

# 2016 *annual* report



## Roma Education Fund

Egzona Hodiq 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.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Jetmir Idrizi





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.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Andras Farkas

# Chairman's Message

Dear Reader,

REF is uniquely placed as a foundation to make equal access and equitable educational outcomes a reality for a significant number of Roma children and young people across Europe. Working with families from over 700 municipalities and more than 2,500 schools in 2016, REF served 23,393 Roma children and students within the grant portfolio, with another 1,269 students supported by tertiary education scholarships. Each year, REF sees more government and education partners adopting REF intervention models because of their concrete results and outcomes – not to mention their wider impact on Roma families and communities.

First, REF has supported a number of early childhood education and care programs in Roma communities that set the stage for desegregation. For example, 87 percent of children in early childhood education were enrolled in integrated primary schools and 96 percent of students of primary education graduated and were enrolled in secondary schools.

Second, 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, of whom 42 percent graduated and enrolled in tertiary education, comparing favorably to European rates for university enrollment. Secondary school scholarships are clearly an attractive tool for education authorities seeking to increase the number of qualified new labor market entrants in their economies. For instance, together with the Ministry of Education of Bulgaria, REF launched a secondary school scholarship program that made financial support possible for 700 Roma students. 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.

Third, the REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program is the largest of its kind in Europe, a landmark of Roma education, supporting

1,269 Roma students in 2016, with 71 percent of final year students successfully graduating. Early in the year REF published a second tracer study on the trajectory of Roma medical professionals in Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania and Serbia who are recipients of the Roma Health Scholarship Program. Such studies on graduation and employment are important milestones to measuring REF's long-term impact to create skilled Roma professionals working in all walks of life as well as powerful advocacy tools. Some students also have benefited from RomaVersitas, a network of student "clubs" supported by the Grant Program that offer tutoring, training and other opportunities for learning and networking.

Fourth, as a private foundation REF has the independence 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 the idea of service to the Roma community, including through volunteerism, of Roma students who benefit from REF scholarships.

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. REF believes 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.

REF is 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

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.

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. For example, 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.

**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 job 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 increased to 39** as during 2016 we established 23 new Toy library centers in eight countries.

**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 to affirm 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.

Year on year, REF intervention models have proven to be easily replicable as well as adjustable to children's needs. While doing so, REF has 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, and easy-to-access, field-based structures for direct support and technical assistance.

After a decade, we are proud to say that REF has managed to advance the education prospects of nearly one million girls and boys as well as their parents.

# Grants Program

REF provided grant support to 74 projects implemented by partners, mostly smaller, local organizations in 13 countries, supporting families from 700 municipalities.

**87%** of REF beneficiaries in early childhood education programs have been enrolled in integrated primary schools compared to **34%** of all Roma children (3-6) in Albania, only **6%** in Bosnia and Herzegovina, **11%** in Montenegro and **16%** in Macedonia.\*

REF grantees carry out cost-effective projects to improve the literacy and parenting skills of more than **57,781** Roma parents.

At the end of the 2015-2016 school year, **96%** of REF-supported children successfully completed their primary education and transitioned to secondary school.

## ACADEMIC OUTCOMES

### Primary school students

Only **4%** dropout rate from REF-supported programs compared to Roma dropout rates in:

Bulgaria, **15%** \*\*

Romania, **31%** \*\*

Croatia, **30%** \*\*\*

**9%**

average GPA improvement

### Secondary school students

Only **3%** dropout rate from REF-supported programs compared to Roma dropout rates\*\* in:

