



Roma Inclusion in Education

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The Roma Education Fund (REF) was established in 2005. Its main office is in Budapest, Hungary. The mission of REF is to close the gap in educational outcomes between Roma and non-Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. The REF gives priority to countries that made the political commitment to design and finance actions to improve Roma's living conditions by taking part in the Decade of Roma Inclusion. REF's main programs include: a) project support grants to governments and NGOs, b) policy development, c) communication and cross-country learning, d) tertiary level scholarships and e) reimbursable grants to help NGOs and local governments access EU funds for the purpose of expanding Roma access to education.

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INTRODUCTION

Half way through the Decade of Roma Inclusion, it is clear that there is still much to be done. Progress made thus far has not led to substantial, visible changes in everyday lives of the majority of Roma. Increased migrations of Roma from 'New' to 'Old' Member States, has resulted in governmental reactions which are controversial and highly politicized.¹ Over the last five years, there has also been a rise in far right, extremist groups and parties, with clear anti-Roma agendas, and various forms of anti-Roma violence are reported regularly across Central and Eastern Europe.²

Given the current state of affairs, the Roma Education Fund believes that closing the educational gap between Roma and non-Roma is both a matter of urgency and top priority for improving the situation of Roma in Central and Eastern Europe. Increased, long-term investments in the education of Roma are required, alongside more effective actions to address other facets of exclusion - employment, health and housing, as they have a mutually reinforcing effect. Discrimination and intolerance toward Roma is cross-cutting all facets, including education, and measures must take into account the need to address this deep-rooted tendency.

In its five years of operations, the Roma Education Fund has elaborated specific approaches for its interventions, based on a number of pillars, which should also guide pan-European actions in the field of education. These are presented in the following sections. As an annex to the paper, we have included the Executive Summaries of the REF Country Assessments for 7 countries (2007). These are updated every 2-3 years, given the rather rapid changes happening. Each assessment summary includes general political, economic and social background of the country, the Roma in the education system and strategic directions.

ENSURE THE INSTITUTIONAL AND FINANCIAL MEANS FOR NATIONAL POLICIES TO BE IMPLEMENTED ON THE LOCAL LEVEL

When seeking to improve Roma inclusion in education, it is essential that the actions at the local level be aligned with appropriate national policies. It is also essential to ensure adequate institutional and financial means so that national policies can actually be implemented. Furthermore, local initiatives must receive sufficient support from local institutions, such as schools, the education inspectorate, municipalities, local branches of line Ministries, and teachers' trade unions, to cite only the more obvious. **In many cases, policies and programs fail to have an impact because of the absence of an adequate policy framework or because they underestimate the very strong negative incentives built in to the education systems and the level of institutional changes that are needed.** Government policies and local programs must be

¹ Note that repatriations of Roma to Kosovo and Serbia have been happening for years, but did not gain public attention to the scale of the recent expulsions of Roma from France to Bulgaria and Romania.

² *Jobbik* in Hungary and *ATAKA* in Bulgaria have made recent gains, and publication so the European Roma Rights Center (www.errc.org), amongst others report attacks and discriminatory treatment in many other countries.

coordinated and should work in coherence with each other. They also need to take into account the challenge of institutional changes. For this reason, it is essential that the governments are engaged in the dialogue about national education reforms. Other key stakeholders in this dialogue should be those implementing specific programs at the local level and others with experience of how institutions operate locally. There is a need to **support assessments of policies and policy implementation and disseminate and share this experience across countries and among various groups of stakeholders.** The Roma Education Fund is well positioned to help convene stakeholders around common objectives, to provide constructive advice on the design of policies with a specific focus on institutional changes, and to finance programs at the local level.

Governments in the region are engaged in the design and implementation of very complex reforms in the education sector, and these reforms are politically difficult. **The attention given to equity and inclusion of minorities varies, and this goal may not always appear consistent with actions focusing on quality education or the more political push towards rapid decentralization.** In these circumstances, the policy emphasis supported by the REF and others varies, depending on the major thrust of each country's national reforms. For instance, if a country adopts per capita financing of schools, as Hungary and Slovakia have and Romania and Macedonia are planning to do, the policy implications are different than in systems that use per-class and teacher based school financing. In the same way, free choice of public schools, an option that exists to varying degrees in Hungary, Romania, and Bulgaria, represents another challenge. Programs cannot be the same in these different circumstances, and the efforts to increase cost efficiency by encouraging competition between schools must be complemented by government actions that ensure that this focus does not end up perpetuating exclusionary practices.

The inclusion of Roma cannot determine the overall reform agenda for education, and it should not. Therefore, institutions must be **careful not to promote a separate education reform agenda for the Roma.** Roma inclusion means, in large part, desegregation of education systems and full participation of Roma children and parents in public education. **National inclusion reforms should also be seen as beneficial to the majority as they are for various minorities.**

It is not only the content of the reform agenda that is important; the way this agenda is implemented is equally—and often more—important. **In many cases the implementation of reforms is the main problem for Roma.** For example, in Serbia, one year of pre-school education became compulsory in September 2006, under the education law. This measure is potentially very important for Roma inclusion, as many studies have shown that participation in pre-school correlates directly with success in primary education. This provision was also part of Serbia's action plan for the Decade of Roma Inclusion. However, the deficit of pre-school facilities in areas of recent migration—in particular peri-urban areas—where significant Roma communities live, as well as the very complex registration procedures for enrolling a child in pre-school, means that the introduction of compulsory pre-school might actually foster exclusionary practices for Roma children. Majority Serbian parents have better social capital and financial means to ensure that their children will be enrolled first, leaving

Roma children basically out of the pre-education system. As a result their lack of participation in the compulsory program will leave them without an entry point into the education system generally and making them de-facto illegal. The REF started a campaign to raise this issue to the attention of the government and civil society in Serbia.

The need to create a close link between program financing and policy reforms has some important implications. **Projects must be combined with studies and analyses, so that organizations can build an understanding of the policy framework for the actions it finances and the reasons for bottlenecks in program implementation.** Based on this understanding more effective policy advice may be given to governments.

The dialogue on policy reform needs the backing of more influential organizations than the REF alone. This could be an important role of a pan-European strategy and related actions. There is a need for close cooperation with multilateral actors who have more leverage for negotiations.

CREATE SYNERGIES BETWEEN THE HUMAN RIGHTS AGENDA AND THE ECONOMIC EFFICIENCY AGENDA

Combining human rights arguments with economic and social efficiency arguments is not usual. In the best-case scenario, these arguments for policy changes run in parallel. Unfortunately, in many cases, human rights concerns are often seen as being hardly compatible with the goals of economic and social efficiency. It is only recently that economists have started to get interested in the connection between human rights and economic rationales. The work of Glenn Loury at Harvard University is one such attempt, and it has received a lot of resonance in the academic community.ⁱ He uses economic reasoning to demonstrate how stereotypes, stigma, and discrimination are formed in American society. A valuable study in Hungary also looks at the economic relevance of a law against segregation in school, making a clear linkage between school desegregation and efficiency gains in the education system.ⁱⁱ Put very simply, the argument for linking economic and human rights concerns centers around the contribution of human rights to creating more cohesive and equitable societies: if we agree that the respect of basic human rights overall helps create more cohesive and stable societies, and that a stable societies will in turn generate stronger growth and economic development, then the relationship between both approaches is clearer. Furthermore, a more equitable society will actually allow a better distribution of growth and increase the pool of consumers and producers. **In the case of Roma inclusion in education, it is essential to ensure that arguments in favor of human rights and economic efficiency are closely linked.** Using only the human rights argument can actually be very counterproductive, especially if it generates a perception that Roma need to have special rights or a special interpretation of their rights, at the same time as often being perceived as not accepting all their obligations as citizens. On the other hand, economic arguments alone are not sufficiently strong to fight entrenched discrimination. Economic reasoning can be most convincing for technocrats, but is often not so for politicians or the public at large.

