are co-funded by fees collected from parents, except for the pre-primary level (one year before first grade) which is free of charge. Preschool is not mandatory, and actual implementation on the ground is impeded by the lack of resources and infrastructure. REF’s main priority in Kosovo is to improve early childhood education and school readiness, and to increase the graduation rate at secondary and university level through the Grants and Tertiary Education Scholarship Programs.

6 kindergartens and **5** municipalities included in the project

184 kids enrolled into integrated kindergartens and Toy library activities

115 mothers taking part in reading sessions and improving their capacities related to child development

Together – Support to Integrate RAE Communities

First-graders supported by the project had a higher GPA (**3.6** out of **5.0**) compared to first-graders not supported by the project (**3.1** out of **5.0**)

12. Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 2013-2014 for Roma, Ashkali and Egyptian Communities in Kosovo, page 115.
13. Kosovo Agency of Statistics.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

Out of the 102 applications received from students in Kosovo for the 2016-2017 academic year, 13 students were awarded scholarships for bachelor studies in Humanities (4), Social Sciences (1), Natural Sciences and Engineering (2), Health/Medicine (2) and Education/Pedagogy (4).

MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting their studies or dropping out.

10 out of **10** students progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

2 out of **10** students continued their studies with REF SP support.

2 students successfully graduated: **1** in Medicine (Dentistry) and **1** in Music (Clarinet).

REF TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN KOSOVO IN 2016-2017				
Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible RMUSP
RMUSP	102	54	13	24%

Spotlight

Sanije Mergjollar | RomaVersitas Member, Faculty of Economics at the University of Prizren

As one of four children, Sanije learned the value of sharing in her family, and she continues to share her knowledge with fellow student members of RomaVersitas in Kosovo today. Her pursuit of quality tertiary education is made possible by RMUSP support.

I quickly made the switch from tutor to mentor as I already had plenty of experience with university. I remember when I was in my first year of BA studies, I didn't know where to go, what lectures to attend, and after two years of feeling lost I saw that some of the students were as "lost" as I was. That's why I want to help, no matter who you are.

I've learned a lot from tutoring Roma freshmen in English and also found the classes on Roma identity, culture and language very engaging. I felt proud to be Roma.



Egzon Ibishi reflects on the upcoming school day at Ali Hadri Vocational School in Peje, Kosovo.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Jetmir Idrizi

Gylseren Cano in Prizren in preparing for a career in the fashion industry at March 11 Drejtimi Design and Art Vocational School in Prizren. Gylseren and Egzon are two of 550 students enrolled in secondary school as part of REF's Secondary School and Mentoring Program in Kosovo.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Jetmir Idrizi

Macedonia

EUROSTAT 2017

Population	2,062,294
Roma population official	53,879
Roma population unofficial	100,000 -150,000
Early childhood education and care	25.6%
Primary education enrollment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	74%/90%
Secondary education enrollment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	27%/65%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education/Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary school scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas
- ✓ Adult education
- ✓ IPA projects implementation

ACTIVE GRANTS

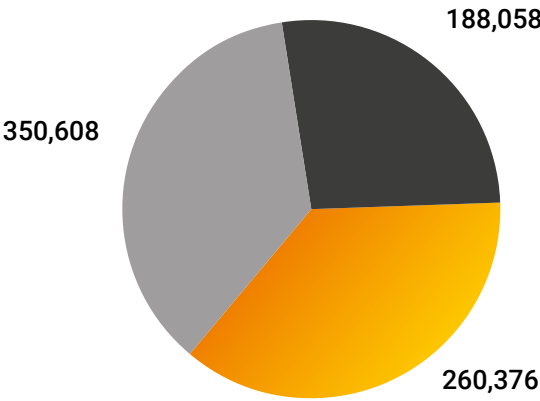
Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Association for Roma Community Development – SUMNAL	Strengthening the Pre-service Teacher Training System through Students’ Practical Work on the Benefits of Multiethnic Society Education	43,200
Ministry of Education and Science	Scholarship, Mentoring and Tutoring for Secondary Roma Students	306,530
Macedonian Government – Ministry of Labor and Social Policy	Inclusion of Roma Children in Public Preschool Institutions	224,908
RomaVersitas Macedonia	RomaVersitas Macedonia	152,308
Ternipe MK	Roma Graduate and Enhance their Lives	82,907
Consortium of NGOs: Association for Support of Marginalized Groups, Roma Resource Center – RRC Skopje	Tutoring Support of Education of Roma Children in Primary Education in Macedonia	274,019
Ministry of Labour and Social Policy, Implementation of Roma Strategy Unit	Inclusion of Roma Children in Preschool Education	121,012
Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, Non-discrimination Unit	Desegregation of Roma Children in Special Schools and Integration in Mainstream Schools	38,408

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount
EU IPA Fostering Social Inclusion, EuropeAid/135012/M/ACT/MK	REF Hungary	Improving Roma Employment through Education and Training in partnership with Roma NGOs Kham and Ambrela	181,322
EU IPA Social Inclusion and Employment at Local Level, EuropeAid/136315/M/ACT/MK	REF Hungary	School Completion as Pathway towards Employment in partnership with Roma NGOs Irhom Topaana, Ternipe and Sumnal	191,343

REF investments in Macedonia in 2016, EUR

- Scholarships awarded
- Grants contracted
- Co-funding



BACKGROUND

2015 marked the second time that Macedonia took part in the PISA assessment to assess students from 70 countries in science, mathematics, reading, collaborative problem solving and financial literacy. According to the results, the majority of Macedonian 15-year-olds performed at the bottom of the scale, indicating a high level of functional illiteracy in the tested subject areas and an uneven performance across groups, e.g., between urban and rural and between low income and higher income groups.

Roma students face educational and social difficulties that result in high levels of early school leaving. Only 15 percent of young Roma adults complete upper-secondary general or vocational education and, on average, only one out of two Roma children surveyed attend preschool education which can ensure proper preparing for schooling.¹³

REF IN MACEDONIA

Shuto Orizari, Chair, Karposh, Gjorche Petrov, Kumanovo, Shtip, Kochani, Vinica, Delchevo, Crnik, Pehchevo, Berovo, Tetovo, Gostivar, Kichevo, Debar, Prilep and Bitola

The Macedonian Ministry of Education and a consortium of eight Roma NGOs¹⁴ are implementing the REF initiated model for early school leaving in 36 primary schools in 18 localities. The intervention aims to improve success, reduce dropout rates and increase knowledge of the language of instruction and mathematics of Roma children who attend 4th, 5th and 6th grade of primary schools. Based on the positive results of previously implemented projects in primary education, the targeted number of municipalities for this project increased from 5 to 17, while the number of primary schools increased from 7 to 36 and the number of Roma pupils in primary education targeted with this project increased from 600 to 1,500 per school year.

One of the key elements of this project was the participation of 78 tutors who were students or unemployed graduates of faculties of Pedagogy. Tutors provided afterschool classes and monitored the attendance rate of children in regular classes together with the community mediators. The fact that many tutors were Roma graduates proved to be additional motivation for young Roma pupils.

REF is building partnerships with the governmental and non-governmental sectors to launch nationwide interventions which aim to decrease the rate of early school leavers and ensure systematic, long term improvement for Roma. REF, in partnership with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Labor and Social Affairs, is investing in the early childhood education of Roma children and provides academic and financial support at primary and secondary level.

REF and the local partners have been actively working with Macedonian universities to develop a specific curriculum for the provision of additional/tutoring classes in Macedonian primary schools to be recognized as an official subject in the Pedagogy Faculties. Similar practices took place in collaboration with Hungarian, Montenegrin and Croatian universities.

Dzeren Memodova was a beneficiary of REF's early childhood education program for three years and is now enrolled in a mainstream primary school in Vinica, Macedonia.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Robert Miskovics

13. UNDP/WB/EC regional Roma survey, 2011
14. Consortia lead by Roma Resource Center (RRC) and NGO Sonce-Tetovo

Tutoring support of Roma children in primary education in Macedonia”

The GPA of the primary school students increased by 5% after one year of project intervention through tutoring support in primary education. Roma students participating in the project increased the grades in their native language (Macedonian, Albanian, Turkish, or Serbian depending on school) and mathematics by 5.3% (5.1% for native language and 5.5% for mathematics).

95% transition rate of Roma primary school children to next grade

Measures decreasing early school leaving

The Ministry of Education and Science in cooperation with REF provides tutorship for 1,500 Roma children in grades four to six grade of primary education with the aim to stop school repetition and increase the graduation rate.

Furthermore, the Ministry supports around 600 Roma secondary school students with scholarships and mentorship/tutorship resulting in a 98% graduation rate.

A successful blend of early childhood development activities and second chance parental education through “Fostering Social Inclusion” EuropeAid funded project

REF in partnership with Roma NGO Kham and Roma NGO Ambrela started implementing the project “Improving Roma Employment through Education and Training”, with the support of the European Union. The project targets four municipalities in Macedonia (Shuto Orizari, Vinica, Delcevo and Pehcevo/v. Crnik) to improve the employment opportunities of Roma adults.

The project is a unique combination promoting early childhood development of young children and second chance education for their parents. As part of the project 120 adults participate in a second chance program to complete their formal primary and secondary education, with the aim to increase their employability at the labor market. Their children, more than 120 children below the age of six are supported to be enrolled into kindergarten or take part in early childhood education activities.

48 Roma adults aged 16-40 were enrolled in the adult education program in 2016 and are expected to complete their official primary school diploma in December 2017

72 Roma adults aged 16-40 were enrolled in the adult education program in 2016 and are expected to complete their official secondary school diploma in December 2017

400 parents participated in early childhood education sessions

63 mothers improved their basic literacy skills through Story reading sessions

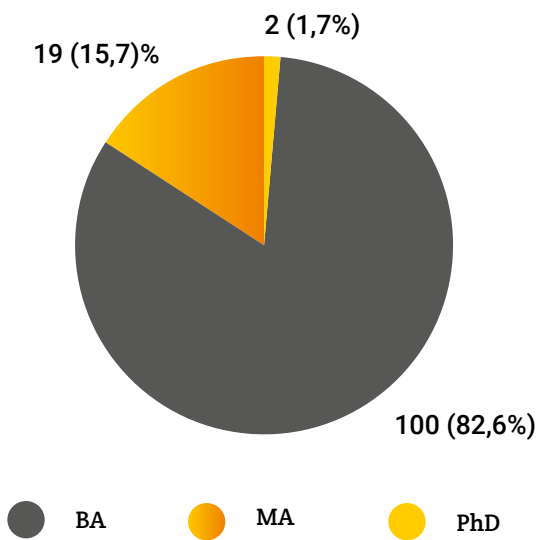
120 children participated in early childhood education and care

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

In Macedonia, REF SP implemented three of its scholarship schemes: RMUSP, RHSP, and RISP. While RMUSP and RISP are open for both renewal and new applicants, the RHSP program accepts only renewal applicants (students who already received the RHSP support in the previous scholarship cycle, and re-apply). The student supported under RISP is pursuing MA studies in International Relations and Diplomacy at the College of Europe in Bruges, Belgium.

In addition to the financial support for covering tuition fees and living expenses during the academic year, seven RMUSP and RHSP beneficiaries from Macedonia benefited from additional support to pursue courses in IT and foreign languages, and conference grants were awarded to three students who presented their research papers on various medical topics at international conferences in Sarajevo, Vienna and Macedonia, and four who participated in medical congresses in Macedonia. One small-scale project grant was awarded for an awareness raising campaign on chronic diseases, their symptoms and prevention within the Roma community of the municipality of Prilep, Macedonia.

RMUSP levels of study in Macedonia in 2016-2017



REF TERTIARY EDUCATION SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN MACEDONIA IN 2016-2017				
Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficia-ries from eligible RMUSP
RMUSP	166	152	100	66%
RHSP	24	22	20	91%
RISP	4	2	1	50%
Total:	194	176	121	69%

MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting their studies or dropping out.

Out of the **93** students who continued their studies **77** received REF Scholarship support.

95% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year

10 out of **42** final year students graduated, **8** with BAs and **2** with vocational medical degrees.

Out of the 42 beneficiaries who were expected to graduate in 2016, 32 students (76 percent) have postponed their graduation to the following year, or put their studies on hold. This particularly high ratio of students from Macedonia who postpone their graduation is largely attributable to the very flexible system in the country allowing students to postpone the submission of their final theses or even the state exams. REF SP is systematically encouraging its beneficiaries to graduate on time, despite the flexibility allowed by the local education system. The 10 students who graduated in 2016 received degrees in humanities, law, social sciences and health/medicaïne.



Spotlight

Irfan Aslan, RMUSP beneficiary, St Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje

Irfan Aslan is a senior at the medical faculty of St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. Supported for four years by RMUSP, he has to pass just two exams before qualifying as a radiologist. Irfan also volunteers as a tutor for Roma primary school students within the framework of a REF-supported project implemented by the Roma Resource Centre in Suto Orizari, Europe's largest Roma municipality.

Many Roma students are already behind when they start primary school, and due to cultural factors, they have difficulty keeping up with Macedonian-language instruction. Sometimes their parents have made the tough choice to leave and work abroad. The children may live with relatives who may not be as involved in their education as their parents, or they may simply go, too, subsequently losing two or three years schooling while being abroad.

I tutor students enrolled in a public school in Suto Orizari. Many people living here are returned asylum-seekers and their children are often far behind when they return to school in Macedonia. They need additional academic support to bounce back. I feel I have a moral responsibility to help my community. Ultimately, I feel I should transfer my knowledge and act as a positive example of a successful Roma student.

Tutoring can also be very rewarding. One of my students from last year who is enrolled in another school has dyslexia. I spent a lot of time coaching him and his teacher later told me he passed the Macedonian language exam.

Although I'm not a teacher, I do hope there will be more opportunities to help young students like these.

Moldova

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education/Desegregation

ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Roma National Centre	RomaVersitas Moldova	71 790

BACKGROUND

During the past years, several important milestones were achieved in advancing inclusive education for Roma children in Moldova. In 2011, the Program for the Development of Inclusive Education was adopted, including an action plan, with a focus on the education of Roma children. Community mediators were introduced to facilitate social inclusion and increase Roma children’s access to education and other social services.