Czech Republic, **52%**

Hungary, **55%**

Slovakia **59%**

**42%**

transitioned to tertiary education

**7%**

average GPA improvement

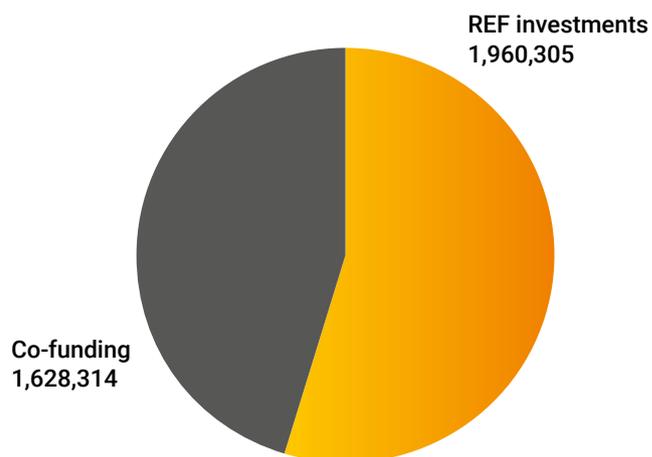
\*Brüggemann, C. (2012). Roma Education in Comparative Perspective. Analysis of the UNDP/World Bank/EC Regional Roma Survey 2011. Roma Inclusion Working Papers. Bratislava: United Nations Development Programme.

\*\* FRA Roma survey – Data in focus Education: the situation of Roma in 11 EU Member States, 2014

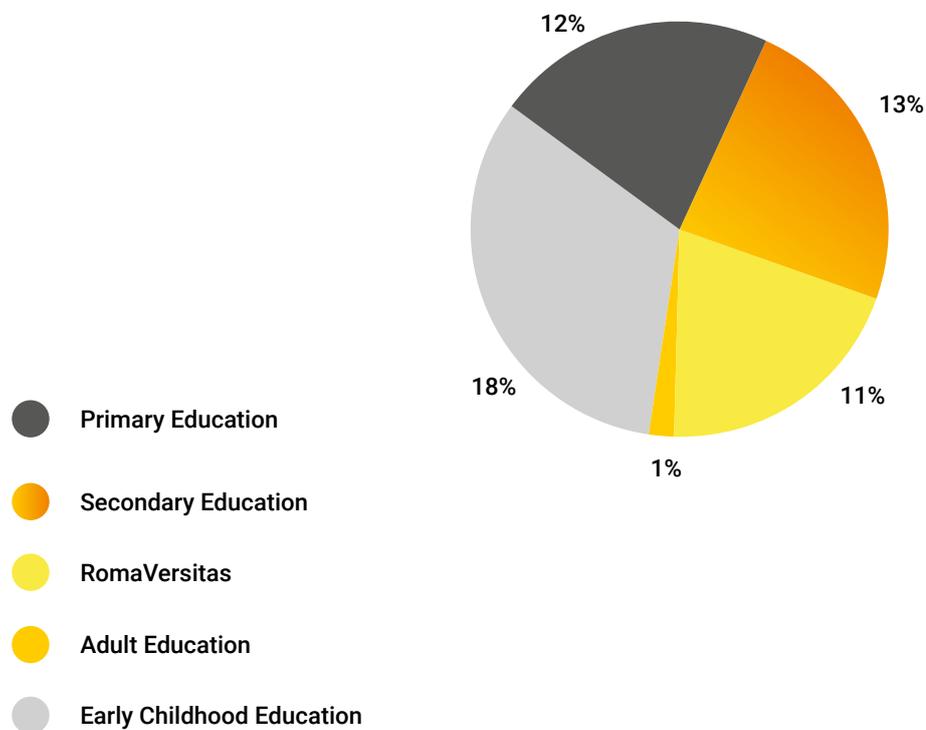
\*\*\* Government of the Republic of Croatia, National Roma Inclusion Strategy, 2012

\*\*\*\*Institute of Statistics of Republic of Albania (2015). Roma and Egyptians in Albania: A Socio-demographic and Economic Profile based on the 2011 Census. Tirana: Institute of Statistics of Republic of Albania.

## REF investments and co-funding in REF funded grant projects in 2016, EUR



## REF investments by educational levels, %



# Spotlight



**Irfan Aslan** is a senior at the medical faculty of St. Cyril and Methodius University in Skopje. Supported for four years by REF's Tertiary Education Scholarship Program, 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-governed municipality.