As was mentioned earlier, a number of assessments show that the cost of ensuring that Roma have adequate access to basic services is largely offset by the high cost of lower life outcomes that results from systematic Roma exclusion. As far as the human rights agenda is concerned, the United Nations, the Council of Europe, and the European Parliament, in particular, have adopted a number of texts describing the rights of minorities and equal opportunities. Some of these resolutions refer directly to education.ⁱⁱⁱ

REF stresses good governance in education systems, and **good governance requires that policies and programs conform to a country's legislation which in turn should conform to European standards.** One of the issues here is that, once a country joins the EU, one of the key incentives for policy makers and officials to take action on human rights loses its force, as the EU has relatively little influence on how existing member countries deal with their minorities, especially in education as education remains primarily the responsibility of individual member states in the EU framework.

At the same time as it addresses human rights concerns, the REF draws attention to the potential economic benefits of its work. **Roma inclusion needs to be seen as economically positive for all stakeholders.** Of course inclusion benefits the Roma, but it also benefits the majority local population, because Roma will be more willing and able to interact with the majority and will become more prosperous consumers. The education establishment benefits from increased positive outcomes of education and a higher success rate among children taking exams, government finances benefit because of lower budget costs in the medium and longer term, and local governments benefit because of increased economic prosperity and employment in their area and lower welfare costs.

STRESS THE CENTRALITY OF ROMA PARTICIPATION

Participation of beneficiaries is always important, and the development literature has stressed the positive impact of participation: When well-designed and implemented participatory approaches increase commitment from the participants in a project, they increase sustainability through reducing the risk of conflict by creating a forum to discuss issues and problems. Greater participation also improves the efficiency of the actions implemented through the project by increasing trust and creating communication channels between the various stakeholders. The shortcomings of participation are also well known: it takes time, it can take more resources in the short term with benefits only felt in the medium and long term, and it requires adapted institutions, specifically trained staff, and well designed methods. Badly designed participation mechanisms can actually produce a worse outcome than no participation at all.

In the case of Roma education, participation is essential for a number of reasons. One reason is the need to empower Roma communities. Until quite recently, Roma rarely represented a strong and well-organized political force at the local and national level, and therefore, with a few exceptions, their participation in legislative and elected bodies is weak, so they have a reduced ability to influence not only policies but also specific programs. Unless they become a force that counts in the democratic power game, Roma's achievements

in influencing economic reforms will be very limited. Providing a voice and visibility to the minority's elite is therefore essential, both because this elite is still small and requires support to be heard and because successful participation can stimulate Roma interest in getting involved in public life. This is true at the regional, national, and local level. The benefits of participating in society's collective engagement are not obvious to people who have been discriminated against for so long. **Participation creates commitments and also motivation.** Efforts to open space for participation, if well managed, can create the trust and confidence that is required for successful programs.

A second reason why participation is important is that Roma parents tend to be less involved than other parents in school management and interaction with school staff. This is due to many factors, such as Roma's own lower level of education, their perception that they will not be heard, or the fact that the coping mechanisms required to deal with poverty do not give them the time and resources necessary to participate effectively. **The experience with Roma education projects shows that low parental involvement can change very rapidly, and that it is not as much of a problem as some would maintain.** If parents are listened to at the level of the school, and they get the minimum support and explanation required through outreach programs such as school mediators, their attitudes change rapidly. The programs also show that when parents' participation can be enlisted, it has a direct and rapid impact on the success of Roma children in school.

A third reason why participation of Roma organizations and Roma staff in implementation is important is that stereotypes on both sides have often eroded trust between the Roma and non-Roma communities. The Roma communities usually respond much better to Roma organizations and Roma staff. These organizations can be excellent intermediaries between non-Roma organizations and the Roma community. Roma staff and organizations are often also excellent role models, which can show relatively closed communities that integration does not necessarily mean losing one's identity and exposing oneself to discrimination.

PARTNERSHIPS FOR PROMOTING WHAT WORKS

Partnership is essential to move forward the agenda of reducing the education gap between Roma and non-Roma and to achieve the necessary reform in education systems. Fast development of decentralization means that central governments by themselves often have a limited ability to ensure that national policies are well implemented. Local partners are therefore needed, but partnerships require some prerequisites, which first and foremost require better understanding of **the impact of policies and documenting what works and what does not work is of utmost importance.**

Quite a lot has been written on Roma education in Central and Eastern Europe, but there is still very little knowledge about what works and what does not work—and about the impact of recent reforms. **It is clear that those countries like Hungary, which made a strong commitment to integration of minorities in their education system and translated this commitment into concrete policies and budgetary allocations, are more successful.** Although some

serious issues remain in Hungary, that country's Roma population has much better education outcomes than Roma populations in Slovakia, Bulgaria, or Romania. This progress is important because it helps combat the negative stereotypes about Roma and education that still strongly influence the attitude of the public at large, governments, and even development agencies and donors. Among these stereotypes, the most common are that Roma parents are not interested in education, that Roma maintain old traditions, such as very early marriage, which are not compatible with the modern way of thinking, that Roma cannot integrate with other children and need special education or separate education, and that programs which target better education outcomes for Roma do not work well, are costly and unsustainable, and have no impact on the labor market. Hungary's experience exposes these stereotypes for what they are.

We already know well that some policies have long lasting positive impacts, and understanding why and how this is so can provide quite clear directions on what to do. The success of certain policies has been documented through the Council of Europe's work on education,^{iv} OSI, the World Bank, UNDP, and a number of universities involved in this area. The benefits of good policies are also confirmed by the first feedback from REF-financed projects. These include knowledge that:

- *Desegregated education* is better than segregation when it comes to improving the performance of Roma children in school, and that some models are working.
- *Scholarships are very important for secondary and tertiary education.* We know that these scholarships have a strong impact on school participation by Roma, but they are more effective if mentoring is also included and advisory services are available.
- *Enrollment in one year of pre-education* is probably the most effective investment for helping children to succeed in primary school and even beyond, in secondary education.
- *Recognition of the values of culture and indigenous language* create an environment that favors integration.
- *Parents' involvement and community involvement* is central to increasing enrollment rates, and also to improving the performance of children.
- *Placing Roma in special schools or classes* for children with learning disabilities is a disaster and should be abolished without delay.
- In Central Europe, *most people have positive attitudes toward the idea of public funding for Roma education.*^v
- *Countries that have comprehensive policies with good incentive systems are succeeding better* than the ones who avoid the issue.
- *More needs to be found out about:* how best to organize the work of Roma mediators in education; how to ensure that teachers use what they learn from special training in multicultural education; and, how to set up an incentive system for school desegregation in decentralized environments.
- Most crucially *more needs to be understood and done to scale up* what we know to programs that have national and regional impact.

Even when some successes are clear, governments need to be convinced of the effectiveness of good policies, and the opposition of particular interest groups must be circumvented. **Demonstrating the validity and cost effectiveness of some policies and programs requires studies and analysis, as well as in-country monitoring systems.** Problems with obtaining relevant statistics

will be an issue for any monitoring mechanism. For very good reasons, Roma often decline self-identify in surveys and censuses, and this usually results in a critical underestimation of the number of Roma. Also, because many Roma are involved in informal economic activities, they tend to hide, like every body else involved in the informal sector, many of their sources of income and the activities in which they are involved. Furthermore, because of a strategy of avoidance of administration common to all very poor people, the poorer Roma communities of some countries tend not to register children at birth, and they may not register weddings and other family events. These behaviors create measurement difficulties and hamper policy formulation, but they can be and are being overcome. Information on Roma is improving throughout Europe.

Additional financial support will still be very important for the next 10 years. Policies for Roma inclusion still require additional financing and attention. As the policies are initiated, there is a need to demonstrate large-scale support and a need for special support that avoids singling out Roma but ensures that all marginalized groups are integrated. Many of the programs require additional financing in the short to medium term, because EU funds, which in most REF countries are the main additional funding available, are difficult to access and are managed in an overly bureaucratic way. Fortunately, in some countries, governments have actually provided special funds from their budget. This is the case in Hungary, which gives additional per capita financing for schools that agree to enroll Roma children in a non-segregated environment.

Conclusion

Roma inclusion in education systems is possible and, in the last few years, some notable progress has been made. Indeed the changes have begun to be reflected in the few statistics available. New elite, committed to working for their communities as facilitators, teachers, school masters or in grassroots NGOs, are appearing. Sustaining this positive trend requires concerted efforts: It is important that education systems are more open to multicultural approaches and that people accept that being citizens of the same country does not mean being exactly the same, having the same cultural references, or having the same economic background. It is also important that pedagogues be more focused on each child and on interactions with others in the classroom, and that the school staff interacts meaningfully with parents and the community outside of the classroom.