Despite these achievements, many Roma children are still missing from school. In communities that are almost exclusively Roma, only half of children attend primary and secondary education, compared to almost 100 percent of non-Roma children. The situation is even worse in preschool education, where only 1 in 5 children go to kindergarten.

REF IN MOLDOVA

RomaVersitas – A model for community involvement and driver for change

In Moldova, REF has set up a RomaVersitas center bringing together 30 Roma tertiary level students, mainly studying law, international relations and music at different universities in Moldova. These students are true drivers of social change, with many of them are already running their own NGOs advocating, among others, for the rights of Roma women in Moldova. The university students are provided tutoring in different academic areas, individually tailored, by university professors and mentoring for working in teams, fighting with stereotypes, reacting to conflict situations and debating. The topics of the mentoring sessions were suggested by the students themselves as areas where they would need to strengthen their skills. In addition, students are enrolled in English and digital literacy classes and are active as volunteers in community work. The level of motivation, community involvement and drive for change among the RomaVersitas Moldova students is remarkable



The Law and Humanities Program (LHP) supported 37 tertiary education students in Moldova in 2016.
 Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas



LHP students present and interact with fellow students from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine. Each year they join peers from Russia and Ukraine for an annual summer meeting to share their experiences in higher education and build soft skills for the labor market. For more on the program, see pages 96-99.
 Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas

Montenegro

EUROSTAT 2017

Population official	626,192
Roma population official	8,305
Roma population unofficial	15,000-25,000
Primary education enrolment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	55%/94%
Secondary education enrolment rate Roma/ Non-Roma	13%/61%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education/Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary education scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ REF-implemented project – Konik Camp

ACTIVE GRANTS

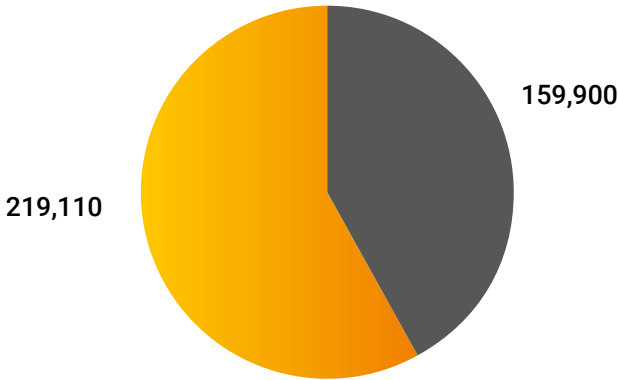
Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Center for Roma Initiatives – Niksic	Provision of Social Services to Regular Attendance of Primary Education Education	45,163
Ministry of Education, Bureau for Education	Roma and Egyptian Scholarship Fund for the Support of Secondary and Tertiary Educationof Roma/RE Youth in Montenegro – Phase 2	85,666
Roma Education Fund Montenegro Branch Office	Konik Camp Project – Phase 3	19,960

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount (EUR)
EU IPA	REF Hungary	Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of Roma, Egyptians and Other Vulnerable Groups in partnership with Help e.V	294,491
EU IPA and Government of Montenegro	REF Hungary	Support to the Integration and Voluntary Return of I/ DPs and Residents of Konik Camp - in partnership with help e.V	315,772

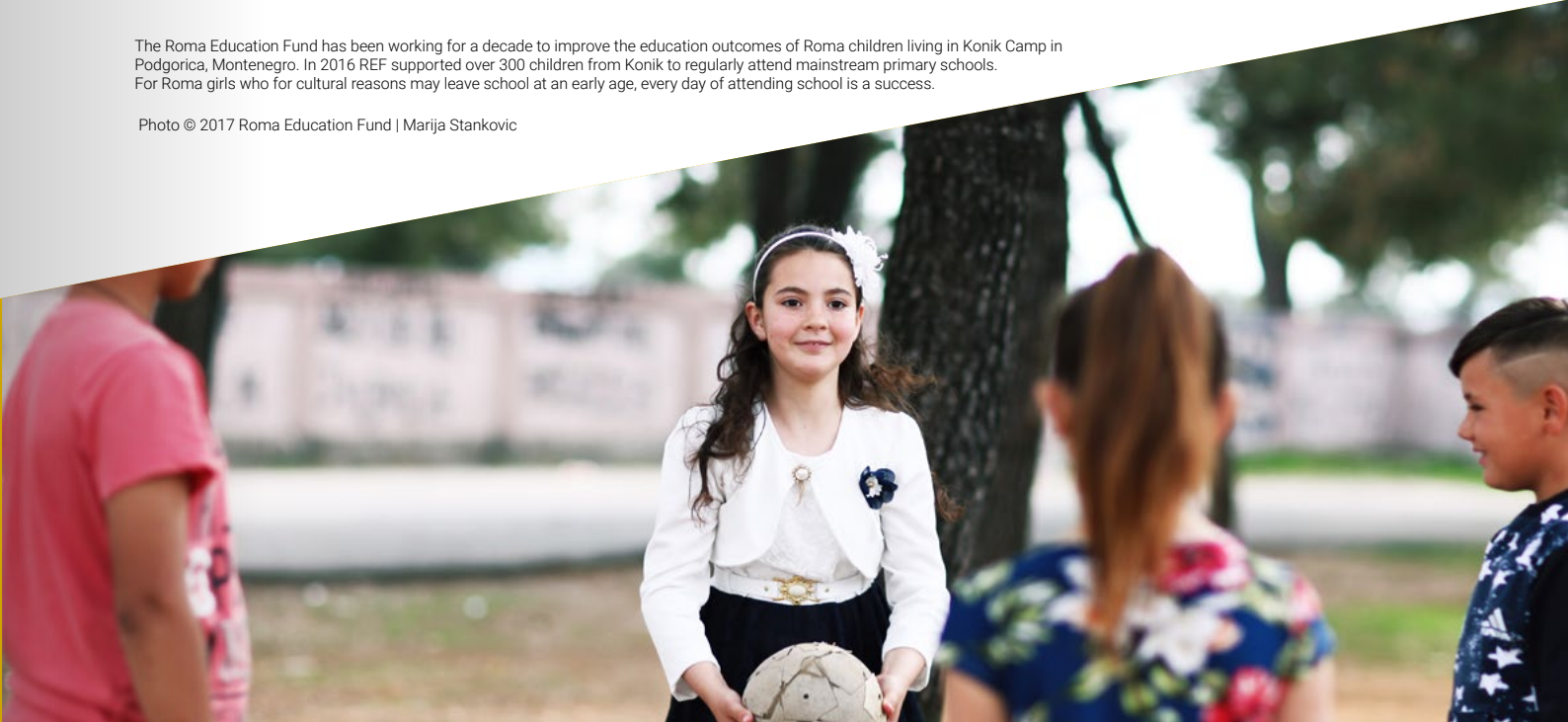
REF investments in Montenegro in 2016, EUR

- Co-funding
- Grants contracted



The Roma Education Fund has been working for a decade to improve the education outcomes of Roma children living in Konik Camp in Podgorica, Montenegro. In 2016 REF supported over 300 children from Konik to regularly attend mainstream primary schools. For Roma girls who for cultural reasons may leave school at an early age, every day of attending school is a success.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Marija Stankovic



BACKGROUND

With a population of just 626,192 and an official Roma population of 1.3 percent (unofficial estimates at 3.2 percent), Montenegro is one of Europe's least densely populated countries. Since the cessation of violence in neighboring Kosovo in 1999, in which many Roma were driven from their homes, its capital Podgorica has housed more than 3,000 Roma and Egyptian (RE) individuals at Konik Camp. Neglected for years, RE residents have lived in substandard housing with little or no public services until recently.

Highly motivated to qualify as a EU candidate state, Montenegro has made numerous steps to contribute to and implement programs for Roma inclusion. Meanwhile, the need for sustainable change in the education sector remains high. Roma and Egyptian (RE) children generally enroll late and drop out of school early. Only 23.8 percent of RE children in first grade of primary school attended preschool

during the previous school year. While 98.2 percent of primary school age children attend primary school, just 64.5 percent of RE children do. Furthermore, Montenegro faces the problem of many so-called invisible RE children, i.e., those who have never attended or enrolled into school (Statistical Office of Montenegro 2014).

REF has aspired since 2013 to close the segregated branch school in Konik Camp and provide a systemic solution for the inclusion of Roma children at all levels of education. The REF representative office in Montenegro aims to support the local implementation of projects in line with the mission of REF, namely supporting desegregation, early childhood education projects and also establishing a Secondary Scholarship Fund for RE students with financial support, mentoring and academic tutoring.

REF IN MONTENEGRO

Mission complete: Closure of the segregated primary school at Konik camp is now a fact

A total of **7** primary schools in Podgorica city and one kindergarten were included in project activities that led to **225** REF-supported children attending integrated schools from school year 2013-14 till the end of 2015-16.

90.6% grade completion rate for all three school years

7% dropout rate (largely due to families returning to Kosovo or migrating elsewhere)

105 male/**120** female primary students attending integrated school

Desegregation was achieved in September 2016 with the closure of the segregated school that had operated at Konik camp for some 17 years with almost 400 RE children. To do so, a number of measures were undertaken, including accredited training to increase the abilities of primary school and kindergarten teachers to work with vulnerable children. Members of partner school management boards, Roma community mediators, tutors-student volunteers from the Faculty of Philosophy and preschool teachers together launched an early school leaving prevention program which has led to only a seven percent dropout rate from the mainstream primary schools.

The high number of Roma and Egyptian children living within the boundaries of Konik Camp without access to mainstream education has been the focus of REF's representative office in Montenegro. While the city of Podgorica resisted change, it was not until the Ministry of Education intervened, itself pressured by the EU and bilateral donors, that progress was made and the first grader Roma and Egyptian children from the camp started to be bussed to Podgorica's mainstream schools in 2013.

As part of a coalition made up of Help e.V., Red Cross of Montenegro, the Danish Refugee Council and the NGOs Legal Center and Juventas, REF Montenegro assisted with the implementation of a complex intervention to bring about change. "Support to the Integration and Voluntary Return of I/DPs and Residents of Konik Camp" project was financially supported by the government of Montenegro and European funds.

REF Montenegro was responsible for implementing actions related to the provision of inclusive, quality education and supporting desegregation. In addition, REF also focused on proper preparation of children for primary education though ensuring a minimum of one year of preschool education, informal early childhood educational activities in its Toy Library as well as through a parental support program.

REF also worked with parents to motivate them to take more active roles in their children's education. Mothers and female caregivers were particularly supported to create proper home learning environments for their children and for themselves. Illiterate RE mothers and young women participated in weekly literacy sessions to learn basic writing and reading skills.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

Due to the low number of Roma students pursuing and completing secondary education in Montenegro in 2016, REF SP received very few applications for scholarships. REF Grant program is addressing this challenge by implementing a secondary education level scholarship program, as well as cooperating with the government in Montenegro in providing support to Roma students in tertiary education.

In 2016 REF, in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and the City of Podgorica, closed the segregated branch school within the boundaries of Konik Camp. With the conclusion of this lengthy process, all school-age children of are bussed to schools around the city, and are accompanied by mediators to help acclimatize them to life in school outside the camp.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Srdjan Ilic



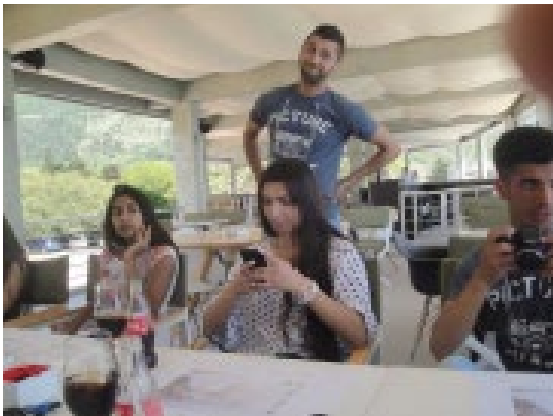
Spotlight

Picture Change at Konik Camp

In April 2016, an American charity partnered with the Roma Education Fund. For two months, Picture Change's founder, Kate Gazaway, volunteered to teach digital storytelling techniques to ten REF secondary school scholarship recipients with the aim to help them discover their innate creativity and their ability to positively impact society through the value of their individual stories. The students engaged in powerful discussions about the power of individual images, how documentary photography can perpetuate or demolish stereotypes, and how digital storytelling allows us to communicate with the rest of the world without being hindered by language.

At the end of the course, two gallery shows featured over 60 student photos, behind the scenes photos, and a biography panel written by the students. The exhibit, which the students titled "I Mi Znamo" (We Also Know), was a personal perspective of Roma life, putting on display what was familiar to the students. The students chose this title to emphasize that the Roma people are capable, eager to learn and to become productive citizens of Montenegro. This instilled pride in the Konik residents and allowed the non-Roma in Podgorica to see so much more than the typical refugee camp photos.

BEHIND THE SCENES



STUDENT WORK



Romania

EUROSTAT 2016/ National Statistics Office

Population	20,121,641
Roma population official (cencus 2011)	621,573
Roma population unofficial	2,000,000
Roma with primary education diploma (2015)	19.1%
All citizens with secondary education diploma (2015)	25.6%
Roma with secondary education diploma (2014)	86.4%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Secondary school scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas
- ✓ REF-implemented project - VELUX
- ✓ REF-implemented project - Norway Grants

ACTIVE GRANTS

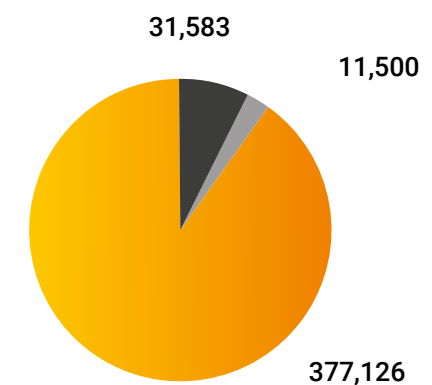
Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
REF Romania Foundation	RomaVersitas Romania	123,100

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount
VELUX FOUNDATIONS	REF Hungary	Pedagogy Scholarship Program in Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	1,139,000
Norway Grants	REF Romania Foundation	Ready, Set, Go!	2,807,345
Allianz Cultural Foundation	REF Romania Foundation	European Voluntary Service for All	3,000

REF investments in Romania in 2016, EUR

- Grants contracted
- Co-funding
- Scholarships awarded



BACKGROUND

According to the 2011 census, the Roma population of Romania is 2.5 percent of the total population, making it the second largest ethnic minority in Romania. Roma represent the majority ethnic majority in 67 localities, but most Roma live in localities where their proportion is lower than 10 percent.