*Tutoring can be very rewarding. 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 have a moral responsibility to help my community and I volunteer to tutor students enrolled in a primary school in Suto Orizari. 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. Ultimately, I feel I should transfer my knowledge and act as a positive example of a successful Roma student.*



Five year olds in Cazanesti focus on their crafts, while their mothers are busy learning at a simultaneous Your Story empowerment session leading to better literacy and critical skills.

Cazanesti village is one of the 14 sites in Romania where the project **Ready, Set, Go! - Increasing Early Childhood Development Outcomes for Roma Children** is impacting the lives of children and their families from disadvantaged communities through investments in local infrastructure, education activities and community outreach.

# Tertiary Education

## SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM IN 2016-2017

### Roma Memorial University Scholarship Program (RMUSP)

**953 students** from 12 countries received €800 support to cover basic study and living expenses, as well as up to €1,200 to cover tuition fees for Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programs. In addition to the financial support, RMUSP scheme offers academic and professional development support.

### Law and Humanities Program (LHP)

**208 students** from the three program countries (Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine) received €1,300 financial support to study in Vocational, Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programs, as well as additional support up to €1,000 to cover tuition fees. In addition to financial support, LHP scheme offers academic and professional development support.

### Roma Health Scholarship Program (RHSP)

**97 students** from the four program countries (Bulgaria, Macedonia, Romania, and Serbia) received from €675 to €3,335 support (depending on level of medical studies) at vocational or tertiary levels. In addition to the financial support, RHSP scheme offers academic and professional development support.

### Roma International Scholar Program (RISP)

**11 students** received financial support to study outside their home countries in Bachelor, Master or Doctorate programs.

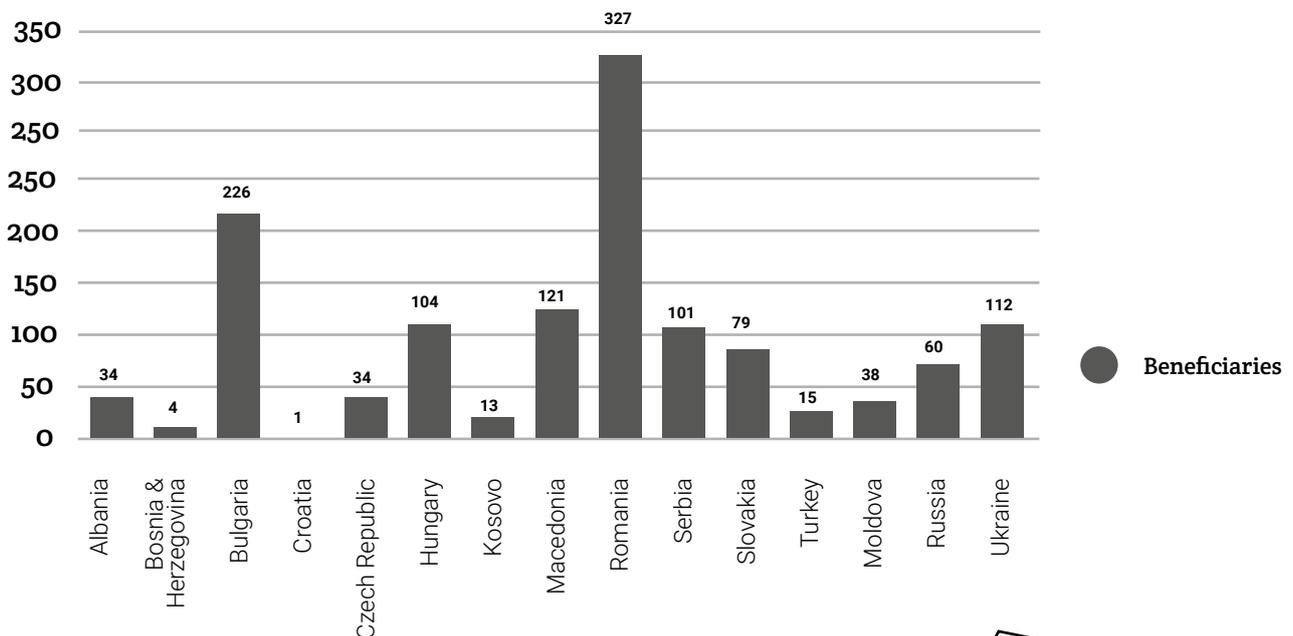
## ACADEMIC OUTCOMES 2015-2016

**71%** of students in their final year graduated successfully, while **28%** postponed their graduation for the following year, and **1%** (4 students) dropped out.