The main philosophy behind a pan-European effort to make school systems inclusive to the Roma should be that it will benefit all children and society as a whole. What is needed is a more child centered, community centered approach, whereby all children, even with their differences, can improve as part of a broader society. This can only be achieved if governments work on changing their institutions and if Roma become full participants in the system.

The Roma Education Fund would be happy to provide additional information and is ready to support pan-European strategies and approaches for inclusion of Roma.

ANNEXES – REF COUNTRY ASSESSMENTS summaries

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Bulgaria³ (2007)

Political, Economic, and Social Context

Bulgaria is a middle-income country, with a gross national income per capita of \$3,450 in 2005 (as measured by the Atlas method). Over the past several years, Bulgaria has made impressive progress toward long-term stability and sustained growth. Bulgaria successfully completed European Union negotiations on June 15, 2004, and the country joined the EU on January 1, 2007. Despite overall positive performance, Bulgaria continues to be one of the poorest countries in Central and Eastern Europe. The low income per capita reflects significant gaps in investments, the functioning of markets and, despite many recent improvements, the quality of the governance and institutional frameworks⁴.

Bulgaria has a population of 7.9 million, including about 750,000 Turks, an estimated 700,000 to 800,000 Roma, and several other ethnic groups with smaller populations. In 2006, 13.4 percent of Bulgaria's total population was living below the poverty line. According to the World Bank, even with dramatic improvements in incomes since the mid 1990s, poverty remains a persistent problem among the country's Roma⁵.

During the 1990s, Bulgaria made some important progress on Roma inclusion and established a positive overall legal framework for inclusion of minorities. The basic document that defines government policy toward Roma is the "Framework Program for Equal Integration of Roma into Bulgarian Society," approved in 1999. A whole set of complementary documents has been adopted to help implement the Framework Program. Also, as part of its participation in the Decade of Roma Inclusion, Bulgaria developed the "Decade Action Plan 2005-2015." On a general level, most of these documents are congruent, but differences surface on the level of implementation plans. Bulgaria has been active in the implementation of the Decade, hosting the official launch in February 2005 and serving as the host country during 2006.

The Law on Antidiscrimination was passed in 2003 and went into effect on January 1, 2004. During June 2005, just before parliamentary elections, the Antidiscrimination Commission was created, but so far, it has not been active. In 2003, the Bulgarian Parliament passed a special Law on the Ombudsman.

Based on these two legal provisions, some serious actions have been undertaken to address discrimination towards Roma in Bulgaria – including a series of court proceedings against school segregation and against refusals to hire Roma.

Education

Bulgaria's education system has been in transition for more than a decade. Under this process, structures have changed, with both positive and negative impacts on the Roma population. The initial access of Roma children to primary education is comparatively high in Bulgaria. Roma students can take advantage of free textbook provision and scholarship assistance. In the policy sphere, several documents and laws tackle the issue of improving Roma education. A fairly high number of Roma work at various levels in the Bulgarian education public administration. Despite these positive trends, the education outcome of Roma still remains well below that of the majority. Roma access to pre-school is limited. Many indicators highlight the poor quality of education received by Roma children, especially in the crucial first years of school. Segregation is a pervasive

³http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF=c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

⁴ Source: World Bank Bulgaria Country Brief 2006.

⁵<http://www.worldbank.bg/WBSITE/EXTERNAL/COUNTRIES/ECAEXT/BULGARIAEXTN/0,menuPK:305448~pagePK:141132~piPK:141107~theSitePK:305439,00.html>.

problem, and, along with other quality issues, it contributes to high dropout rates and very low enrolment in secondary and university education.

The major obstacles for improved Roma education in Bulgaria include the following:

1. Particular enrolment obstacles:

- Access to noncompulsory pre-school education is generally unavailable for Roma children, due to the required attendance fee, which many Roma families cannot afford. Furthermore, there are limited spaces in pre-school education institutions, and they have a policy that gives priority to children of working parents. As a result, many of Roma children are excluded.
- Even access to the one year of compulsory pre-school education (kindergarten) is often denied to Roma children, mainly because of classroom space limitations.
- The poor quality of education received by Roma students in the lower levels of the education system creates obstacles for their progression to higher levels. There is a general lack of support, including financial support, for students preparing for entrance exams to high schools and universities.

2. Segregated education:

- The system of "Gypsy schools," where the students are predominantly or exclusively Roma children, creates a poor educational environment and, consequently, low-quality education. Many Roma children are simply not allowed to enroll in Bulgarian mainstream schools, and they are instead channeled into overcrowded Roma schools.
- In cases where students do get transferred from a segregated "Gypsy school" to a mainstream school, further problems often arise. Desegregation can be accompanied by protests of non-Roma parents and exacerbated social divisions if: the process does not involve parents and the community, Roma children are not offered an adequate choice of schools, there is not a broad distribution of Roma children in different schools and classes, there is no preliminary support for families in need, extra lessons for Roma children are not provided, there is no information campaign, etc. Thus, transferring Roma children to mainstream schools requires an overall national desegregation policy and action programme.
- Education in special schools: Although the new policy of the Ministry of Education and Science supports the downsizing of special schools, the process is slow, and the majority of the children in special schools are still of Roma origin. Many of these children are enrolled by their parents – not because of any mental handicap but because of benefits like free meals and clothing.

3. Adult education: Adult education and vocational training is currently only available on a project basis, and the experience with the majority of these programmes has not been positive. These projects did not manage to improve the education level or employability of the Roma participants, because they did not reflect the real needs of the labour market or the education system.

Strategic Directions for Bulgaria

Within the overall strategic framework of the REF for improving Roma education outcomes in Bulgaria, the REF's future activities will be grouped around the following project themes:

1. Assistance and support to Roma communities and NGOs through the following potential activities:

- Supporting Roma parents and community leaders to recognise and engage in key education issues:
- Supporting Roma NGOs to be involved in educational activities to cooperate and strengthen their organisational, networking, and capacity building structures. The

goal is to make NGOs better able to identify potential policy impacts and mitigate risks, strengthen project implementation, access and use EU and other funds more effectively, and ensure inclusion of smaller, isolated NGOs.

2. Implementation support to education authorities through the following potential activities:

- Developing sustainable models for desegregation of all “gypsy” schools.
- Increasing the enrolment of Roma children in pre-school education.
- Reducing dropouts in grades five through eight and increasing transition to high school and tertiary education.
- Identifying and implementing sustainable approaches to second-chance and adult education.
- Establishing a comprehensive and trustworthy data collection system.

3. Policy development with government through the following potential activities:

- Engaging in the decentralization process to build local government capacities and commitment to Roma education.
- Reviewing and strengthening the policy framework for addressing Roma education issues, including desegregation.

The REF’s short term strategic priorities for project support in Bulgaria are as follows:

- Accelerate implementation of the desegregation campaign, building on evaluations of current and past projects, with emphasis on an approach that includes parental and community involvement. Promote a similar approach among key partners, especially the EU.
- Scale up activities, in order to achieve high pre-school and universal “compulsory” kindergarten enrolment for Roma children.
- Provide “support-packages” for Roma children, including mentoring, tutorials, after-school activities, and materials linked to specific grades and needs.
- Enhance the capacity of Roma communities to access EU funds and utilize them effectively.
- Organise media campaigns and other communication activities, to raise awareness about the need for desegregation and other Roma education support initiatives.

The REF’s policy analysis and research-related strategic objectives in Bulgaria are as follows:

- Develop a comparative analysis of education quality in segregated and integrated mainstream schools, using both quantitative indicators and inspector evaluations.
- Evaluate desegregation projects, to help identify those positive elements with the greatest potential for scaling up to national level programmes.
- Provide policy advice concerning decentralization, including the design and implementation of per-capita financing system.
- Conduct a study of fiscal benefits associated with closing the education outcome gap between Roma and non-Roma.
- Help identify links between social assistance policies and education objectives.
- Promote greater curriculum flexibility and associated examination changes and advise on “user-friendliness” of textbooks and teaching materials.