Recent years have seen the Ministry of Education demonstrate a commitment to improving the education of Roma through the introduction of compulsory preschool education in the year before entry to primary school, support for desegregation, promotion of intercultural curricula, and affirmative action measures and financial incentives to increase Roma's participation in upper-secondary and tertiary education. The most pressing problems for the education of Roma in Romania are limited access to education in early childhood and persistent school segregation on the basis of ethnicity.

REF IN ROMANIA

Roma Education Fund Romania was established as an independent Romanian foundation in 2009 in order to apply for European Structural Fund (ESF) sources earmarked for Roma inclusion. The Romanian foundation was the first strategic step to grow a network of Roma Education Fund foundations and branch offices in order to better access such opportunities. From 2009-2015, REF Romania implemented nine ESF projects with a total value of €18.4 million. In 2016 REF concentrated on projects funded and managed by external donors, notably Ready Set Go!, an early childhood education and care (ECEC) program, which is supported by Norway Grants R025 Poverty Alleviation Programme in Romania.

Ready, Set, Go!, supported in part by Norway Grants, refurbished and built new kindergartens as part of an effort to improve access to early childhood education services in 11 of the most vulnerable municipalities in Romania. Seasonal school events provided children like this boy with many opportunities to develop their nascent creativity.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund Romania | Ready, Set, Go!

READY, SET, GO! PROJECT HAS TOUCHED THE LIVES OF HUNDREDS OF CHILDREN AND PARENTS

560 children enrolled in kindergarten

Attendance rate exceeded 80% for those children enrolled in kindergartens.

More than 4,500 participants joined Ready Set Go! in 69 events.

A key area of intervention for REF in Romania is early childhood education. Ready Set Go! launched in 2014, is a complex ECEC intervention in Romania's most disadvantaged regions. It includes education components such as Toy Library, Your Story, Home School Community Liaisons and community motivation events. With 14 kindergartens in 11 municipalities, enrolling 280 children in this effort, the program provided preschool services five days a week over two academic years and also included a limited amount of summer programs in 2016.

As a result of the program, 82 primary school-age children were enrolled in local primary schools. Ready Set Go! employed 14 educators and 14 Roma preschool mediators along with 14 community facilitators to support these outcomes. Along with vouchers provided to 560 participating families, the project made capital investments, renovating five rundown schools and building another five new kindergartens.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

Romania is the largest country in REF SP portfolio, reflecting the large size of the Roma population and the participation of the country in three out of the four available REF scholarship schemes. Out of the 521 scholarship applications received from students in Romania for the 2016-2017 academic year, 327 were awarded scholarships, representing 26 percent selected within REF SP.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	449	374	291	78%
RHSP	65	41	35	85%
RISP	7	3	1	33%
TOTAL	512	418	327	78%

The large number of ineligible applicants in Romania is due to the high number of submitted applications in RHSP, where REF SP accepts only renewal applicants. Ten RHSP beneficiaries in Romania have reached the final years in their medical studies, and they work as resident doctors to obtain medical specializations. Among the PhD students, one RISP student pursues postgraduate studies in Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester, UK.

In addition to the financial support for covering tuition fees and living expenses during the academic year, eight RMUSP and RHSP beneficiaries from Romania received Professional Development Activities Grants to support foreign language and computer courses, participation in conferences and seminars, internships and research

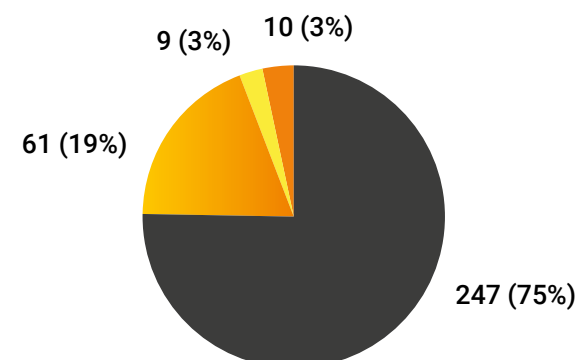
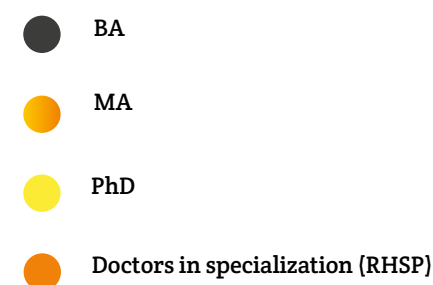
projects: four students presented their research paper on the topic of their medical specializations at the 25th International Medical Sciences Student Congress in Istanbul and International Congress on Heart Failure in Bucharest, one student participated in a one-month research study in Egypt, working with doctors on the "Epidemiology of acute coronary syndrome patients, in-hospital morbidity and mortality regarding different reperfusion strategies," and the remaining three students attended summer schools on emergency medicine in Montenegro, pediatrics in Bucharest and early childhood development in the Netherlands.

Ready, Set, Go!, supported in part by Norway Grants, refurbished and built new kindergartens as part of an effort to improve access to early childhood education services in 11 of the most vulnerable municipalities in Romania. Toy Libraries and activities promoting mothers' literacy and empowerment , have impacted these communities by improving early educational outcomes.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund Romania | Ready, Set, Go!



RMUSP, RHSP and RISP levels of study in Romania in 2016-2017



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

REF SP monitors beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

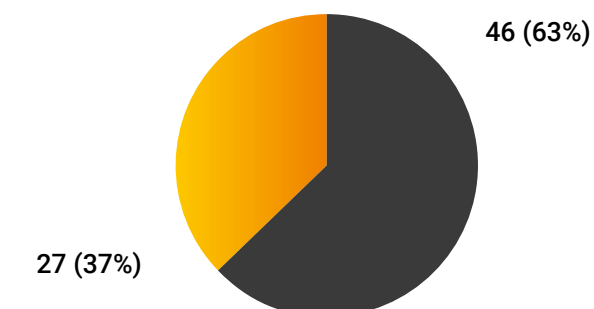
58% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

Among the **281** students who continued their studies in 2016-17, **169 (58%)** continued with REF Scholarship Program support.

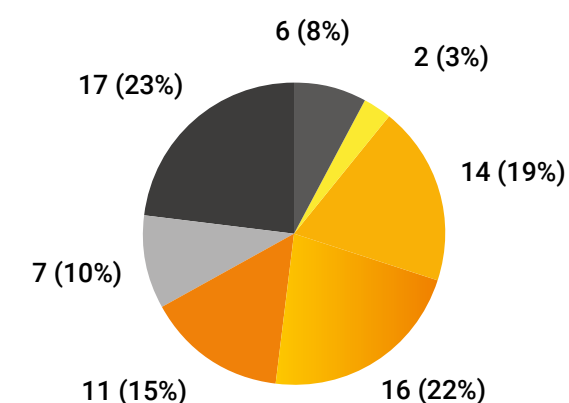
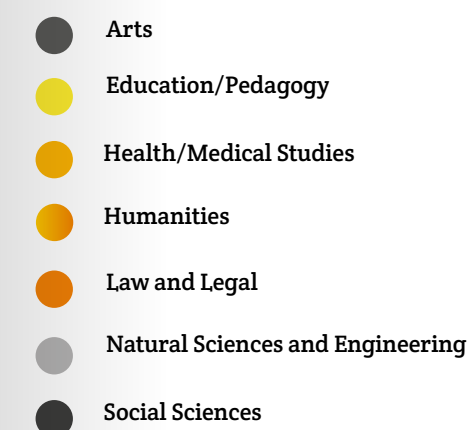
Out of the **73** beneficiaries that graduated successfully in 2016, **27 (37%)** applied to continue their studies to a higher academic degree with REF support. It is important to highlight that one of REF SP beneficiaries from Romania graduated Biomedical Science from the University of Coventry, UK.

73 out of **98** final year students graduated in 2016 (**74%**), while **25 (26%)** prolonged the final thesis writing period with one additional year.

RMUSP and RHSP graduates' levels of study in Romania in 2015-2016



RMUSP, RHSP and RISP graduates' fields of study in Romania in 2015-2016





Spotlight

Marius Razvan Rus, RMUSP, Medical Faculty in Sibiu

Marius Razvan Rus grew up in a rural village in Transylvania. His parents ran a small grocery store in their village, where his father later was elected deputy mayor. Time and again at the top of his class, Marius has embarked on a journey to become a medical professional with REF scholarship support.

When I started primary school my mother, knowing full well the low expectations for Roma students, said to me, "Don't take your eyes off the teacher. I'll worry about what's for dinner." I was unprepared for the level of suspicion when I entered fifth grade. Teachers thought I was there for the free meal, not to learn, much less participate in the school's extracurricular programs like the theater troupe, handball team, French lessons or academic competitions. I was the only Roma to win any awards and was recognized at school by being made student representative in seventh grade. For secondary school, I had to commute to the town of Medias. The school was highly competitive and my goals were moderate: place in the top five if you can. By my junior year I decided medicine was my calling and I applied to various medical

schools. In Romania, universities must set aside a number of places for Roma students and I was very anxious to see where I might end up.

Since attending the medical faculty in Sibiu, I began to live, to discover, to exist. I began to empathize more with others. I noticed an outstanding need for support and pitched in for two projects, one focusing on rural health and the other on orphanages. I was overwhelmed by my feelings and encouraged that I could have a real impact on others through my actions.

This summer I interned with a doctor who specializes in vascular surgery at Sibiu's central hospital. I was very impressed by his abilities, level of care and rapport with his patients, no matter their ethnicity or financial status. His is an example worth following: simple interventions that fundamentally change people's lives. He imparted a strong sense of mission in me and I'm looking forward to when I will be qualified to help others, too – and share my knowledge and experience with other Roma medical students.

Designed to address a chronic shortage of qualified Roma medical practitioners/health professionals in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia, the Roma Health Scholarship Program has supported over 527 Roma students (through 1,295 scholarships) pursuing vocational and/or tertiary medical studies through a scholarship package comprising financial, academic and professional support, since its launching in 2008. Pepa Karadzova, studying general medicine in Pleven, Bulgaria, said of the program, "Aside from the financial support, I have a mentor who helps me reach my academic goals."

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas



Serbia

EUROSTAT 2017

Population	8,790,793
Roma population official	147,604
Roma population unofficial	450,000
Preschool enrollment rate (3-6 years) Roma/non-Roma	18%/48%
Primary education enrollment rate Roma/non-Roma	80%/95%
Secondary education enrolment rate Roma/non-Roma	25%/71%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education / Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary education scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ RomaVersitas
- ✓ REF-implemented project - KfW

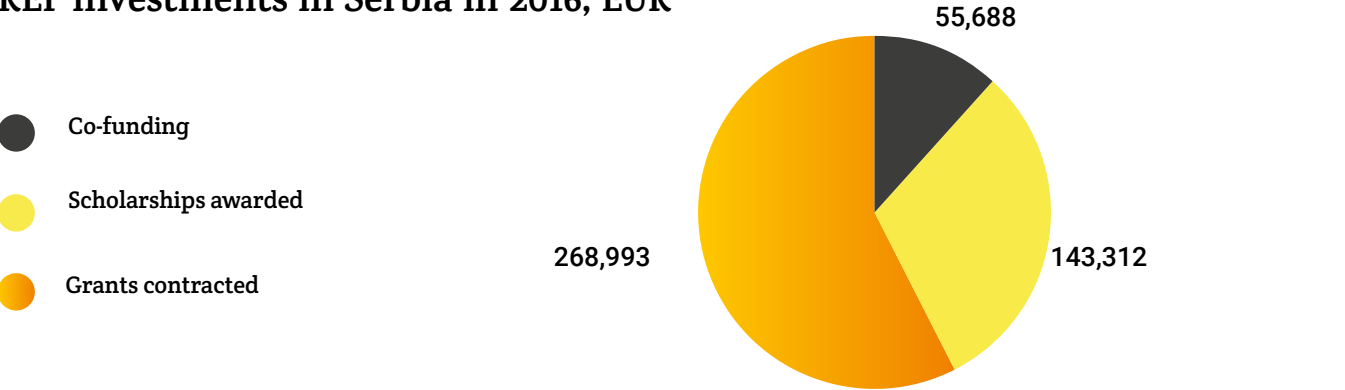
ACTIVE GRANTS

Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
Consortium: Romanipen, Roma Association of Kraljevo, Romanicikna, Roma Association of Obrenovac, Small Happy Colony – Centre for Children and Youth plus MENA	Mother Child Educational Program – Phase out	103,503
Novi Sad Humanitarian Centre	Volunteer Assistance in Education	19,725
RomaVersitas Novi Sad II – Vojvodinian Roma Center for Democracy	RomaVersitas	155,035
Consortium: Romanipen, Romani Cikna, Hands of Friendship, Humanitarian Center Rom and Small Happy Colony – Centre for Children and Youth	Toy Libraries – Our Space for Growth	135,660
Roma Restart	RomaVersitas Belgrade	18,294

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECT

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Amount Contracted (EUR)
German Development Bank – KfW	REF Hungary	Improved Education and Integration Opportunities for Roma in Serbia, Employment Empowerment of Young Roma and Reintegration of Returnees	2,373,950

REF investments in Serbia in 2016, EUR



BACKGROUND

Data from the UNICEF survey of multiple indicators of the status of women and children¹⁷ indicate that Serbia still faces challenges for securing access to equal and quality education for all. For example, only 64 percent of Roma children graduate from primary school (as compared to 93 percent in the general population), while only 22 percent Roma children continue to high school (as compared to 89 percent in the general population). In addition to the overall high dropout rate, there is a trend of Roma girls leaving school and establishing families between 15 and 19 years of age, with 43 percent of Roma girls in this age group dropping out of school to get married, compared to four percent in the general population. As a consequence, the share of Roma with a high school diploma is only around 11.5 percent.