**69%** of students progressed successfully to the next academic year.

The ratio of students in non-graduation years who interrupted their studies or dropped out varies from country to country but 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 the REF Scholarship Program team and through students' intermediary reporting.

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



# Spotlight



**Monika Chen grew up in an extended Roma family in Hungary. 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.**

*I aspire to be a successful businesswoman. I want to be powerful enough to be an example to other Roma young people. The support of the REF Tertiary Education Scholarship Program made it possible to 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 Budapest's eighth district. The founder was close to my 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 "Egyymi," a school helping underprivileged Roma children in the eighth district. I like being able to help those who helped me on my journey.*



**Since the academic and financial support of REF's Tertiary Education Scholarship Program, Jan Balaz from Slovakia has quickly moved from academics to working life. Unlike his mother and father who served in the hospitality industry, Balaz is advising at the highest level of EU institutions on Roma affairs.**

*No lack of career opportunities have appeared since I graduated – first, at a high-profile NGO, next in Slovakia with the Plenipotentiary for Roma Communities and now with the Slovak Presidency of the Council of the European Union. I'm responsible for helping negotiate the Council Conclusions on Accelerating the Roma Integration Process that are expected to bring a positive change in the life of the Roma at the local level across the 28 European Union countries. It is time to repair the injustices of the past and bring positive change to the lives of those who have been neglected for so long.*

# Advancing REF's mission

## **Toy Libraries**

REF introduced Toy Libraries to a handful of Roma communities in 2010, encouraging children and their caregivers to check out quality toys and to learn by playing on site. REF's network of Toy Libraries has since expanded to nearly 40 Roma communities in eight countries, reaching 2,000 Roma families and their children in 2016.

## **Your Story**

Storytelling sessions empower mothers, help build their relationships with their children as well as one another and lead to better literacy and critical skills. Hundreds of Your Story sessions have been held within REF's Early Childhood Education and Care programs over the last five years.

## **School Desegregation**

Bussing has been a potent tool to catalyze desegregation processes. REF provides transportation services together with complex interventions for children, parents and teachers as a way to close segregated schools and enroll children in mainstream ones. Every day REF helps hundreds of children reach mainstream schools and get the education they deserve.

## **Tutoring and Mentoring**

For students who may underperform due to years of substandard teaching and low-quality schools, tutoring services are a proven remedy to improve the grades of primary and secondary school students at risk of dropping out. Mentors may also be part of this package, providing accessible role models to students and guiding them on the road to graduation.

## **Secondary Education Scholarships**

A growing number of REF secondary education scholarships now reach thousands of Roma secondary students each year, helping them with financial and academic support to go the extra mile and complete their studies.

## **RomaVersitas**

RomaVersitas is a unique service for Roma university students to empower themselves and enhance their academic performance. Functioning like a student union in eight countries, these centers provide academic support, networking opportunities and training in soft skills that make a positive difference in the job market.

## **Tertiary Education Scholarships**

REF's flagship Tertiary Education Scholarship Program has been a motor of success to create a critical mass of highly educated Roma professionals and intellectuals. Ask nearly any Roma student how they managed to study, and the majority will answer that the support of the Roma Education Fund made their achievements possible.