Country Assessment Executive Summary – Czech Republic⁶

Political, Economic and Social Context

The Czech Republic is a high income country with a gross national income per capita of \$11,110 (GNI, Atlas method)⁷ and a population of 10.2 million. The country has one of the highest income levels among the new member states of the European Union (EU). Recent economic developments have been favourable, with a strong recovery in growth, significant fiscal consolidation, low inflation, and favourable balance of payments. Inflows of foreign direct investment, among the highest in the region, have contributed significantly to the economy's strength. Despite this broadly favourable economic performance, long-term unemployment remains high. Moreover, pension and health reforms need to be started to prepare for the aging population.

According to unofficial statistics the Roma are the biggest ethnic minority group in the Czech Republic, with an estimate number of 160-300,000 or about 1.6-3% of the overall population. Similar to other countries, statistical information on Roma in the Czech Republic is very limited since the Roma are hesitant of declaring their Roma identity. A 2003 UNDP report notes that the Roma in the Czech Republic are better off than in other countries of Central and Eastern Europe, and they also have better social and health conditions. This is due partially to a rather comprehensive system of social benefits and to the general economic context of the Czech Republic. Social exclusion, which is often called ghettoisation, continues to be a pressing problem, as it has negative consequences in all areas, including education.

The Roma's political representation is rather weak with no Roma in the Czech Parliament or in the cabinet of ministers. At the sub-national level, in each region, there is a Coordinator for Roma Affairs. On the municipal level, there are several dozen Roma working as Roma advisors in municipalities and as social workers. Many Roma and pro-Roma NGOs work at the regional and local levels.

The Czech Republic has still not adopted comprehensive anti-discrimination legislation. The Anti-Discrimination Act got rejected by the Senate in January 2006 and subsequently failed to pass the Chamber of Deputies in May 2006. The Anti-discrimination Act was meant to transpose the EU's Racial Equality Directive and replace the existing fragmented anti-discrimination legislation, which consists of more than 60 acts.

Discrimination in the Czech Republic is forbidden based on constitutional bans on discrimination and special sections in the Education Act, Labour Code and other pieces of legislation, as required by the Race and Framework directives 2000/43 and 2000/78. In practice, however, implementation is hindered by the lack of adequate enforcement mechanisms.

Education

The education of Roma in the Czech Republic has shown visible improvement lately. There are clear indicators of political commitment to improve the education of Roma children, such as the Government Concept of Roma Integration, with a new focus and support for early childhood care (e.g. preparatory classes, teacher assistants, free kindergarten, secondary school scholarships, etc.), and the formal abolishment of special education schools targeting Roma. In addition, funding for the education of disadvantaged children is secured through the ministerial development programme replacing the previous irregular grants from private donors. However, the implementation of the different Government acts, regulations and programmes would need to be strengthened via more efficient enforcement mechanisms and enhanced institutional capacities.

⁶http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF=c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

⁷ Source: World Bank Czech Republic Country Brief 2006.

The education system in the Czech Republic continues to be burdened by several barriers that exclude Roma from full and sustained participation.

1. Segregation:

- The Czech education system does not have a clear response to residential segregation. There are no desegregation strategies. Roma children from remote settlements are educated in substandard schools and are left with no prospect to integrate into further education cycles.
- The unusually early tracking that can take place at age 11 in the primary education level, affects Roma most, as the majority of them are enrolled into low quality or practical schools, without further prospects of a quality education.
- Formal removal of special schools from the legal framework did not change the fact that Roma are educated in separate facilities, with an inferior curriculum and teachers with lower expectations.

2. Lack of acknowledgement of Roma language, culture and needs:

- There are virtually no Roma teachers.
- No attention is paid to inclusion, diversity, and equal opportunity issues in the training of head teachers and school managers.
- The Czech Republic is one of the rare countries in the region where the Romanes language is not taught, even as an optional subject (with some exceptions as in specialized secondary school for Roma). The importance of Romanes is generally ignored by schools and most NGOs.

3. Implementation gaps:

- The Decade Action Plan and earlier government strategies and action plans on Roma, including the Concept of Roma Integration, are not well integrated within mainstream policies, and their implementation is not effective enough.
- Despite a recognized need for pre-school education for children from marginalized socioeconomic backgrounds, the availability of pre-primary education is still limited.
- Funding through open grant schemes and “development programmes” is not effective enough, evaluation of impact on Roma is hampered through insensitive data collection mechanisms.

Strategic Directions for Czech Republic

Over the next three years, the REF will engage the Czech education authorities, Roma organisations, local governments and Roma communities in policy dialogue and will support in the following priority areas to improve Roma education outcomes in the Czech Republic:

1. Greater access of Roma to existing programmes and services:

- Pre-school and kindergarten.
- Preparatory classes.
- Scholarships and other programmes of support.

2. Better use of EU funds to increase funding for Roma education:

- Leverage resources through matching grants for counterpart funds and reimbursable grants for pre-financing.
- Build capacity of local communities, governments and Roma NGOs to access EU funds.

3. Systemic changes to redress inequities affecting Roma in the following areas:

- Early tracking and over-representation of Roma in basic practical schools.
- Development of comprehensive approach to reduce segregation throughout the entire system (including isolated Roma communities).
- Evaluation of effectiveness of development programmes regarding Roma.

- Lack of cooperation between assistant of the teacher and teachers in the classroom.

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Hungary⁸

Political, Economic, and Social Context

Hungary is an upper-middle-income country with a population of 10 million and a gross national income per capita of \$10,050 in 2005 (as measured by the Atlas method)⁹. The country entered the European Union in May 2004. Between 2000 and 2006, Hungary received approximately €2 billion in development support through the EU's pre-accession and transition facility funds¹⁰. These funds helped the country achieve solid economic growth with a relatively low level of unemployment. It is expected that, within the framework of the 2007-2013 budget period, Hungary will receive €23 billion¹¹ for development purposes through the regional development, social and cohesion funds. These funds will also help address many of the social development issues in Hungary, including the situation of the country's Roma.

Hungary has a favorable anti-discrimination legal framework, built around three legal provisions: the Act on Equal Treatment and the Promotion of Equal Opportunities, the Civil Code, and the Public Education Act.

Still, Roma are poorly represented within the national government, with only four Roma among the 386 members of the Hungarian Parliament. Hungary does have two Roma members, both of them women, in the European Parliament. Roma in Hungary also have a national network of elected minority self-governments that serve as advisory bodies for matters that affect their community. In the latest elections, in October 2006, voters formed 1,116 local self-governments, each of which has five Roma local politicians. There are also minority governments on the county and national level. The National Roma Government has 53 members.

Roma form the largest ethnic minority group in Hungary. There are an estimated 580,000 Roma in the country, which means they make up about 5.5 percent of the overall population. Overall, Hungary's population is shrinking and getting older, but the number of Roma in the country is growing, and their age composition is significantly younger than that of the general population. The income situation of the Roma has been steadily worsening since the change of the political and economic system in 1989. Between 1991 and 2001, the percentage of Roma considered to be poor doubled.

The risk of poverty in Hungary is determined primarily by four factors: education and labour market situation; demographic indicators; geographical location and type of dwelling; and ethnicity. Around one third of Hungary's Roma are affected by extreme poverty, and most of these live in Roma settlements.

Education

There is a positive attitude toward inclusive education among all important stakeholders and political structures in Hungary. There is also a history of initiatives and systemic provisions addressing the needs of Roma in education. Furthermore, the country has a strong, active, and well-developed Roma nongovernmental sector, as well as non-Roma human rights civil society organisations. These groups have been helping improve the

⁸ http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF_c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

⁹ Source: World Bank Hungary Country Brief 2006.

¹⁰ Source: Hungary's EU website.

¹¹ Source: *EU Funding to Hit New Record*, UK Embassy Website.

educational situation of Roma for some time now. Meanwhile, the number of Roma occupying key governmental and county-level positions has increased significantly during the past years.

In the last few years, there has been a serious transition in the field of education, which is becoming more and more of a public priority. Roma children in Hungary have full access to education. The participation rate of Roma is also high, and drop outs only represent a problem at the secondary school level. There is free textbook provision, several social benefits, and scholarship and mentorship assistance available for Roma students. Furthermore, affirmative action is institutionally incorporated in Hungary's tertiary education, and desegregation is financed from a budgetary provision that gives normative per-capita support for integration. Roma in Hungary are also assisted by EU social funds.