A special group of young Roma with this problem comes from the families of failed asylum seekers who are returned to Serbia. While many of these children do not speak Serbian and need additional classes to attend school programs, they also face problems because of differences between school programs in Serbia and the countries

where they studied previously. For such reasons, Roma children from families are often enrolled in lower grades or special needs schools. In many cases, the parents do not have the necessary documentation from their children's previous schooling. These children are usually not well accepted in the community and they suffer discrimination, with high chances for dropping out.

Exclusion from education impacts the competitiveness of Roma in the labor market. Even though numerous projects and scholarship programs have increased the number of young Roma in high schools and universities, mainly in three- and four-year vocational schools, traditional education does not bring practical experience which is necessary for a job search, their social and life skills remain weak and employer discrimination remains.

REF IN SERBIA

Boosting academic performance and graduation rates from secondary education for Roma children

Despite numerous initiatives in recent years to improve the situation of the Roma population in Serbia, dropout rates at all education levels represent a serious concern for the country. Around 25 percent of secondary school-age Roma (as opposed to 71 percent of the general population) attend secondary schools.

In an effort to promote secondary school attendance of Roma children, a cooperation among REF, the EU and the Serbian government was launched in 2014. The project "Technical Support to the Ministry of Education, Science and Technological Development in Establishing and Strengthening the Program for Prevention of Dropouts of Secondary School Roma Pupils" provides support to secondary school Roma students, providing financial support for school materials, scholarships and travel costs, as well as mentoring and tutoring.

REF Secondary Education Program in Serbia 2015-16

512 scholarship beneficiaries (342 continuing from the previous academic year and 170 new beneficiaries to the program)

98 students graduated

5% dropout rate

During these activities, 92 volunteer tutors provided a total of 4,114 hours of academic support services to 126 pupils, and 193 mentors provided motivational and life skills support for Roma students. The REF team in Serbia also provided capacity building and permanent support to the mentors through online communications and site visits. In parallel, REF continued to advocate with national institutions on raising awareness on the importance of integrating mentorship in the Serbian educational system.

Mentor Accreditation: A cross-country learning experience in secondary education

Due to the extensive experience REF accumulated in implementing the secondary scholarship program, REF Serbia initiated a concept for cooperation, networking and cross-country learning processes among secondary scholarship programs in Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Kosovo, Montenegro and Serbia. Terms of Reference for mentors were harmonized among these five countries, applying the same training package for mentors which was accredited in Serbia and Montenegro by their Ministries of Education. The accreditation procedure for Bosnia and Hercegovina and Kosovo is currently under way. The REF teams from Serbia and Montenegro, as well as REF grantees and teams working on secondary education programs in each of these five countries met in Serbia, Montenegro, Kosovo and Bosnia and Hercegovina to exchange experiences and learn from each other. This cross-country learning exercise was found valuable to compare programs among different countries and to identify the most effective ways for impacting on authorities and legislation at national and regional levels for the benefit of Roma secondary school students in the Western Balkans.

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECTS IN SERBIA

Improved education and integration opportunities for Roma in Serbia, employment empowerment of young Roma and reintegration of returnees

In 2016 a grant agreement for €2,373,950 was signed between the Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany, administered by KfW Development Bank, and REF. The project aims to provide technical assistance and develop a mechanism which will advance the social inclusion of young Roma in the Serbian society through education, employment and integration of Roma returnees.

The project will run through 2019, with the following components:

- Support to secondary school REF scholars – mentoring and tutoring for secondary school students, and advocacy on introduction of Roma mentoring in the education system, which should result in raising the productivity and success of Roma high school students.
- Strengthening professional and life skills of REF secondary school scholars – professional development for youth who have completed secondary school, such as vocational and job-related skills trainings, continuous needs assessment and paid internships for successful labor market entry.
- Support to Roma reintegration returnees to Serbia – assistance to young Roma returnees who have spent a long time abroad to overcome barriers in language, education, residence and administrative requirements.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	155	118	81	69%
RHSP	26	21	20	95%
RISP	9	4	1	25%
TOTAL	190	142	100	70%

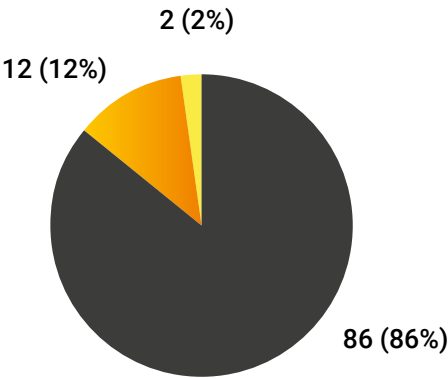
Out of the 190 applications received from students in Serbia for the 2016-2017 academic year, 100 students were awarded scholarships, including one RISP BA beneficiary at the Belgorod University of Arts and Culture in Russia.

In Serbia, REF SP implements three of its scholarship schemes: RMUSP, RHSP and RISP. While RMUSP and RISP are open for both renewal and new applicants, the RHSP program accepts only renewal applicants (students who already received the RHSP support in the previous scholarship cycle, and re-apply).

In addition to the financial support for covering tuition fees and living expenses during the academic year, six RMUSP and RHSP beneficiaries in Serbia received Professional Development Activities Grants and benefited from foreign language courses in English or German. Additionally, two RHSP small-scale projects were supported, aimed at advancing development of Roma communities at the local level. One project focused on raising awareness of Roma parents in the Trstenik region about the importance of vaccination, and translating the yearly vaccination calendar to the Romani language, while the second project focused on workshops for young mothers in the Osecina region on the importance of pre-natal care.

RMUSP, RHSP and RISP levels of study in Serbia in 2016-2017

- BA
- MA
- PhD



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

79% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

Out of **49** students who continued their studies, **31** continued with REF SP support.

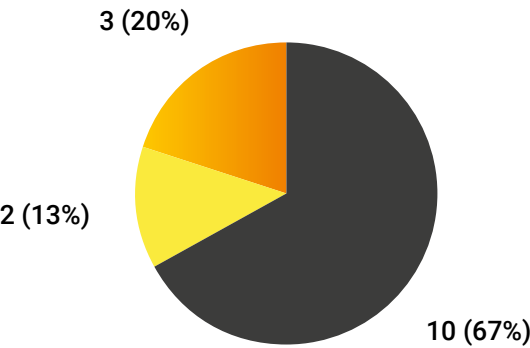
15 out of **34** final year students graduated (**44%**).

The particularly high ratio of students from Serbia who postpone their graduation is largely attributable to the very flexible system in the country allowing students to postpone the submission of their final theses or even the state exams. REF SP is systematically encouraging its beneficiaries to graduate on time, despite the flexibility allowed by the local education system.

The high number of graduates in the field of Medicine in 2015-2016 is largely attributable to the RHSP scheme. Nine students graduated with a vocational degree, while one completed BA level studies under the RMUSP scheme.

RMUSP and RHSP graduates' fields of study in Serbia in 2015-2016

- Health/Medical Studies
- Natural Sciences and Engineering
- Social Sciences





Driton Berisha from the Kosova Education Centre, speaks about the importance of learning by playing at the Roma Toy Libraries Network Conference in Belgrade in 2016. Toy Libraries provide a space for disadvantaged families to borrow quality, educational toys and learn together.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Srdjan Ilic

Spotlight

Zijus Sacirovic, RMUSP, BA Pedagogy

Zijus Sacirovic was born in a Roma settlement in Zrenjanin, Serbia. From a young age, he felt destined to succeed. At one point he aimed to become a police officer but life had something else in store for him: excellent academic results and qualifying as a kindergarten teacher.

After graduating from high school, I realized that nothing was preventing me from enrolling in higher education. I wanted to apply to the police academy but they were not accepting students, so I opted for the Advanced School of Education of Kindergarten Teachers in Vrsac and was admitted through an affirmative action program.

No one in my family completed higher education, so I had no idea what it might be like to be a student. Being away from home and the new environment were very challenging but studying was simple. I was the only student who passed all his exams each term and I was treated as a young professional by both teachers and students, regardless of my ethnicity. REF's support made this all possible.



During teacher training, I realized I had chosen the right path. Educating children is a noble, demanding and responsible job. I graduated as valedictorian of my class and had the opportunity to study for one more year. Last summer I also attended another program certified through the Faculty of Philology at the University of Belgrade that allowed me to qualify as Romani language teacher.

Afterwards, I was surprised to find an offer to join Marija Aleksandrovic, PhD, familiar to some readers as a REF colleague, as her assistant.

Now I am finishing my fourth year, working part-time and plan to apply to the Teaching Faculty to continue my studies, focusing on the education of young Roma.



Slovakia

EUROSTAT 2017/ OECD 2015

Population	5,397,036
Roma population official	105,738
Roma population unofficial	380,000-600,000
Early school leavers (2015)	6.9%
Early childhood education (2015)	28.4%
Tertiary educational attainment (EUROSTAT 2015)	23.6%

- ✓ Early childhood education
- ✓ Primary education / Desegregation
- ✓ Secondary school scholarships
- ✓ Tertiary education scholarship program
- ✓ REF-implemented project - VELUX

ACTIVE GRANTS

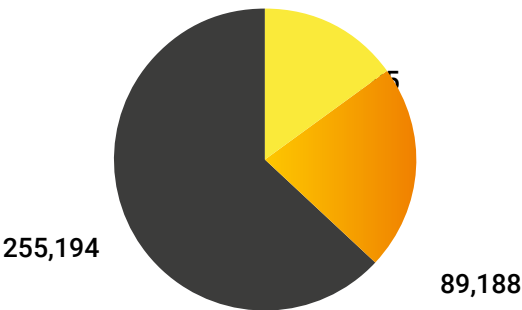
Organization	Project name	Amount Approved by REF Board (EUR)
REF Slovakia Foundation	Secondary Scholarship Program	236,282
Ternipe – Association for Roma Youth in Slovakia and Hungary	After-school Model in Rimavská Seč	69,752
Equal Chances Association	A Good Start – Phase 3 Zborov	51,767
County Association of Romani Initiatives – KARI Union	A Good Start – Phase 3 Banska Bystrica	44,545
Cultural Association of Roma in Slovakia	A Good Start – Phase 3 Martin	67,960
Equal Chances Association	A Good Start – Phase 4 Zborov	29,550
County Association of Romani Initiatives	A Good Start – Phase 4 Banska Bystrica	20,000
Roma Education Support Trust – Opre Roma	Training: Creation of a Desegregated and Fully Inclusive Environment at Slovak Schools in cooperation with ROCEPO – Roma Education Centre Prešov	1,350

REF-IMPLEMENTED PROJECT

Donor	REF Network Entity	Project name	Contracted amount
VELUX FOUNDATIONS	REF Hungary	Pedagogy Scholarship Program in Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia	1,139,000

REF investments in Slovakia in 2016, EUR

- Co-funding
- Scholarships awarded
- Grants contracted



BACKGROUND

The latest census in Slovakia (2011) shows that two percent of the population self-identified as Roma, the second largest ethnic minority in Slovakia after Hungarians. Unofficial sources say that Roma represent 7.5 percent of Slovak inhabitants. In response to growing extremism in the country over the last decade, the Ministry of Education, Science, Research and Sport of the Slovak Republic recommends that secondary schools and institutions offer activities aimed to prevent racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, extremism and other forms of intolerance through excursions to concentration camps and commemorative places of holocaust in Slovakia and the region. Nevertheless, according to the Slovak Public Defender of Rights, in 2013 Roma represented over 88 percent of the pupils in the special education classes and schools surveyed.¹⁵

Early school leaving of Roma from secondary schools is very high; while only 35 percent of Roma students enroll in secondary schools, only about 19 percent graduate. UNDP figures further indicate that only two percent of the working age Roma population (aged 15-65) completed the Matura exam which must be passed in order to apply to a university or other institutions of higher education, and enrollment in tertiary education is below one percent.

REF IN SLOVAKIA

Expanding Roma children's access to quality early childhood education and care

327 children involved in Toy Library activities

16 kindergartens included in the projects

4 participating municipalities

399 parents involved in ECD clubs, Your Story session and other community activities

Only **3%** dropout rate from the kindergartens

REF Slovakia enhances academic performance of Roma students in vocational schools and gymnasia through merit-based (GPA-related) schemes

97% graduation rate among the secondary school recipients in year 2015-16

82% transition rate from secondary to tertiary education

2% dropout rate

0.2% unjustified absences among the secondary school recipients in year 2015-16

REF’s nationwide secondary scholarship program, implemented since 2011, is the only specific program aimed for Roma students in secondary schools in Slovakia. The goal is to address the problem of low retention, completion and achievement rate of Roma students in secondary education, as well as to improve the transition rate of Roma students from secondary to tertiary education, through the provision of scholarships which are also accompanied by mentoring and tutoring support to improve or maintain academic performance. REF worked closely with the Ministry of Interior through the Office of Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities in Slovakia which provided financial support for mentoring and tutoring of the Roma scholarship beneficiaries in school year 2016-2017.

In addition to increasing the number of Roma students who complete secondary and tertiary education, the long-term goal of the secondary scholarship program is to increase their employability in Slovakia. Along the way, the program aims at additional results such as boosting the self-confidence and self-esteem of Roma communities, positively changing the perception of Roma by the non-Roma and encouraging educational institutions to offer a more inclusive learning environment for Roma students. The project creates a solid base for reducing the gap between Roma and non-Roma students and develops and promotes mentorship and tutorship as a model for academic support of disadvantaged students.

Two summer camps were organized in 2016 for 51 scholarship beneficiaries of both the Secondary Scholarship Program and Velux Pedagogical Scholarship Program. The aim was to have an event where students could meet, interact and share experience on their pedagogical studies and enhance their social and professional skills. A “Living library” activity was organized with invited guests as living books, sharing their inspirational and motivational stories. Participants were kindergarten and primary school teachers, employees of Methodological Pedagogical Center in Prešov, mentors and representatives of the State Scientific Library in Prešov. The students left the camps with a renewed sense of the significance of being educated young Roma who will be future educators and make a difference in the Roma community by being role models to the younger generations.

In the academic year 2015-16 REF Slovakia supported 210 students in three categories:

40 gymnasium students
45 vocational school students with GPA up to 1.54 (excellent)
125 vocational school students with GPA 1.55 – 2.5 (very good to excellent)

15 mentors and **42** tutors from 22 secondary schools were engaged to help the students in need of additional academic support.