## PUBLICATIONS AND EVENTS

### Research commissioned by REF in 2016

Working paper: Student Performance and Inequality in Central and South Eastern Europe: Cross-country Comparison and Case Study on Romani-speaking Students in Slovakia

Authors: Simone Bloem and Christian Brüggemann

Study: Impact of Hungarian Legislative Changes on the Education of Disadvantaged Pupils, Roma Children and Youth

Author: György Mártonfi

### Co-publication by OSF, also funded by REF

Strategic Litigation Impacts: Roma School Desegregation

Author: Adrianá Zimová

### Public events

Toy Libraries Conference Belgrade, Serbia

Press breakfast with 30 local and international journalists in Budapest, Hungary, and a follow up tour on school segregation

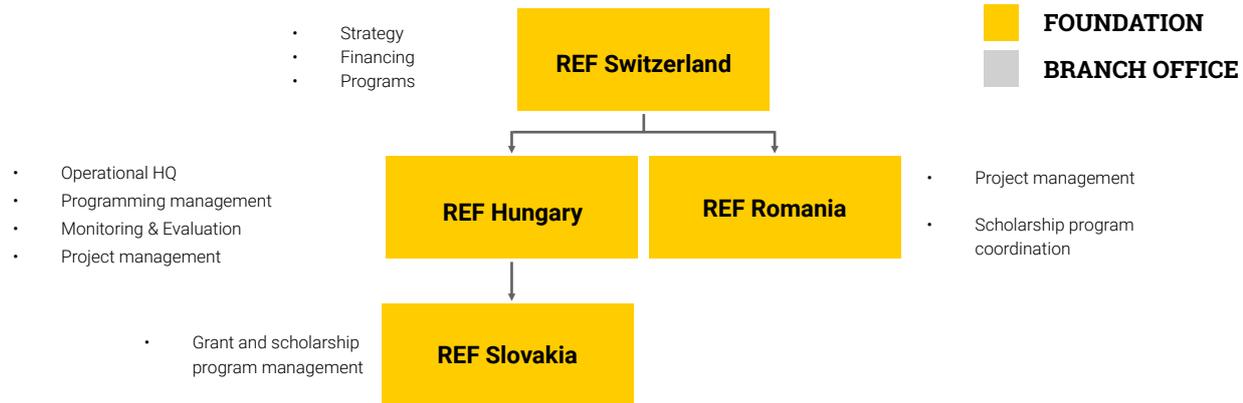


Driton Berisha from the Kosova Education Centre, speaks about the importance of learning by playing at the Roma Toy Libraries Network Conference in Belgrade in 2016. Toy Libraries provide a space for disadvantaged families to borrow quality, educational toys and learn together.

Photo © 2017 Roma Education Fund | Srdjan Ilic

# REF Network

## FOUNDATIONS



## BRANCH NETWORK



## In 2016

### REF Switzerland

- Provided €1.6 million for grants in the project support program and €1.9 million for tertiary scholarships.

### REF Hungary

- Managed the core programs as the headquarters of the REF network and was also active in the implementation of educational projects financed from EU/IPA, EEA and other donor funds including:
- Signed a funding agreement with KfW to improve the education and integration opportunities for Roma in Serbia in the framework of a 3-year project with a total budget of €2.4m (REF Serbia branch office)
- Completed the second phase of an early childhood education and care project at Konik Camp, Montenegro, in partnership with Help – Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe, and signed a funding and partnership agreement related to the continuation of the program for the next two academic years (REF Montenegro branch office)
- Completed the secondary scholarship program in Serbia funded by OSCE (REF Serbia branch office)
- Signed a grant agreement with the Ministry of Finance in Macedonia, in the amount of €191,343 funded by IPA, to implement an adult education project to promote integration of Roma adults into the labor market and combat gender and ethnic discrimination.
- Continued the implementation of €181,322 project funded by IPA to increase the long term employability of marginalized Roma communities in five localities in Macedonia through adult education and training, literacy programs, and increased access to early childhood education and care.
- Continued the implementation of the HEIM research project funded by the Executive Research Agency of the European Commission
- Continued the scholarship project for Roma students studying in pedagogy faculties in Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia funded by the VELUX foundations and extended its geographical scope to Romania
- Partnered with REF Romania in the implementation of Ready, Set, Go! funded by the Norwegian Financial Mechanism aiming at providing comprehensive early childhood education and care services in marginalized communities