Nonetheless, there are still some systemic weaknesses of the Hungarian education system that need to be tackled, including:

- Children coming from poor families face serious enrollment barriers that originate from the selective education system, in which schools are encouraged to favor children of good economic standing in making admittance decisions. This problem manifests itself in the following ways:
 - Roma children's enrollment in kindergartens and schools is hampered by many factors, such as a lack of available places in class, a lack of public transportation, non-welcoming school management and, in some cases, segregated schools and classes.
 - Poverty constitutes a major obstacle. Roma families in poor rural communities or settlements live far from the good schools. They cannot pay for public transportation to get to the best schools, books, or other education expenses, and scholarships are usually insufficient to cover all costs.
- The quality of education provided for Roma children is inadequate and insufficient to ensure their successful completion of higher levels of education. Therefore, Roma children's educational achievement is low, and their class repetition and drop-out rates are high, especially at the secondary level. Many of them enroll in low-quality schools or vocational schools that do not give students the skills they need to have good prospects for employment.
- Teachers' education, especially at the initial level, does not prepare teachers for working in heterogeneous multicultural classes. The teachers' education system is predominantly knowledge-oriented and not method-oriented. Although there is a wide range of in-service training available, teachers are free to choose which of these courses they will take. The most popular of these courses are English and information and communication technology, and fewer teachers take those courses that would enable them to work in multicultural environments.
- Another systemic weakness is the tendency of the different professional committees for assessing learning abilities to place disadvantaged children, in particular Roma children, in special education institutions.

Segregation, in different forms, represents another major issue Roma children have to face in today's education system in Hungary. The problem can manifest itself in the following ways:

- Segregation among schools can be caused by school maintainers who are in favor of keeping separate schools just for Roma children. Spontaneous migration of non-Roma out of an area results in the rise of the proportion of Roma students.
- Segregation within schools can emerge due to the per-student financing system of education. School administrators are interested in having as many students as possible. Therefore, to prevent the "emigration" of non-Roma children which usually happens as a consequence of the rising proportion of Roma students,

- some schools set up segregated classes for Roma students. These segregated classes can, in most cases, be found in separate and lower quality buildings.
- Segregation occurs in special schools. In practice, special schools and special classes mean students face low expectations, low-level teaching and lower curricula. The proportion of Roma students in special schools is extremely high. Segregation through exemption from school attendance is a relatively new method of separating Roma children. Many Roma children get classified as study-at-home students who are only obliged to take exams at the end of each semester. This is a common alternative for many Roma children who are at risk of dropping out, but students in such programmes have reduced chances of finishing school.
 - *De facto* segregation takes place when Roma children are pushed into short-term vocational schools. Many Hungarian and international reports point out the weaknesses of short-term vocational education. These schools are the last resort for socially and academically excluded young people, many of whom are Roma. The system is disconnected from employers' needs, with few apprenticeship opportunities and high drop-out rates, i.e. around 20-25 percent in grades nine and 10.

Strategic Directions for Hungary

Within the overall strategic framework of REF for improving Roma education outcomes in Hungary, the REF's future activities will be grouped around the following themes:

- Assistance and support to the Roma community.
- Implementation support to education authorities.
- Policy development advice to the government.

1. Assistance and support to the Roma community, through the following potential activities:

- Supporting Roma parents and community leaders to recognize and engage in key education issues, by:
 - Motivating parents to participate in comprehensive desegregation processes to eliminate "gypsy" schools and de facto Roma segregation in special schools.
 - Involving parents in preschool enrolment and participation.
 - Building communication channels between Roma parents/community leaders and local government authorities on education issues.
- Supporting Roma self-governments involved in educational activities to cooperate and strengthen their organisational, networking, and capacity building structures. The goal is to make Roma self-governments better able to identify potential policy impacts and mitigate risks, strengthen project implementation, access and use EU and other funds more effectively, and ensure inclusion of smaller/isolated NGOs.

2. Implementation support to education authorities, through the following potential activities:

- Developing a sustainable model for desegregation that includes all "gypsy" schools.
- Increasing the enrolment of Roma children in quality education.
- Reducing drop outs in grades nine and 10.

3. Policy development with government, through the following potential activities:

- Reviewing and strengthening the policy framework and implementing mechanisms for desegregation as a key condition for accessing EU structural funds.
- Engaging in the decentralisation process to build local government capacities and commitment to Roma education.
- Improving education, training, and employment possibilities for low-skilled adolescents and adults.
- Allowing independent monitoring of school maintainers.
- Finding effective means for classroom monitoring and evaluation.

- Influencing the means of teacher training and in-service teacher-training practices.
- Supporting oversight of textbook-materials and teaching materials and revising the teaching materials used in postgraduate teacher-training.

The REF's short term strategic objectives in Hungary are to:

- Promote actions that contribute to the reform of the special school system.
- Promote actions that contribute to the reform of the vocational education system, shifting from a short to a long cycle of vocational and general education.
- Promote the use of the lottery system in allocating places in schools.

The REF envisages conducting analysis and research on the following issues:

- Vocational Education and Training system for 15-18-year-olds, to seek means for increasing graduate's employability and relevance of the training.
- Government's support-system for Roma children, including mentoring, tutoring, after-school activities and materials linked to specific grades and needs.
- Affirmative action, scholarships and additional support to secondary and tertiary Roma students coming from poor families.

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Macedonia¹²

Political, Economic and Social Context

Macedonia is situated in South Eastern Europe and has a population of around two million. The country's political and economic conditions are characterized by a sensitive ethnic divide between the Macedonians, who make up 64 percent of the population, and Albanians, who make up 25 percent. Violent open ethnic conflicts have been avoided, but the situation is often tense, and the government has undertaken major reforms to ensure better representation and access to cultural rights for various minorities. Roma, who comprise 5-6 percent of the population in Macedonia, make up one of the groups that have recently gained visible political representation as part of the government's efforts to ensure better representation of ethnic minorities. However, acceptance and support for Roma continues to largely depend on the evolution of Macedonian-Albanian relations.

Economically, Macedonia is burdened by substantial pockets of poverty, even though it is classified as a lower-middle-income country, with a gross national income per capita of around \$2,830 in 2005 (GNI, Atlas method). The latent internal conflict has not allowed Macedonia to benefit from the opening up of its economy. The government is maintaining a restrictive fiscal policy that it introduced in 2004, and expenditures for education, which were already low, have been reduced even more. Most of Macedonia's development programmes, including the programmes to support Roma, became almost exclusively donor dependent. An active civil society sector has developed, and it partially replaces functions that weak state institutions are unable to fulfill.

The situation of Roma in Macedonia has improved in recent years. The number of Roma students enrolled in primary and, especially, secondary schools has increased somewhat. Affirmative action policies introduced by the government have had a positive impact on the number of Roma students enrolled in, and graduating from, the tertiary education system. Roma participation in the political and public administration spheres has also improved, and considerable cooperation between the government and the Roma communities has been achieved. A new government, representing the opposition of the past four years, was elected in August 2006, leading to a change in the senior management in all relevant ministries. It took up the goals of the Decade of Roma Inclusion and is expected to continue the actions started along those lines.

¹²http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF_=c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

Education

The education system of Macedonia has been experiencing a prolonged transition. Developments have been introduced in most areas of the system, but significant reforms are still needed. Education in general receives low priority, with public expenditures for education cut back to where they are among the lowest in Eastern and Central Europe, both in actual spending and as a percentage of GDP. The existing and available social assistance is not adequately tied to education. There are no incentives for improving the quality of teaching, and serious quality problems exist at all levels of the education system. A major decentralisation effort has started and will be carried out during 2007. It will give local governments more important education-related rights and responsibilities but it also contains some major risks for the education of Roma.