In the academic year 2016-17 REF Slovakia supported 386 pupils from 129 secondary schools in four categories:

69 first year gymnasium students
66 gymnasium students in years 2-4
59 vocational schools with very good GPA up to 1.54
192 vocational school students with good GPA from 1.55 – 2.5

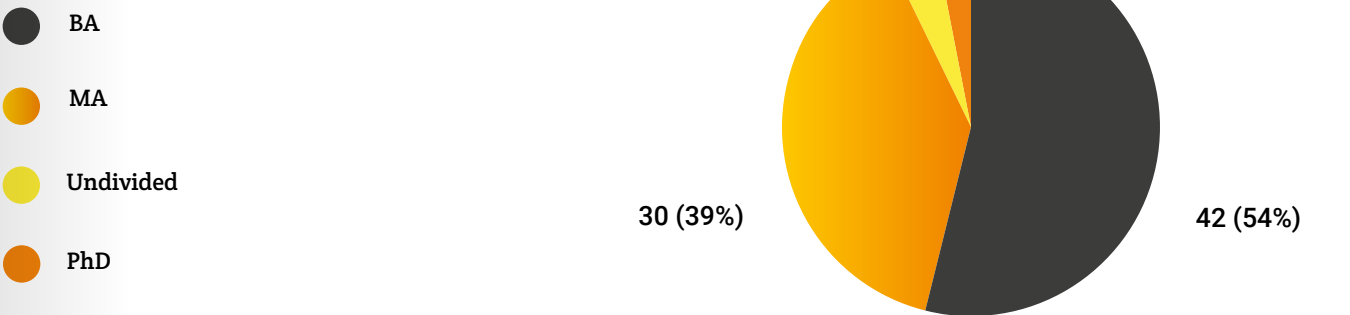
12 mentors and **15** tutors were secured to work with students in **12** secondary schools.

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

Out of the 139 scholarship applications received from students from Slovakia for the 2016-2017 academic year, 79 were awarded scholarships, including 2 students who received support to study abroad in universities in Budapest, Hungary and Texas, USA.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	136	115	77	67%
RISP	3	2	2	100%
TOTAL:	139	117	79	68%

RMUSP levels of study in Slovakia in 2016-2017



MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 the REF SP tracked beneficiaries' progress in order to monitor students' academic advancement, successful graduation, and cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

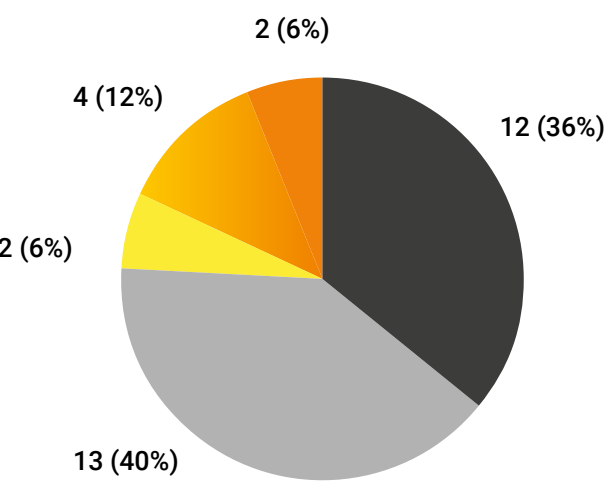
90% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

Out of the 38 students who continued their studies in 2016-17, 28 continued with REF Scholarship Program support

33 out of 42 final year students graduated (78%), 14 BAs and 19 MAs. Nine students (22%) prolonged thesis writing by one year or needed to retake final exams.

RMUSP graduates' fields of study in Slovakia in 2015-2016

- Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Health/Medical Studies
- Education/Pedagogy
- Arts



Spotlight



Olga Bagarová, RMUSP Comenius University in Bratislava, Organic Chemistry

Olga Bagarová comes from a Roma settlement in the eastern foothills of the Tatras in Slovakia. She attended mostly segregated schools, but due to her academic discipline she was regarded as an "exception" and not weeded out from non-Roma classes. Her parents played a large part in encouraging her love of math and science, and by now she is a sophomore in chemistry at the Comenius University in Bratislava.

I remember that in school everyone was kind to me, but when talking about Roma in general, they did not like us, and they did not hide their feelings. I knew that they considered me to be an "exception" and if I did not happen to have good grades, they would not bother to talk to me. Later on, I started to attend a bilingual grammar school. It was not too hard and I was again the only Roma in our class. Everyone got on very well, but it was exactly the same. Their opinions about Roma are not very favorable and I was again the "exception." If I ceased being friends with everyone who thinks that a polite educated Roma is a bizarre and rare phenomenon, I would not have any friends at all. The majority rarely see many positive examples of Roma, so they think that Roma are satisfied with being excluded and since they do nothing to change the situation.

Although I was motivated and had a stable family life, it would have been nearly impossible to study without a REF scholarship. The scholarship is not only about money but also about opportunities and consciousness. I get to meet other young educated people and I am very happy to know that there are so many future Roma leaders and people show society that we are successful just by going about their daily lives. I also know that I can turn to REF's staff in Slovakia for advice and they will listen and try to help.

At age 17 I was already involved in social issues. I have trained in quite a few national and international workshops and became a local volunteer to help, motivate and educate Roma teenagers and youth, including time at Linux IX, one of Slovakia's most disadvantaged Roma communities.

Turkey

EUROSTAT 2017/ OECD 2015

Population (2012)	75,627,000
Roma population official	500,000 - 700,000
Roma population unofficial	4,000,000 - 5,000,000
Early school leavers (2015)	36.4%
Early childhood education	51.7%
Tertiary educational attainment (EUROSTAT 2015)	23.6 %

✓ Tertiary education scholarship program

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

Out of the 34 scholarship applications received from students in Turkey for the 2016-2017 academic year, 15 were awarded scholarships.

Program	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
RMUSP	33	19	14	74%
RISP	1	1	1	100%
TOTAL	34	20	15	75%

Among the 15 beneficiaries, 11 are in BA studies, three in MA studies under the RMUSP program, and the one student in the RISP scheme is pursuing Master studies in Finance at Liechtenstein University.

Three students benefited from the PDAG additional support in 2016, under the RMUSP scheme: two pursued German language courses and one attended an academic conference on early childhood development.

MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

In 2016 REF SP continued to monitor beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another, tracking their academic advancement, successful graduation and cases of students interrupting their studies or dropping out.

89% progressed successfully to the 2016-17 academic year.

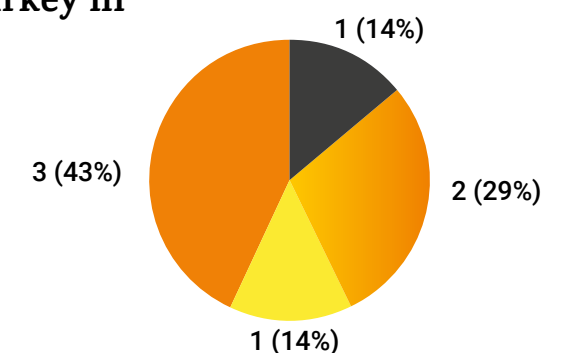
Among the **9** beneficiaries who continued their studies in 2016-17, **4** continued with REF SP support.

7 out of **18** final year students graduated (**39%**).

The remaining **11** students postponed their graduation to the next year, or they put their studies on hold.

RMUSP BA graduates' fields of study in Turkey in 2015-2016

- Arts
- Humanities
- Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences and Engineering



Moldova, Russia, Ukraine

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM (REF SP)

LAW AND HUMANITIES PROGRAM (LHP))

The Law and Humanities Program (LHP) has been co-financed by the Roma Education Fund (REF) and by the Foundation Remembrance, Responsibility and Future (EVZ) since 2007 and is implemented by the REF Scholarship Program in collaboration with national partners in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine.

Out of the 320 scholarship applications received from students in Moldova, Russia and Ukraine for the 2016-2017 academic year, 208 students were awarded for LHP scholarships and two were accepted for the Roma International Scholar Program (RISP) scheme that supports international student mobility, with one MA student enrolled in International Law and Human Rights at the University of Tartu in Estonia and one BA student in Music at Prayner Conservatorium in Vienna, Austria.

Program	Country	Submitted applications	Eligible	Beneficiaries	Ratio of beneficiaries from eligible
LHP	Moldova	49	46	37	80%
	Russia	86	81	60	74%
	Ukraine	183	145	111	77%
TOTAL		318	272	208	76%

In addition to the scholarship support for covering living expenses and tuition fees throughout the academic year, the LHP scheme offers individual support for further professional development through a range of activities such as foreign language and computer courses, participation in conferences and seminars, internships, and research projects. In the 2015-2016 academic year, the LHP scheme provided two-day in-country trainings in each of the three LHP countries and 34 students attended foreign language courses in locally-accredited language schools.

The annual, two-day LHP student conference in Budapest, Hungary brought together 50 LHP beneficiaries and alumni from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine in July 2016, where participants discussed issues related to Roma culture, identity, and gender relations in the Roma community.

The LHP scheme also offers grants for small-scale projects, aimed at advancing development of Roma communities at local level. In 2016 four small-scale projects were supported (at up to €2,500 per project) implemented by groups of past and present LHP beneficiaries who promoted access to healthcare for Roma living in poor regions (Moldova); assisted Roma families in gathering the documentation necessary to register and obtain residential permits for the land they used to inhabit before being demolished by authorities (Russia); raised awareness among Roma youth regarding the importance of education and commemoration of Roma genocide victims during the Second World War including the creation of a book about Roma victims of Nazi concentration camps, containing facts referenced from historical and archival accounts (two projects in Ukraine).

MONITORING REF SP BENEFICIARIES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS AND GRADUATION STATUS IN 2015-2016

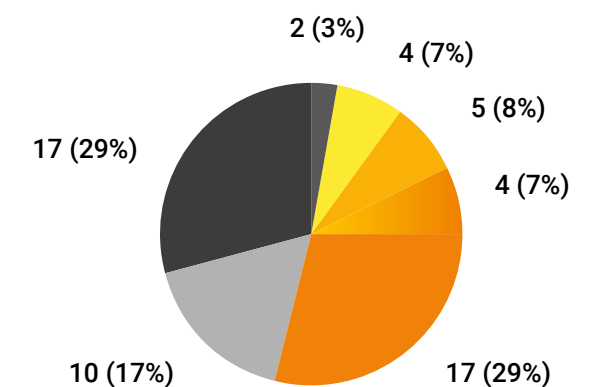
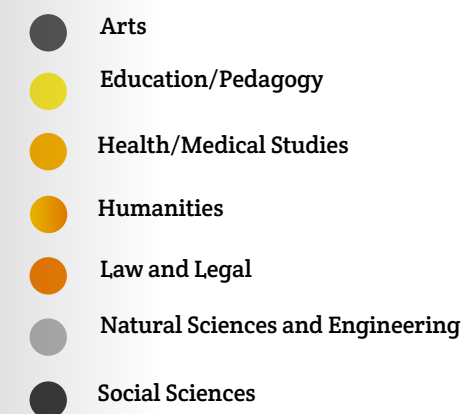
In 2016 the REF SP tracked beneficiaries' progress from one academic year to another in the three countries, in order to monitor students' academic advancement, successful graduation, or cases of students interrupting or dropping out from their studies.

99% progressed successfully to the next academic year.

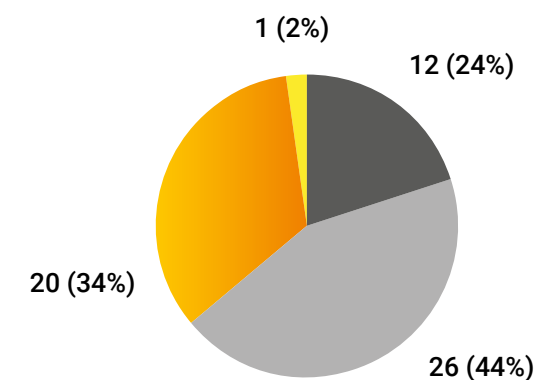
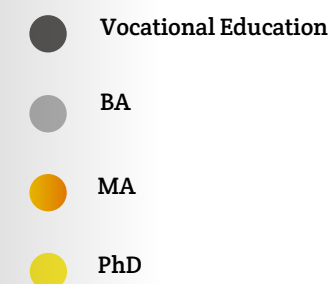
Out of the **139** students who continued their studies in 2016-17, **130** continued with REF support.

59 out of **61** final year students graduated (**97%**) – two students prolonged their thesis writing by one year.

LHP graduates' fields of study in 2015-2016



LHP graduates' levels of study in 2015-2016





University students from Moldova, Russia and Ukraine supported by the Law and Humanities Program (LHP) meet annually to share their experiences in higher education and build soft skills for the labor market.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas

Spotlight

Aliona Kazanska, LHP Beneficiary, Law at Chernigiv Cooperative College 2012-2015, Law at Taras Shevchenko National University in Kiev from 2016

Aliona Kazanska was born in the city of Chernigiv midway between Kiev and Ukraine's Belarussian border. In a balancing act between tradition and modernity, she is studying for a career in law while campaigning for a strong Roma youth movement in Ukraine.

I was alone and different from the others in school. I figured I ought to be careful there, as schools seemed to be a mirror of a tough outside world. Somehow I waded my way through school and found that my identity included many different parts.

My childhood in a big, happy Roma family is undeniable and I'm proud of my ethnic background. But I also like to study, be independent and professional, and share my thoughts with others. What's wrong with being a Roma human rights activist who likes fantasy books, listens to rock and loves dark chocolate? Still I'm afraid to be myself just anywhere. Even within my community there are expectations to be a wife, the perfect daughter-in-law, and they pepper me with questions like "When is Aliona going to stop studying and get married?"

For a "smart, modern" girl who studies at university away from home, life is full of surprises and challenges. Attending the law faculty in Kiev was my dream and here I am now, growing day by day. I'm particularly proud of my participation in preparing a toolbox against discrimination for Stories That Move, a youth empowerment initiative led by Anne Frank House. By participating in this kind of storytelling, I found a generation of teenagers from many different backgrounds who value diversity as much as I do. The project echoed my own awareness of the historical injustices experienced by Roma in Ukraine and highlighted how I could amplify our history, making it relevant to today and not allowing our voices to be silenced. Together with other Roma students, we produced and directed a video, Our Future Without Discrimination (Kale Jakha, Kirke Jasve), based on a poem by Ilona Doroga. This attempt to creatively express our feelings about discrimination and human rights violations won first prize in a competition about Roma and discrimination.