### REF Romania

- Fully closed and reported the implementation of three large-scale educational projects funded by the European Union. Continued the implementation of Ready, Set, Go! which targets early childhood development outcomes for some 1,400 Roma children. This 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 Slovakia

- Continued the implementation of REF's secondary scholarship program. Also participated in the implementation of the VELUX project in partnership with REF Hungary, and provided local coordination for REF's Tertiary Education Scholarship program and country facilitator services to the Grant Program managed by REF Switzerland.

# 2016 Financials

## 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
<b>Total sources</b>	<b>7,034,230</b>	<b>1,365,778</b>	<b>1,691,736</b>	<b>(136,576)</b>
Transfers within REF network		1,191,179	522,360	350,801
<b>TOTAL SOURCES WITH TRANSFERS:</b>	<b>7,034,230</b>	<b>2,556,957</b>	<b>2,214,096</b>	<b>214,225</b>
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)
<b>TOTAL SPENDING</b>	<b>4,744,726</b>	<b>2,448,870</b>	<b>2,214,096</b>	<b>214,225</b>
Transfers within REF network	2,289,504	108,087	0	0
<b>TOTAL SPENDING WITH TRANSFERS</b>	<b>7,034,230</b>	<b>2,556,957</b>	<b>2,214,096</b>	<b>214,225</b>

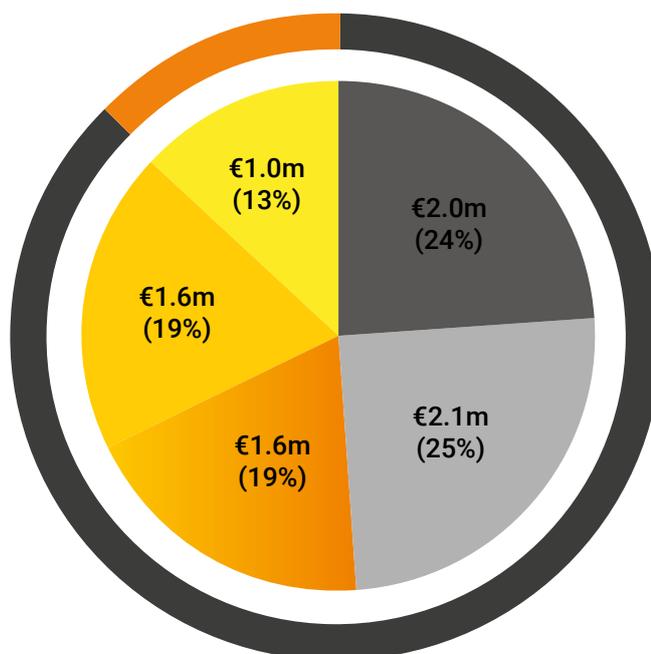
## Commitments of REF foundations in 2016 by educational model

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*	2,500,594
Adult Education	1	45,375
<b>TOTAL:</b>		<b>4,071,707</b>

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 program\*\* (EURm, %)

- Grant Program
- Tertiary Education Scholarship Program
- Implementation of educational projects
- Technical assistance, capacity building, 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



\* 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.

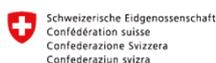
\*\* Not including provisions, FX losses and other expenses; ratio of administrative expenses to total spending including these costs is 11%.

# 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  
Government of Montenegro, Ministry of Education  
Help, Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe e.V.  
KfW Development Bank  
Norway Grants  
Open Society Foundations  
Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe  
Porticus Foundation  
Romanian Ministry of European Funds  
Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency  
Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation  
The VELUX FOUNDATIONS  
The World Bank  
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.

## REF NETWORK

### ROMA EDUCATION FUND

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### REF ROMANIA

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Bucharest, Romania 021 255  
[www.romaeducationfund.ro](http://www.romaeducationfund.ro)

### REF SLOVAKIA

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