The most important problems threatening the quality of the education of Roma in Macedonia are the following:

- Inadequate education financing, and insufficient financing mechanisms, bring about the following consequences:
 - There is virtually no social support promoting wider participation in education. Support instruments, such as stipends, scholarships, textbooks, free meals, exemption from pre-school attendance fees, etc., are only available through programmes financed by international donor agencies, and or available only for those in special education.
 - The traditional education system does not allow for providing additional attention to children with low scholastic achievement. Parents, sometimes with the support of donors, must pay for such services like extracurricular activities, mentoring, individual tutoring, or preparation for entry exams.
 - The current funding mechanism is based on the number of eligible classes a school provides. Thus, it encourages schools to minimize efforts and avoid admitting students who would require special attention. These students, if admitted, tend to drop out by themselves after a couple of years of schooling, due to the lack of attention from the school. There has been no pilot programme to establish a per-student financing formula, and there has been not enough discussion of this idea in the framework of the new decentralisation law yet. There seems to be a high risk that this situation will deteriorate even further, if decentralised education financing is introduced without the elaboration of a new financing formula and compensation mechanisms.
 - State-provided education is, to a considerable extent, complemented by nongovernmental organisations, which are financed through grants by the international donor community. For the Roma, most of the shortcomings of the official state system are partially compensated for through activities of Roma NGOs. Although this work has created a vibrant civil society dealing with education, it also unwillingly contributes to a further decrease in attention devoted to Roma children in schools and pre-schools. An implicit "division of labour," is developing. A situation that is already financially unsustainable and can, in the long run, pose obstacles to the development of the education system.
- Administrative barriers for enrolling into pre-school and primary education still exist, given that many Roma families lack the necessary documentation and social support from the state. The announced partial privatisation of pre-school institutions and the consequences to be introduced might further jeopardize the access of Roma to pre-school.
- Segregation in special schools and separate classes is still common in Macedonia, and there is not much reaction to this problem – even from the Roma communities.
- Despite supportive policies, schools are generally unwelcoming and unsupportive of Roma children. These children are confronted with systemic and multifaceted

obstacles, which contribute to their poor achievement, high dropout rates, and low enrolment in the higher levels of the education system. These obstacles include the following:

- Discrimination through all levels of the system: There are no operational and commonly accepted mechanisms for combating discrimination in schools, and in some cases this can lead to more comprehensive segregation. The school curricula do not favor multiculturalism, and the assessment system is based on grading without standards and objectively measurable criteria, providing an ample source for possible biased and discriminatory evaluations of Roma children.
- Roma parents are seriously under-represented in school boards, and cannot participate in the schools' decision making processes. School policies remain insensitive to Roma students' needs, and cooperation with Roma NGOs is rarely supported.
- The quality of education for Roma in many cases is substandard, especially in the early stages of education, and Roma children simply get transferred to the next grade without needing to fulfill the minimum requirements. As a consequence, Roma students face tremendous difficulties in integrating into higher grades, a situation that leads many students to repeat grades or drop out.
- There are no policies to attract and support Roma in pre-service teacher training, so there is a shortage of Roma teachers at the pre-school and primary school levels. Non-Roma teachers are often burdened with negative ethnic stereotypes and prejudices towards Roma. There is also an insufficient number of qualified teachers and/or teacher trainers who are fluent in the Romanes language. Furthermore, there is neither a university chair for Romology nor other institutional structures that could ensure the supply of qualified Roma teachers.

Strategic Directions for Macedonia

REF's medium-term strategic objectives in Macedonia are as follows:

1. Strengthen the capacities of local governments and municipalities to fulfill their new duties and responsibilities in formulating education policies – potentially through the competition of local governments in areas with significant Roma populations.
2. Help increase the quality of education for Roma students, through several measures, including:
 - Supporting mentoring in the transition grades – grades four and eight – to increase progression rates.
 - Offering textbook provision support for disadvantaged students.
 - Supporting teacher and mentor training.
 - Building on the work of Roma Education Centers in connecting parents with schools, demonstrating best practices in the beginning grades of primary education, and carrying out public awareness raising campaigns.
 - Applying the lessons learned from the "Tanoda" case of Hungary to find ways to provide additional classes and after-school activities.
3. Scale up scholarships and mentoring programmes at the secondary level.
4. Organise a donor coordination conference.

REF has several policy analysis and research related strategic objectives in Macedonia. The most urgent among these are as follows:

1. Conduct an analysis of education expenditures, from government, donor and NGO resources, to assess possible restructuring to improve the impact of these expenditures on Roma children.

2. Carry out an analysis of the necessary incentives, such as alternative work schedules and extra financing, to provide for mentoring services and additional classes needed for underachieving children.
3. Prepare an economic benefit analysis to help strengthen the central and local governments' financial commitments to support Roma education.
4. Analyse the existing scholarship and social assistance schemes in Macedonia, in order to help develop models that ensure higher attendance and lower dropout rates – and in order to assist policy makers in adopting and implementing these models.

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Romania¹³

Political, Economic, and Social Context

Romania is a middle-income country with a gross national income per capita of \$3,830 in 2005 (measured by the Atlas method)¹⁴. With a population of 21.6 million, Romania is the second largest country in Central and Eastern Europe. Over the past few years, Romania has successfully completed the actions necessary for joining the European Union, and its membership officially started on January 1, 2007.

Despite robust economic growth over the past five years, Romania still faces important challenges. Additional structural reforms are needed to build a competitive market economy capable of withstanding the pressures of EU integration. Moreover, poverty persists in the country, and more than 15 percent of the population is below the poverty line. Two-thirds of Romania's poor live in rural areas, despite the country's substantial potential in agriculture, forestry, and fishery¹⁵.

Romania has the largest population of Roma in Europe, with an official count at 535,000, or 2.5 percent of the population, and an unofficial estimate ranging from 1,800,000 to 2,500,000 – or between 8.3 percent and 11.5 percent of the population. The poverty rate among Roma is three times higher than the average poverty rate in Romania. This high level of poverty is due to many factors, including poor health and education, limited opportunities in the labour market, and discrimination, all of which contribute to a vicious cycle of poverty and exclusion.

Romania has ratified most international human rights and minority rights protection documents adopted by the United Nations and the Council of Europe. Romania has also developed elements of legislation against discrimination within the framework of different larger national laws. However, Romania has received warnings from the EU regarding the protection of minorities, especially concerning the Roma. The warnings state that the country has done little in establishing policies ensuring "a zero level of tolerance against racist manifestations." There is still much to do to establish a favorable legal framework and related enforcement mechanisms for the protection of minorities, including Roma. Roma minorities are under-represented in the different state structures. Since 1989, the only Roma political party present in the parliament has been the Roma Social Democratic Party. Although a quite large number of Roma NGOs are registered, only few of them are active. While at the national level there is 20-30 active Roma NGOs representing Roma interest, at the local level the small Roma NGOs are not empowered. Since 1989 Romanian authorities have showed interest for Roma issues and created different structures and institution within the government and at the local level. These institutions do not always have the means and capacity to influence important policies and programmes.

¹³ http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF_=c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

¹⁴ Source: World Bank Romania Country Brief 2006.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

Education

Romania's education system has been in transition for more than a decade. Currently, the system is characterised by major instability, principally due to the lack of a sound legal framework. New legislation is needed. In 2005, Romania started the decentralisation of its education system with pilot projects in three counties. The process is expected to be completed by 2010.

In addressing Roma education, the Ministry of Education and Research has been trying to create a support structure by building on the inspectors and school mediators at the local level. However, in most cases, these promising and well-intended measures brought about insufficient results, principally due to lack of sustainability. At present, Roma children still have low rates of attendance and enrolment in the Romanian education system.

More specifically, the education system in Romania is characterised by the following problems for Roma:

- Roma children have low enrolment rates in pre-school/kindergarten, and they face severe enrolment barriers in primary education.
- There is a lack of adequate desegregation policies and enforcement measures.
- There is an extensive number of Roma children placed in special education.
- The unsupportive education, financing, and management system discriminates against children from poor families.
- Extensive disparities exist in the quality of education, due to different curriculum standards. Also, Roma culture is not well recognised in schools and school curricula, and multicultural education rarely forms part of teachers' education or in-service training.

In addition to these problems, some of the upcoming systemic changes related to the decentralisation process might even worsen the situation of Roma children when it comes to their access to education and the quality of that schooling. Some potential consequences of the changes are as follows:

- Discrimination and segregation could become more severe because of the discretion left to local authority in many aspects of education.
- The benefits of per capita financing of education could be undermined by negotiated contracts that limit incentives to enroll Roma children.
- Parental choice could play against marginalised groups like the Roma.
- New school accreditation mechanisms will likely affect schools with low performance without providing any safeguards.