My advice to anyone: work hard and knock at the door, for behind it you will find yourself.



Finance and Administration

ORGANIZATION OF ROMA EDUCATION FUND

The network of Roma Education Fund consists of four entities (REF Entities) that have been established as legally separate foundations in Switzerland, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The REF Entities cooperate based on a memorandum of understanding to achieve their shared primary objective to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. Each REF Entity has a separate board with independent members for their decisions. REF Entities include:

- Roma Education Fund Switzerland established in 2005
- Roma Education Fund Hungary established in 2006
- Roma Education Fund Romania established in 2009
- Roma Education Fund Slovakia established in 2014

Roma Education Fund Hungary opened branch offices in Serbia and in Montenegro, the figures of which are presented in the books of Roma Education Fund Hungary.

SUMMARY OF REF FINANCIALS

In 2016 REF provided €7.3 million to Roma organizations, Roma education-related projects and beneficiaries of REF educational programs. Eighty-seven percent of the REF budget is spent on programs and beneficiaries in 16 countries.

From total overall funding of €9.9 million REF spent €2.0 million on new grants contracted in its grant program in 13 countries and €2.1 million on tertiary scholarship programs for Roma students in 16 countries. Altogether REF spending under these two programs in 2016 was allocated to the main educational models of REF as follows:

Sources of funds and spending of REF foundations in 2016 in EUR

	REF SWITZERLAND	REF HUNGARY	REF ROMANIA	REF SLOVAKIA
Opening foundation capital	329,826	224,508	(1,021,443)	(150,556)
Third party donor income	6,641,129	1,118,018	2,692,252	12,000
Other income	63,275	23,252	20,927	1,980
Total sources	7,034,230	1,365,778	1,691,736	(136,576)
Transfers within REF network		1,191,179	522,360	350,801
TOTAL SOURCES WITH TRANSFERS:	7,034,230	2,556,957	2,214,096	214,225
Grant program	1,556,429	123,039	7,523	273,314
Tertiary scholarship program	1,890,497	171,120	41,500	8,285
Own educational projects	933	421,921	1,090,476	52,352
Capacity building, policy development and communications	277,589	428,920	451,460	0
Administrative expenses	173,941	872,181	0	0
Other expenses	404,441	15,832	43,769	0
Accumulated capital	440,896	415,857	579,368	(119,726)
TOTAL SPENDING	4,744,726	2,448,870	2,214,096	214,225
Transfers within REF network	2,289,504	108,087	0	0
TOTAL SPENDING WITH TRANSFERS	7,034,230	2,556,957	2,214,096	214,225

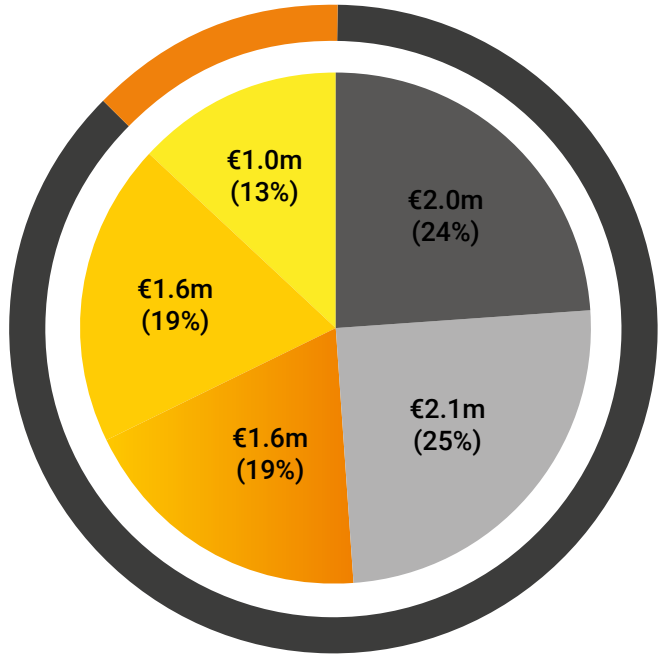
Commitments of REF foundations in 2016 by educational model

MODEL	NUMBER OF NEW PROJECTS CONTRACTED IN 2016	FUNDS COMMITTED IN 2016 IN EUR
Early Childhood Education	19	644,068
Primary Education	13	433,182
Secondary Education	3	448,488
Tertiary Education	n/a ¹⁶	2,500,594
Adult Education	1	45,375
TOTAL:		4,071,707

In 2016 REF developed and implemented eight external projects from funding provided, inter alia, by the European Union, Norway Grants, KfW, OSCE and VELUX FOUNDATIONS with a total spending of €1.6 million. A further €1.6 million was spent on technical assistance, capacity building and advocacy. The total administrative expenses, €1.0 million, represent 13 percent of total spending.

2016 spending by program¹⁷ (EURm, %)

- Grant Program
- Tertiary Education Scholarship Program
- Implementation of educational projects
- Technicalassistance,capacitybuilding,advocacy
- Administrative expenses
- 13%(EUR 1.0m) spent on administration
- 87% of total spending (EUR 7.3m) provided to Roma organizations, Roma education - related projects and beneficiaries of REF educational programs



Key events in REF Network in 2016

REF Switzerland (REF CH)

REF Switzerland provided €1.6 million for grants in the framework of the project support program and €1.9 million for the tertiary education scholarship program. Besides program costs, expenses of technical assistance, advocacy and capacity building, REF Switzerland funded educational projects implemented by other REF Entities (including the secondary scholarship programs in Montenegro and Slovakia, the RomaVersitas program in Romania) and the operations of the headquarters of the REF Network in Budapest, Hungary, provided capacity building and core support to the operations of REF Romania, and secured funding for the various programs implemented by REF Slovakia.

In 2015 REF Switzerland provided a €570,000 recoverable grant for REF Romania to finance the full implementation of ESF projects. Due to accumulated project expenses of ESF projects implemented by REF Romania but not covered by ESF and REF contributions – such as expenses declared as ineligible by the management authority and foreign exchange losses suffered on financing these projects – it is possible that REF Romania will not be able to repay the full amount of this recoverable grant. In order to fully reflect this risk, an additional provision of €350,000 was created. At the same time, a part of the provisions created in the previous years were used to reflect the value of the recoverable grant portfolio provided to civil society organizations to help their implementation of EU-funded educational projects.

In 2016, in an effort to improve the efficiency and transparency of operations of the REF Network, REF management introduced a comprehensive risk management framework, reviewed and improved its donor reporting practices and key financial processes, and started the preparations for strengthening and restructuring the operations and cooperation of REF Network Entities. These efforts will continue in 2017 and will be supported by the further development of the IT platforms serving REF programs and operations.

REF Hungary (REF HU)

Besides managing the core programs of REF and being the headquarters of the REF Network, REF Hungary was active in the implementation of a number of educational projects financed by various donors through its offices in Hungary, Serbia and Montenegro. These actions included:

- Signing of a funding agreement with KfW to improve the education and integration opportunities for Roma in Serbia in the framework of a three-year project with a total budget of €2.4m
- Completion of the second phase of an early childhood education project at Konik Camp, Montenegro in partnership with Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V., and signing of a funding and partnership agreement related to the continuation of the program for the next two academic years
- Completion of the secondary scholarship program in Serbia funded by OSCE
- Continuing the implementation of the HEIM research project funded by the Executive Research Agency of the European Commission
- Continuing the VELUX scholarship project for Roma students studying in pedagogy faculties in Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia funded by the VELUX FOUNDATIONS and extension of its geographical scope to Romania
- Partnering with REF Romania in the implementation of the Ready, Set, Go! project in Romania, funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, and aiming at providing comprehensive early childhood education and care services in marginalized communities
- Implementation of the secondary scholarship program in Montenegro funded by the Ministry of Human Rights and Minorities and REF

REF Romania (REF RO)

In 2016 REF Romania fully closed and reported the implementation of three large-scale educational projects funded by the European Union. REF Romania was particularly active in the field of advocacy and lobbying for improvement and change relevant policies in Romania.

In addition, REF Romania continued the implementation of Ready, Set, Go! – Increasing Early Childhood Development Outcomes for Roma Children, which targets early childhood development outcomes for some 1,400 Roma children. The Ready, Set, Go! project is supported by a grant through the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, in the framework of the RO 25 Poverty Alleviation Programme in Romania.The total grant amount is €2.43 million.

REF Romania started the implementation of the RomaVersitas project in Bucharest and coordinated REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Programs in Romania.

16. The Grant program had six RomaVersitas projects committed within its tertiary education model in 2016; this education intervention also includes the beneficiaries of REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program – 1,269 students for 2016-17 academic year.

17. Not including provisions, FX losses and other expenses; ratio of administrative expenses to total spending including these costs is 11%.

REF Slovakia (REF SK)

In 2016 REF Slovakia continued implementation of REF’s secondary scholarship program to improve the academic performance of disadvantaged secondary school students; to increase their attendance, graduation and transition rates from secondary to tertiary education; and to decrease their dropout rate. Besides this project, REF Slovakia participated in the implementation of the VELUX scholarship project for Roma students studying in pedagogy faculties in partnership with REF Hungary in Slovakia and Czech Republic, and provided local coordination for REF’s Tertiary Education Scholarship Program and country facilitator services to the Grant Program managed by REF Switzerland.

Fundraising

REF was particularly active in the application for new calls funded by the EU/IPA and other institutional donors in 2016:

- REF Hungary entered into a financing agreement with KfW, the German Development Bank, to implement a three-year project, Improved Education and Integration Opportunities for Roma in Serbia (Phase 1), with a total budget of €2,373,950, aimed at supporting REF to improve access to education and employment opportunities for Roma in the Republic of Serbia.
- The Ministry of Finance of Macedonia awarded a second grant of €191,343 for School Completion as Pathway towards Employment funded by IPA, to implement an adult educational project to promote integration of Roma adults into the labor market and combat gender and ethnic discrimination.
- REF Hungary signed a partnership agreement with Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V. to participate in the implementation of Promotion and Protection of Human Rights of Roma, Egyptians and Other Vulnerable Groups funded by the European Union. The role of REF in the project is to coordinate and implement activities and actions for early childhood education and care and quality, inclusive education, with a total budget for REF of €310,441.
- Central European Initiative (CEI) Cooperation Fund awarded a grant of €38,550 to co-fund an international knowledge exchange project focusing on the secondary scholarship programs supported by REF.

Donations received by REF Entities in EUR, 2012-2016

DONORS	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
RECEIVED BY REF SWITZERLAND						
Council of Europe		7,788				7,788
DFID United Kingdom			50,000	50,000		100,000
ERSTE Group AG			500,000			500,000
European Commission		1,808				1,808
EU: AGS project		16,558				16,558
EVZ - Erinnerung	179,400		221,000	234,000	262,000	896,400
Fundación Secretariado Gitano	5,965	7,936				13,901
HH Management				181,159		181,159
Individuals		450		5	197	652
Karl Popper Foundation		87,928				87,928
Mirabaud wedding donations			35,466			35,466
Mirabaud Pierre				1,000		1,000
Morgan Stanley			197			197
Network of European Foundation	120,000	155,072		119,600		394,672
Norwegian Family	28,135	24,882	21,342			74,359
Porticus				100,000	90,000	190,000
Salzburg Global Seminar	1,026					1,026
SIDA Sweden		1,042,250		542,160	503,894 ¹⁸	2,088,304
Soros-Bolton wedding		33,469	13,345			46,814
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation	800,000	700,000	350,000	832,618	850,000	3,532,618
Open Society Institute	6,584,344	4,363,123	2,094,538	4,492,342	4,916,294	22,450,641
Ostrava Municipality		6,200	6,200	6,200	7,200	25,800
The Velux Foundations				1,034		1,034
UNICEF			57,458			57,458
US Embassy, Slovakia				1,677		1,677
WB Community Fund	9,717	8,375	5,776	11,838	11,544	47,250
World Bank IBRD	703,915	290,366	291,925			1,286,206
World Vision				4,565		4,565
Total received by REF Switzerland	8,432,502	6,746,205	3,647,247	6,578,198	6,641,129	32,045,281
RECEIVED BY REF HUNGARY						
American House Family	4,902	5,112				10,014
Bernard Van Leer Foundation	68,448		68,111			136,559
CFCD Macedonia					81,821	81,821
European Commission - DG REGIO	236,195					236,195
European Commission - Research Executive Agency				40,622		40,622
Fundación Secretariado Gitano	6,006					6,006
HELP HILFE	113,537	70,827	283,934	118,769	75,721	662,788
KfW					799,461	799,461
Bureau of Education Montenegro					8,418	8,418
Ministry for Human and Minorities Montenegro			76,242		79,657	155,899
Ministry of Slovak Republic			5,955	54,045		60,000
OSCE			46,313	86,438	59,581	192,332
REF Romania (ESF/EEA projects)			44,709	27,399	3,727	75,835
Tempus Foundation	788	192				980
THE VELUX FOUNDATIONS			92,435	245,861		338,296
World Bank IBRD	8,184					8,184
Other donors, Individuals		11,124	26,401	7,118	9,632	54,275
Total received by REF Hungary	438,060	87,255	644,100	580,252	1,118,018	2,867,685

18. Donation from SIDA is the net of donation received under the current funding agreement of EUR 736,077 and a repayment related to the previous funding agreement between SIDA and REF of EUR 232,183

Donations received by REF Entities in EUR, 2012-2016

DONORS	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	Total
RECEIVED BY REF ROMANIA						
Fundación Secretariado Gitano	3,811	1,400				5,211
Romanian Management Authority - as partner	149,155	406,976				555,951
Romanian Management Authority - as lead entity	556,629	3,233,296	1,050,075	3,052,751	1,648,918 ¹⁹	9,551,959
Norway Grants					1,030,186	1,030,186
UNICEF	13,330					13,330
Other donors, Individuals	100	23			13,148	896,400
Total received by REF Romania	723,025	3,641,515	1,050,075	3,052,751	2,692,252	11,159,618
RECEIVED BY REF SLOVAKIA						
Ministry of Interior, Slovakia					12,000	12,000
Total received by REF Slovakia	0	0	0	0	12,000	12,000
TOTAL DONATIONS RECEIVED						
	9,593,587	10,474,975	7,344,098	9,850,702	10,463,399	46,084,584

SUMMARY OF SIGNIFICANT ACCOUNTING POLICIES

1 Bookkeeping and reporting requirements

In 2016 REF Slovakia continued implementation of REF’s secondary scholarship program to improve the academic performance of disadvantaged secondary school students; to increase their attendance, graduation and transition rates from secondary to tertiary education; and to decrease their dropout rate. Besides this project, REF Slovakia participated in the implementation of the VELUX scholarship project for Roma students studying in pedagogy faculties in partnership with REF Hungary in Slovakia and Czech Republic, and provided local coordination for REF’s Tertiary Education Scholarship program and country facilitator services to the Grant Program managed by REF Switzerland.