These systemic barriers in Romania are reinforced by a negative attitude of the majority of society against those living in poverty, especially in socially segregated communities. Roma children generally face low expectations from their parents, due to the low levels of parental education. Roma children lack the necessary role models of successful Roma when leaving in segregated environment and are required to take part in different household and income generating activities, which leave limited time for studying. Early marriages in isolated communities and seasonal migration of Roma families, including children from rural areas, represent further barriers for school enrolment.

Strategic Directions for Romania

Activities that the REF will seek to undertake include:

1. Assistance and support to the Roma community, through the following potential activities:

- Supporting Roma parents and community leaders to recognise and engage in key education issues by:
 - Involving Roma parents in school boards and parent associations.
 - Detecting and acting on school-level discrimination.
 - Raising awareness of Roma parents on the importance of enrolment and attendance at all levels.

- Increasing the flow of information on education issues.
- Supporting Roma NGOs involved in educational activities, to cooperate and strengthen their organisational, networking, and capacity building structures, by:
 - Identifying policy impacts.
 - Strengthening implementation.
 - Accessing and using EU funds effectively.
 - Ensuring inclusion of smaller/isolated NGOs.

2. Implementation support to education authorities, through the following potential activities:

- Increasing the enrolment of Roma children in education by:
 - Increasing pre-school enrolment to cover all Roma children.
 - Expanding kindergarten attendance.
 - Supporting affirmative action for kindergarten and pre-school to recognise the needs of disadvantaged families.
- Increasing transition rates at critical stages and reducing drop outs by:
 - Focusing attention of Roma inspectors and mediators.
 - Involving local authorities and school leaders.
- Increasing attention to quality and focusing on quality improvement in the education system by:
 - Focusing on desegregation.
 - Addressing over-representation of Roma in special schools.
 - Promoting inclusion in education, including multicultural curricula, taking into account particular features of minority/Roma culture.
 - Ensuring access to textbooks and other learning aids.
 - Promoting greater openness to Roma parents and the Roma community.
- Using the monitoring and evaluation framework to strengthen policy implementation and coherence and identify responsibilities of local/county authorities by:
 - Involving the Roma community.
 - Ensuring that school/local development planning and school/Maintainer self-evaluation supports inclusive education.
 - Ensuring effective use of governmental/EU funds and other funds.
 - Developing channels for feedback to the national level.

3. Policy development with the government, through the following potential activities:

- Engaging in the decentralisation process to build local government capacities and commitment to Roma education by:
 - Focusing on municipal/county educational authorities.
 - Assisting in developing inclusive local/county public education policy development plans;
 - Linking local and school autonomy to enhanced responsibilities.
 - Monitoring financing inequities and ensuring that the per capita financing formula promotes quality Roma education.
 - Reviewing and strengthening the legislative framework for Roma education, including the desegregation directive, and ensuring enforcement.

The REF's short-term strategic objectives in Romania are to:

- Scale up support to pre-school enrolment and programme quality for Roma children.
- Achieve improvement in elementary school enrolment and continued attendance through grade eight.
- Strengthen the impact of existing affirmative action at the high school level by reinforcing linkages between the Roma community and elementary and high schools.
- Provide scholarships and additional support to Roma secondary students coming from poor families.

- Initiate media campaigns and other activities to empower Roma communities and strengthen Roma NGOs on education issues; this would include participation in parent-teacher-student associations.

The REF's policy analysis and research-related strategic objectives in Romania are to:

- Engage government and other stakeholders in dialogue, to improve the status of Roma inspectors and mediators.
- Support improved school monitoring, to more accurately reflect the situation of Roma students, with a particular emphasis on enrolment, preventing drop out, achievement, and employability.
- Undertake a study to quantify fiscal benefits to Romania from improved education outcomes for Roma.
- Assess the outcomes associated with Romania's system of affirmative action at the high school and tertiary levels.
- Support capacity building related to accessing and managing EU funds.

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Serbia¹⁶

Political, Economic, and Social Context

Serbia is a lower-middle-income country with a gross domestic product per capita of \$3,243 in 2005¹⁷. Since 2001, after a delayed transition, the country has progressed steadily toward a modern market economy. Macroeconomic stability, achieved swiftly in 2001 and 2002, was broadly maintained. During the first five years of transition, the economy grew on average 5.5 percent per annum, peaking in 2004 with 9.3 percent GDP growth, one of the highest growth rates among transition economies.

In 2005, growth remained strong at 6.3 percent. Poverty and unemployment represent a major concern in Serbia. During the past decade, a long period of instability, wars, international isolation, and economic turmoil adversely affected the living standards of a vast majority of the population. The country's poor economic performance in this period led to a decrease in real earnings and was accompanied by deterioration in social protection and health services.

As a result, poverty rose sharply in the 1990s. Although only 10 percent of the population falls below the poverty line¹⁸, one third of the country's inhabitants live just above the poverty line. These people remain in danger of slipping into absolute poverty if any adverse economic developments occur. Serbia's population is somewhat less than 8 million, with 108,000 registered Roma inhabitants, but estimates put the real Roma population at 450,000-500,000, or 6.2 percent of Serbia's total population. This estimate is used by the government and civil society to address the uncertainty in defining the real demographic data of Roma in Serbia. The population count is difficult, due to refugee movements in the '90s. Hence the Roma population of Serbia consists of three major social groups: (i) native Roma, (ii) Roma refugees and internally displaced persons, and (iii) Roma readmitted to Serbia. Fifty percent of Serbia's Roma live in almost 600 Roma settlements scattered throughout the country, with major concentrations around Belgrade, in Vojvodina and in Southeast Serbia. About 300 of these settlements are in urban areas, the remainder in suburban or rural areas. Forty-four percent of the Roma settlements are unhygienic slums, and only 11 percent are developed. Roma settlements are beset by legalization barriers and, in urban areas, resettlements. The poverty rate among Roma is significantly higher than among the

¹⁶ http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF_c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

¹⁷ World Bank (2006): *Serbia Country Brief 2006*, <http://www.worldbank.org.yu>.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Serbian population in general. Among poor Roma, women and children are particularly at risk, with poverty rising significantly for larger households and those headed by females. Poverty is also closely correlated with the education and employment status of the head of household. Roma face significantly higher unemployment rates across all age cohorts and all educational outcomes than non-Roma. Roma are overrepresented in unskilled jobs (which account for 90 percent of employed Roma) and in seasonal and part-time work. Roma unemployment is also significantly higher across all educational levels, a situation that indicates Roma – even those relatively few who complete secondary or tertiary education – face serious obstacles in realizing the returns of education.

Political representation of the Roma has been rather weak in Serbia. However, from 2007 there are two Roma members of parliament and some Roma representatives are active in municipal councils. The most important Roma political organisation, the National Council of the Roma

National Minority, was founded in 2003, based on the provision of the *Federal Law on Protection of Rights and Freedoms of National Minorities*. During the '90s, an active NGO sector emerged, and this helped improve the situation of the Roma in Serbia. The majority of these NGOs are cultural and artistic associations, while around 30 of them deal with the implementation of different Roma support projects.

Education

The education system in Serbia has been in transformation since 2001, facing all the typical challenges of a prolonged transition process. Developments are underway in almost all areas of the system, with some areas more advanced and others facing persistent impediments. The most pertinent problem is the low enrolment and very high dropout rate of Roma children, compounded by their misplacement in special schools and classes.