2 Main accounting principles

The books of the REF Entities are maintained in local currency as legally required, with the exception of REF Switzerland where the books are maintained in € since its functional currency is EUR. Most of the financial transactions of REF Entities are denominated in EUR. For better comparability, financial statements in the annual report are presented in EUR.

Donation income is recognized at nominal value when received and presented on a cash basis, while promised donation income is not recorded for prudency reasons.

The program and grant expenses paid are recognized at nominal value. Already known costs are accrued. Grants awarded by the Project Support (Grant) and Tertiary Education Scholarship Programs are presented on total contractual value in the year they are awarded. Other program related expenses are recognized in the period to which they are related.

Administrative expenses include cost of operations, purchases, cost of contractors, salaries of administrative staff and their travel expenditures not directly related to the programs. Administrative expenses are recognized at nominal value, already known costs are accrued.

In case of projects implemented in partnerships and REF is the main project implementer responsible for reporting the entire cost of the project to the donor, all expenses related to partners are presented as REF expenditure in the financial statement.

Tangible and intangible assets are carried at their costs less depreciation and any accumulated impairment loss. The useful life of property rights, intellectual products, the qualification and classification of fixed assets are determined according to the applicable national rules by each REF Entity. The depreciable amount of a depreciable asset is allocated on a systematic basis using straight line method to each accounting period during the useful life of the asset. The fixed assets above a certain value, defined by the applicable national rule of each REF Entity, are accounted as depreciation in lump sum when put in use. REF Entities have to apply extraordinary depreciation by devaluation when the asset’s usability is permanently reduced, or if it has become redundant and/or damaged. The foundations do not use the revaluation model of assets.

Receivables are recorded at nominal value less any accumulated impairment loss.

¹⁹. Including reversal of previous year income.

REF Entities statement of expenditure over income, 2016 and 2015

		REF SWITZERLAND		REF HUNGARY		REF ROMANIA		REF SLOVAKIA	
		2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
		EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR
INCOME									
Donations received from third parties		6,641,129	6,578,198	1,118,018	580,252	2,692,252	3,052,751	12,000	
Donations received from REF Switzerland				1,191,179	1,505,972	479,668	141,569	285,025	179,095
Donations received from REF Hungary						42,692		65,776	12,859
Project Support and other Program Refund		63,229	93,443	663	0				
Other income			0	7,594	1,253			1,980	
Total Income		6,704,358	6,671,642	2,317,454	2,087,477	3,214,612	3,194,320	364,781	191,954
EXPENDITURE									
Project Support Program (Grants)	1	(1,556,429)	(1,750,126)	(123,039)	(67,663)	(7,523)		(273,314)	(253,270)
Tertiary Education Scholarship Program	2	(1,890,497)	(2,131,612)	(171,120)	(228,410)	(41,500)	(13,737)	(8,285)	(2,701)
Communications	3	(40,687)	(132,536)	(103,994)	(94,673)				
Policy development and capacity building	4	(236,902)	(245,357)	(324,926)	(270,024)				
A Good Start and complimentary projects	5		(83,373)		(7,880)				
REF Romania - ESF projects	6			(596)	(18,458)	(144,429)	(3,245,753)		
REF Romania - Ready, Set, Go	7			(18,054)	(17,879)	(934,863)	(305,218)		
REF Romania and its partners capacity building	8					(451,460)	(102,647)		
Project Support and other Program Refund	9				(18,198)				
Konik Camp project in Montenegro	10			(106,410)	(218,285)				
UNICEF	11		(7,459)						
Velux project	12	(933)		(72,573)	(51,551)	(11,184)		(52,352)	(45,687)
OSCE-TARI project	13			(58,449)	(111,971)				
HEIM - EC Reseach Executive Agency	14			(31,285)	(26,588)				
IPA Macedonia - Fostering Social Inclusion	15			(83,250)					
KfW - Improved education and integration, Serbia	16			(51,304)					
Grants to Roma Education Fund, Hungary		(1,524,811)	(1,346,301)						
Grants to Roma Education Fund, Slovakia		(285,025)	(179,095)	(65,998)	(12,859)				
Grants to Roma Education Fund, Romania		(479,668)	(143,196)	(42,089)	(9,362)				
Total Programs and Grants		(6,014,952)	(6,019,055)	(1,253,087)	(1,153,801)	(1,590,959)	(3,667,355)	(333,951)	(301,657)
Administrative expenses		(173,941)	(128,371)	(872,181)	(683,357)				(1,137)
Provisions to cover risks in loans and receivables		(350,000)	(400,000)						(1.187)
Net operating results		165,465	124,216	192,186	250,319	1,623,653	(473,035)	30,830	(110,840)
Interest income		46	392	426	497	3	3	1	5
Interest cost		(20,849)	(17,606)	(3)	(588)				
Gain on foreign exchange			191,661	14,569	1,017	20,924	17,895		
Losses on foreign exchange		(33,592)		(17,611)	(10,937)	(29,615)	(60,864)		
Net financial results		(54,395)	174,447	(2,619)	(10,011)	(8,688)	(42,966)	1	5
EXCESS OF EXPENDITURE OVER INCOME									
		111,070	298,662	189,567	240,308	1,614,965	(516,001)	30,830	(110,835)

REF Entities balance sheet on December 31, 2016, and December 31, 2015

	REF SWITZERLAND		REF HUNGARY		REF ROMANIA		REF SLOVAKIA	
	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015	2016	2015
	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR	EUR
Cash at banks	3,278,445	2,513,648	1,191,277	272,266	386,204	751,394	39,403	8,791
Receivables	0	0	57,945	51,772	1,580,746	2,082,725	18,731	41,027
Loan to REF Entities	575,000	875,000	0	1,500,000	0	0	0	0
Inventories	0	0	7,697	7,751	420,632	0	0	0
Other current assets	440	3,549	48,101	41,515	0	0	250	250
Total current assets	3,853,885	3,392,197	1,305,020	1,873,304	2,387,582	2,834,119	58,384	50,069
Recoverable Grants	0	360,841	0	0	0	0	0	0
Long-term loan to REF Romania	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Accrued income	56,589	24,795	0	0	0	0	0	0
Intangible assets	0	0	495	2,727	0	0	0	0
Tangible assets	0	0	15,632	14,273	10,189	13,526	0	0
Total long-term assets	56,589	385,636	16,127	17,000	10,189	13,526	0	0
TOTAL ASSETS	3,910,474	3,777,833	1,321,147	1,890,304	2,397,772	2,847,645	58,384	50,069
Liabilities			118,659	73,892	2,881	45,425	16,078	9,024
Accrued expenses	24,000	29,000	101,631	106,904	0	0	140,644	117,735
Provisions for projects granted	3,014,501	2,980,589	0	0	0	0	21,388	73,866
Accounts payable to partners	0	0	0	0	1,245,749	1,661,023	0	0
Loan from Council of Europe Development Bank	0	0	680,000	1,180,000	0	0	0	0
Long-term loans from REF Switzerland	0	0	5,000	305,000	569,774	569,774	0	0
Long-term loans from REF Hungary	0	0	0	0	0	1,500,000	0	0
Long-term loans from Agentia de Monitorizare o Presei	0	0	0	0	0	92,866	0	0
Other provision	431,077	438,418	0	0	0	0	0	0
Total liabilities and provisions	3,469,578	3,448,007	905,290	1,665,796	1,818,404	3,869,088	178,110	200,625
Foundation capital as of January 1	329,826	31,164	224,508	(13,146)	(1,021,443)	(519,376)	(150,556)	(39,721)
Restatement of Foundation capital	0	0	0	0	0	0		
Excess of expenditure over income	111,070	298,662	189,567	240,308	1,614,965	(516,001)	30,830	(110,835)
Year-end translation difference	0	0	1,782	(2,654)	(14,154)	13,934	0	0
Foundation capital as of December 31	440,896	329,826	415,857	224,508	579,368	(1,021,443)	(119,726)	(150,556)
TOTAL LIABILITIES AND FOUNDATION CAPITAL	3,910,474	3,777,833	1,321,147	1,890,304	2,397,772	2,847,645	58,384	50,069

Notes to the financial statements

1 Project Support (Grant) Program

In the framework of the Project Support Program, REF Entities provide grants to consortia of civil society and public institutions to implement education reform projects at all education levels in the Decade of Roma Inclusion Countries.

2 Tertiary Education Scholarship Program

The target of this Program is to provide scholarships for tertiary level Roma students. The Program consists of four components and additional support.

- Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP).
- Law and Humanities Program (LHP)
- Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)
- Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)
- Professional Development Fund (PDF)

3 Communication

REF’s communications team promotes the exchange of knowledge and experiences, and communicating information on policies and programs that support Roma inclusion in education systems and represents one of the major pillars of REF’s activities through conferences, workshops and publications.

4 Policy Development and Capacity Building

The target of this project is to support studies, technical assistance, strategy development and learning activities to strengthen dialogue with governments and civil society on education reform and Roma inclusion.

5 A Good Start and Complementary Projects

The target of this project is to ensure that Roma and other poor and excluded children have access to quality early childhood education and care services in Hungary, Macedonia, Romania and Slovakia. The project has been completed in 2015.

6 REF Romania – Projects Supported by European Social Funds (ESF)

REF Romania implemented three educational projects funded by the European Social Funds and REF Switzerland. They were successfully closed by December 31, 2015 and fully reported in 2016.

7 REF Romania – Ready, Set, Go!

The project targets early childhood development outcomes for some 1,400 Roma children residing in six of Romania’s most disadvantaged counties with the highest absolute number and highest share of Roma population of preschool age. The project is supported by a grant from Norway through the Norwegian Financial Mechanism, in the framework of the RO 25 Poverty Alleviation Programme in Romania.

8 REF Romania and its Partners’ Capacity Building

This project provides capacity building and financial support for REF Romania and its partners for those activities, which are necessary for project implementation but not covered by ESF.

9 Progress Project in Slovakia

The project aims at investing in early childhood development by promoting innovation and social integration of Roma in Slovakia. REF had an advocacy role in the project in order to share its experiences and knowledge on early childhood development. The project was completed in 2015.

10 Konik Camp Project in Montenegro

This is an assistance program for the integration and return of displaced persons and residents of Konik Camp in which REF implements the educational component through provision of early childhood development programs. Phase 2 of the project was completed in 2016. REF has signed a partnership and funding agreement to participate in the continuation of the project.

11 UNICEF Project

The objective of the project is to support desegregation of Roma children and improve data collection on Roma children in Moldova including study visits to Bulgaria and Serbia. This program was completed in 2015.

12 VELUX Project

This project supports the increase in the number of female kindergarten teachers of Roma origin in the regions of Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia with high numbers of Roma residents. The program will run until approximately the end of 2022.

13 OSCE TARI Project

The project objective is to decrease dropout rate among Roma secondary school students at risk of dropping out in three main regions of Serbia. The program has been completed by the end of 2015-2016 academic year and is continued from funding provided by KfW (please see note 16).

14 HEIM Project

This is a research/innovation project with a focus on how principles of equity and inclusion can be applied to internationalization strategies and programs in higher education, and on developing research and innovation capacity in this field. It focuses on the Roma community in Europe as a critical example of a marginalized group, at both staff and student levels. The project is implemented in a partnership between three universities (Sussex, Urmeå and Seville) and REF.

15 IPA Macedonia – Fostering Social Inclusion

Improving Roma Employment through Education and Training is implemented in five locations in Macedonia together with two implementation partners. The aim of the project is increasing the long-term employability of marginalized Roma communities through adult education and training, literacy programs, and increased access to early childhood education and care. The project is financed by the Ministry of Finance of Macedonia as contracting authority through IPA – Human Resource Development budget in the framework of external actions of the European Union.

16 KfW – Improved Education and Integration Serbia

In the framework of the project of Improved Education and Integration Opportunities for Roma in Serbia (Phase 1), KfW supports REF to improve access to education and employment opportunities for Roma in the Republic of Serbia. This project is composed of three components: (1) the promotion of secondary school education for Roma youth, (2) the promotion of employability of graduates of the REF secondary school program and (3) the promotion of the re-integration of migrants returning to Serbia from Germany.

REF staff pause from work for a group photograph.
Photo © Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas



REF Network Governing Boards

REF SWITZERLAND FOUNDATION

Andrzej Mirga (Chair) is a Polish Roma who headed the Contact Point for Roma and Sinti Issues at the OSCE's Warsaw-based Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) from 2006 till 2013. He is also a long-term associate of the Project on Ethnic Relations and has served as an expert on the Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers of the Council of Europe, and later as its chair, in addition to several official posts in Poland. Mirga was appointed to the position of Chair in spring 2015.

William Lazarus Bila comes from the private sector with over 20 years project management experience coordinating with stakeholders in large multinational organizations, transforming complex financial and operational information into practical recommendations across a variety of functions such as corporate strategy, finance, and human resources. He currently serves as President of La Voix des Roms in France and graduated with a BS in Finance and International Business from the Stern School of Business at New York University and an MBA from the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago.

Dr. Nicoleta Bitu is the director of the Centre for Romani Studies of the National School for Political and Administrative Sciences. She has been active in the field of human and women's rights for over 24 years, at the forefront of the European mobilization of Romani women activists and of advocacy for the rights of Roma. A recognized and published expert in her field, she has worked for Romani CRISS, the Open Society Foundations, the Council of Europe and Romano ButiQ. Her work has provoked the Romani and feminist movements to think and act based on the universality of human rights when it comes to Romani women. She is currently involved in initiatives on Romani arts and culture such as the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture and contributed to establishing the Museum of Roma Culture and Documentation Centre on Roma in Romania.

YvanaENZler recently retired as Swiss Ambassador to Sweden and was reappointed to the REF Board in 2016. She previously served as representative of the Swiss government on the REF Board from 2008 to 2012 while Swiss Ambassador to Albania. She joined the Swiss diplomatic service in 1979 and was posted in Berne (1979–80), Brussels (1980–81), Berne (1981–88), Rome (1988–91), Washington (1991–95), and again Berne (1995–98). From 1998 to 2002 she was Deputy Head of Mission at the Swiss Embassy in Sarajevo and, from 2002 to 2007, Head of the Swiss Liaison Office in Pristina (Kosovo). She holds an MA in Political Science from the University of Lausanne (Switzerland) and a M.A.L.S. from Georgetown University in Washington, D.C.

Dr. Kinga Göncz (Vice Chair) is the chair of Roma Advisory Board of Open Society Foundations and a visiting professor at Central European University School of Public Policy. She has held different positions in the Hungarian Government between 2002 and 2009, including Minister of Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities and Minister of Foreign Affairs, and she was a member of the European Parliament from 2009 to 2014.

Livia Járóka, PhD, is an anthropologist who researched Roma youth identity at University College London. A Chevening and Wenner Gren Scholar, she is a former Member of the European Parliament (2004–2014) and author of the European Framework Strategy for Roma Inclusion in 2011. She received the MEP Award in Justice and Fundamental Rights in 2006 and 2013 and was selected as a Young Global Leader (WEF) in 2006. Livia left the board in mid-2016.

Lisa Jordan is Senior Director of Strategy and Learning at the Porticus Foundation. She has worked on strengthening democracy and civil society through positions with NGOs, governments and private philanthropic foundations for twenty years. Ms. Jordan previously served for nine years with the Ford Foundation as Acting Director and Deputy Director of the Governance and Civil Society Unit. She holds a Master’s Degree in Development Studies from the Institute of Social Studies in The Hague, Netherlands.

Pierre Mirel served at the European Commission 1981-2013, first on trade relations with “emerging” countries, then on the EU’s fifth enlargement (1990-2004) and on EU relations with Croatia and Turkey (2004-2006). He was Director for the Western Balkans until he retired from the EC at the end of 2013. He is a lecturer at Sciences Politiques-Paris on EU enlargement and neighborhood policies. His most recent publication on these themes is *Géopolitique de la Démocratisation: l’Europe et ses ‘voisinages’* (Presses de Sciences Po, Paris, 2014).

Gábor Ormosy (Treasurer) is the CFO of Geosol Group, a renewable energy source provider to power generators in Hungary. He is president of the Non-Profit Partner Foundation which was established to provide specialized advisory services to non-profit organizations on a non-profit basis in order to strengthen their sustainability through forming executable strategy, streamlining operations and focusing fundraising. He was instrumental to the success of MAG, a subsidiary of the Hungarian Development Bank, working with EU Funds, and also was responsible for restructuring two units of Wallis Group. He was appointed in summer 2016.

Mariam Sherman is the Director of Strategy and Operations in the Europe and Central Asia Region of the World Bank. She has occupied several positions in the World Bank in Washington and abroad, and previously worked for NGOs on programs in the Middle East and South Africa. She received a MS in Development Management from the American University in Washington D.C., and a BA in Middle Eastern Studies (Arabic and Modern He- brew) from Manchester University in England.

Sybille Suter currently serves as Swiss Ambassador to Macedonia and represents the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC) on the REF Governing Board. She previously served as Head of the SDC’s Latin American Division. She received an LLM from the University of Bern. She joined the REF Board as representative of the Swiss government in mid-2016.

Alexander Wittwer is currently Ambassador of Switzerland to Slovakia, and most recently Ambassador in Albania. Since joining Switzerland’s Federal Department of Foreign Affairs in 1987, he has worked in various positions on three continents. A lawyer by training, Mr. Wittwer was the representative of the Swiss government on the REF Board until mid-2016.

REF HUNGARY FOUNDATION

Dr. Kinga Göncz, also serving as Vice Chair on the REF Switzerland Board, has been appointed as Chair of REF Hungary.

Gábor Ormosy, also serving as Treasurer on the REF Switzerland Board, has been appointed to the Board of REF Hungary.

Gyula Várallyay is a former senior staff member of the World Bank; he served as Interim Director of REF on two occasions.

REF ROMANIA FOUNDATION

William Lazarus Bila, also serving on the REF Switzerland Board, has been appointed as Chair of the REF Romania Foundation Board.

Dr. Nicoleta Bitu, also serving on the REF Switzerland Board, has been appointed as a member of REF Romania Foundation Board.

Dezideriu Gergely is a Romanian Roma and former director of the European Roma Rights Center. A human rights lawyer since 2001, he has held positions in governmental and nongovernmental institutions.

Margareta (Magda) Matache is a Roma rights activist from Romania. In 2012 she was awarded a Hauser post- doctoral fellowship at the FXB Center, where currently she works as an instructor. From 2005 to 2012 Matache was the executive director of Roma CRISS.

REF SLOVAKIA FOUNDATION

William Lazarus Bila, also serving on the REF Switzerland Board, has been appointed as Chair of REF Slovakia Foundation Board.

Lydia Gabcova is an independent Roma consultant specializing in Roma youth empowerment and participation in Slovakia. She currently advises the Roma Institute in Bratislava on ESF-funded projects.

Dr. Ingrid Kosova is the founder and director of Quo Vadis, a multicultural Montessori school in Zvolen, Slovakia.

REF Network Foundations and Branch Offices

REF HEADQUARTERS IN BUDAPEST, HUNGARY

Nadir Redzepi, Executive Director	Radoslav Kuzmanov, Scholarship Program Officer
Erzsébet Báder, Scholarship Program Officer	Zsuzsa Melicher, Finance Officer
Tom Bass, Communication Officer	Anasztázia Nagy, Program Officer
Azam Bayburdi, Administrative Officer	Beata Bislim Olahova, Grant Program Manager
Dan Pavel Doghi, Higher Education Program Manager	Szilvia Pallaghy, Program Officer (till mid-2016)
Nevsija Durmish, Program Officer	Jozsef Petrovics, IT Officer
Stela Garaz, Program and Studies Officer (on maternity leave)	Beáta Prokaj, Senior Finance Officer
Vivien Gyuris, Program Officer	Marius Tabá, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer (till late 2016)
Svetlana Hristova, Communication Manager	Ionica Toader, Finance Coordinator
Merziha Idrizi, Scholarship Program Officer	Péter Tóth, Chief Financial Officer
Anastasia Jelasity, Fundraising & Communication Officer	

REF MONTENEGRO

Marijana Blecic, Konik Program Coordinator in Montenegro (from late 2016)
Andrija Djukanovic, Scholarship and Mentorship Program Coordinator in Montenegro
Dragana Radoman, Konik Program Coordinator in Montenegro (till mid-2016)

REF ROMANIA

Claudia Lixandru, National Director	Daniel Ganea, Educational Expert
Roxana Claudia Cacina, Project Assistant	Claudiu Ivan, Research
Monica Florina Calin, Implementation Expert	Mihaela Juncu, Accountant
Mihaela Canea (Velicu), Project Assistant	Maria Ursu, Project Manager
Gabriela Chiriac, Accountant	Andreea Nedelcu, Fundraising Expert
Lavinia Ciuta, RomaVersitas Coordinator	Elena Radu, VELUX Coordinator
Ionela Cristea, Program Director	Carmen Roncea, Financial Expert
Marian Daragiu, Project Manager	Mirela Spanu, Financial Manager
Elena Gabriela Dinca, Legal Expert	Adrian Tabá, Monitoring and Evaluation Assistant
Danut Dumitru, Advocacy Director	Ioan Tanase, Monitoring and Evaluation Expert
Nicu Dumitru, RHSP Coordinator	Daniela Vlasceanu, Financial
Amalia Florea, RMUSP Coordinator	

REF SERBIA

Natasa Kocic-Rakocevic, Country Program Manager for Serbia and Montenegro

Marija Aleksandrović, Local Coordinator for Vojvodina

Alen Demiri, Local Coordinator for South Serbia

Darko Kerekes, Program Administrator for REF Serbia (till mid-2016)

Radenka Vasiljević, Local Coordinator for Central Serbia (Program Administrator in late 2016)

Jelica Nikolic, RMUSP and RHSP country coordinator

REF SLOVAKIA

Stanislava Dzurikova, Office Manager, Scholarship Country Coordinator for Slovakia

Viktor Teru, Country Facilitator for Slovakia

REF COUNTRY FACILITATORS

Marsela Taho, Albania and Kosovo

Yveta Kenety, Czech Republic

Aida Mihajlovic, Bosnia and Hercegovina

Dr. Zsolt Kalanyos, Hungary

Ognyan Isaev, Bulgaria

Erxhan Galushi, Kosovo

Siniša-Senad Musić, Croatia

Senad Mustafov, Macedonial

REF SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM COUNTRY COORDINATORS

Marsela Taho, Albania

Nadejda Raicu, Moldova

Merziha Idrizi, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia and Montenegro

Amalia Florea, Romania

Orlin Orlinov, Bulgaria

Nicu Dumitru, Romania

Yveta Kenety, Czech Republic

Maria Musatova, Russia

Erzsebet Bader, Hungary and Roma International Scholar Program

Jelica Nikolic, Serbia

Erxhan Galushi, Kosovo

Halil Ibrahim Nurbel, Turkey

Ajsel Amet, Macedonia

Serhiy Ponomaryov, Ukraine

Viorica Volovei, Moldova (on maternity leave)

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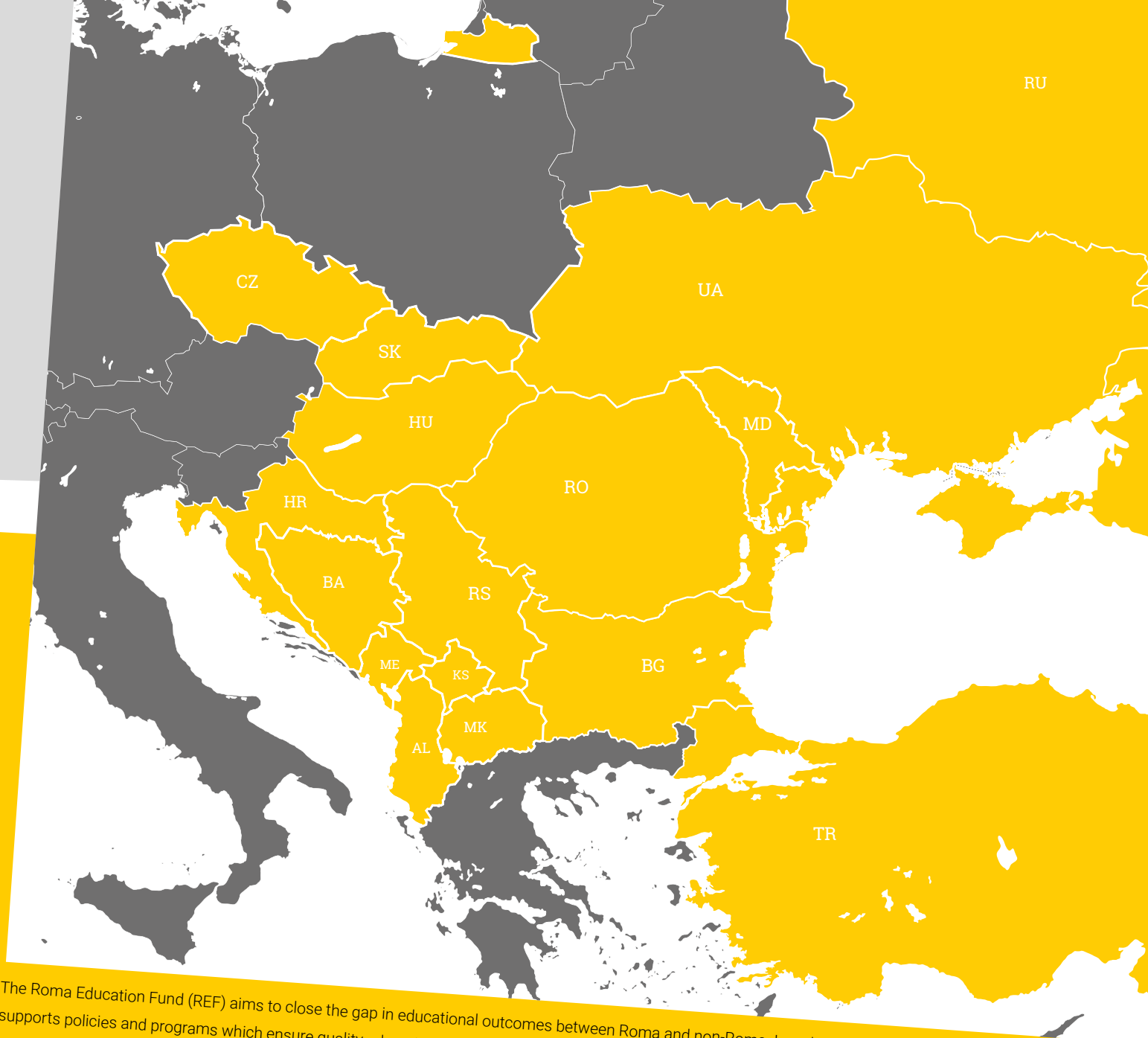
THANK YOU!

We would like to thank all of the individuals and civil society organizations with whom we have partnered in 2016. The work we do would not be possible without the enthusiastic participation of children, parents, teachers, schools, government officials and policymakers.

Thanks to our supporters for making all our achievements possible in 2016!

- Bernard van Leer
- Central European Initiative
- City of Ostrava
- Council of Europe Development Bank
- European Commission
- EVZ Foundation “Remembrance, Responsibility and Future”
- Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development of Germany
- Government of Montenegro, Ministry for Human and Minority Rights
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- Help, Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.
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- University of Sussex





The Roma Education Fund (REF) aims to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma. In order to achieve this goal, REF supports policies and programs which ensure quality education for Roma, including the desegregation of education systems.

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