The Roma in Serbia face a variety of barriers to education, falling into the following categories:

- Serious barriers exist for the enrolment of Roma children into pre-school and primary education, due to lack of financial means of the Roma family, lack of space in pre-school institutions, lack of residence permits of a significant proportion of Roma and conditionality of enrolment upon a medical check-up and assessment of school-readiness.
- There is a systemic gap in education provision affecting Roma. Enrolment into primary education is age-bound: until the age of 8½, children are eligible for late enrolment into first grade, and only after the age of 16 they are eligible for enrolment into adult education schools. Many Roma children fall into the gap between 8½ and 16 years, and stay out of school permanently.
- School management is unsupportive for inclusive education; discrimination in schools is often overlooked. School inspectors are usually not trained to detect discrimination or exclusion during their school visits. Only around 10 percent of the schools of Serbia have school development plans which also aim to implement socially inclusive programmes, addressing the needs of Roma children in non-discriminatory ways.
- There is a lack of qualified teachers trained to work in multicultural and multiethnic environments, in particular among Roma children. The system of Roma teaching assistants or mediators is being established only currently.
- The school curriculum is demanding in terms of requiring excessive factuality and preliminary skills and knowledge from the students. Also, there is a lack of institutional support for helping attain the necessary language skills for Roma children speaking exclusively the Romanes language or Roma returnees from EU countries speaking other European languages.
- Lack of free textbook provision.
- Performance assessments are biased: Roma children usually become underachievers in school tests and exams, and thus they usually do not pursue further education. A big part of the problem is that the assessment system is culturally and linguistically biased, and there is no systemic support provided to help Roma children overcome these barriers.

- School financing is unsupportive of inclusive education: Financing schemes are not adjusted to demographic conditions, schools in poor municipalities with major Roma concentrations are unable to cover basic education costs, pre-school education is not free of charge, free school meals are not provided, financial incentives are linked to special education, and the education and social welfare financing schemes are separated.

In summary, the Roma in Serbia face a discouraging set of enrolment barriers to education, and, consequently, their participation in education is one of the lowest in South Eastern Europe. Due to low attendance, segregated education in the system is not yet a major issue, except in special schools, which are mainly composed of Roma students. However, as there currently is no legal anti-segregation legislation it is expected that this issue will surface immediately after some of the enrolment barriers and issues are resolved, and it needs to be mitigated early on.

Strategic Directions for Serbia

1. Considering the enrolment barriers of Roma children and the multiple incentives for dropping out, the REF's long-term strategic directions in Serbia will be as follows:

- To help provoke the necessary changes in the legal and institutional framework to reduce drop out rates, and include children out of school especially those aged 9-16.
- To provide support for the inclusion of Roma children in the compulsory preschool education programme started in September 2006.
- To develop scholarship and mentorship support for Roma in secondary education
- To help address the issue of overrepresentation of Roma in special schools, by exploring alternatives for mainstreaming children into an inclusive education system and eventually abolishing the special education system.
- To support donor coordination of Roma education activities in Serbia.

2. Assistance and support to the Roma community should include the following potential activities:

- Training Roma professionals in education.
- Supporting institutional developments and capacity building of the Roma communities involved in education related activities.
- Finding adequate mechanisms for complementing the lack of support available for Roma children, such as supporting Roma initiatives for promoting the active engagement of Roma parents in the education of their children.
- Supporting initiatives helping Roma students cope with negative experiences in education.

3. The REF's policy development support to the government should include the following potential activities:

- Institutionalizing affirmative action for secondary and tertiary education and reviewing new legislation currently in preparation.
- Developing a per-student financing mechanism, including the adoption of an adequate financial coefficient for Roma students.
- Supporting fiscal decentralisation, and securing adequate revenues for poorer local authorities with high Roma populations.
- Supporting the new policy on civil registration, abolishing all enrolment barriers stemming from registration and identification gaps for Roma.
- Introducing education in Serbian as a second language for Roma students.
- Providing additional classes for students in need, as a systemic, legally binding provision of the education system.
- Promoting municipal level school inspections for detecting, monitoring, and preventing discrimination and segregation.

- Implementing the reform of vocational educational training with modular instruction, rules allowing easy re-entry into the system, and a provision making it possible for students to acquire qualifications at all levels.
- Using school development planning and school self-evaluation to support inclusive education.
- Ensuring that in-service teacher training includes quality programmes to raise teachers' sensitivity and enhance skills required for working in diversified classes.

4. The REF's analytical and advisory work in Serbia will concentrate on the following areas:

- Segregated Roma education in Serbia: Analyzing the mechanisms underlying poor practices and recommending possible strategies resulting in transferring children from special schools and classes to regular education.
- The possibilities of Roma parent involvement in the Serbian context: Although there is a growing experience with parent involvement as an indispensable support mechanism for successful education of students through many Roma NGO projects, there is a need for a clear overview of possible practices coupled with an assessment of their long-term effectiveness, based on which sustainable approaches could be built.
- Legal regulation of enrolment for 9 to 16-year-olds and the establishment of an effective system of education provision for late enrolers and children who dropped out.
- Curriculum development for teacher education universities that is pertinent to Roma students.

Country Assessment Executive Summary - Slovakia¹⁹

Political, Economic and Social Context

Slovakia is an upper-middle-income country, with a population of 5.4 million and a gross national income per capita of \$8,130 in 2005 (by the Atlas method)²⁰. Slovakia has achieved both political and economic stability since it gained independence with the breakup of Czechoslovakia in 1993. Its economic transformation, initiated in 1998, positioned it well for European Union accession, which occurred on May 1, 2004.

Slovakia is one of the fastest-growing economies in the region, and gross domestic product increased by 6 percent in 2005. Nevertheless, unemployment, at 16.2 percent, remains high, even by regional standards, though its level continues to recede – in line with improved performance in the real sector and administrative measures taken by the government. There are sharp regional differences in unemployment: The eastern region has a much higher incidence of poverty, as economic activity is heavily concentrated in the west, particularly around the capital, Bratislava.

Slovakia's population consists of 80 percent Ethnic Slovaks, 10 percent Hungarians and 10 percent Roma. The living conditions of the Roma are especially poor in isolated settlements. Poverty in these areas is multidimensional – related to high levels of unemployment, poor housing conditions, and lack of access to basic public services²¹. Almost one quarter of Slovakia's Roma live in these isolated and extremely poor settlements.

The Roma's political representation has weakened since 1992, with no representation at all in the Parliament and disproportionately low numbers in local and regional

¹⁹ http://www.romaeducationfund.hu/publications/index.php?RomaEduF=c8df2a3d54042e9b90ab12737fe908fd&menu_grp=4&id=30

²⁰ Source: World Bank Slovakia Country Brief 2006.

²¹ http://www.government.gov.sk/romovia/list_faktov.php

governments. Nevertheless, the establishment of the Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs in 1998 was a major achievement in government recognition of Roma needs. The office falls under the jurisdiction of the Deputy Prime Minister for Human Rights, Minorities and Regional Development and has been headed by a Roma since 1999. It is expected that Slovakia's recently elected government²² will continue existing programs to reduce social inequalities, including those affecting the marginalized Roma communities.

Education

While the Slovak education system can boast various achievements, it also features some serious systemic weaknesses that affect Roma children. The legal framework for improving the educational outcome of Roma children is based on the "Concept of Roma Children and Youth Integrated Training," which covers secondary and university educational development and was adopted by the government in 2004. This policy draws on the key document of the Ministry of Education, the national "Program of Education and Training in the Slovak Republic in the forthcoming 15-20 Years."

The implementation of the Concept may bring about important improvements in the secondary and university education of the Roma children.

Some of the achievements of the Slovak education system are as follows:

- High enrolment rate: The enrolment rate of school children reaches close to 100 percent. Every child is registered for compulsory education, and this registration is monitored by the municipality and the social services department. Social and child benefits for parents are based on school attendance.
- Scholarships and free meals: Social system measures were introduced as part of social reform in 2003/2004, and these included subsidized school meals and scholarships at primary and secondary schools (for children of social benefit recipients).
- Teacher assistants: The amendment to Decree No. 408/2002 (1631/2002-sekr.) of the Ministry of Education introduced the profession of a teacher assistant. Working in partnership with the teacher, the teacher assistant becomes a liaison officer for Roma children, providing a distinctly positive example. In the academic year 2006/07, preschools and primary schools employed 900 Roma teacher assistants, whose salaries are financed by the Ministry of Education.
- Per-capita financing: Decentralization of powers and a new per-capita financing system have increased efficiency. While no precise measurements exist, it is likely that per-capita financing has also increased the interest of regular schools in retaining Roma students.
- Preparatory classes: The preparatory classes were adopted under Act. No.408/2002 (600/2002-43) and became effective since September 2002. The preparatory grade is aimed at helping children adjust to the transition from a domestic to a distinctively institutionalized environment. The preparation children receive in grade zero is intended to create a space for accelerated personal growth of each child, while assisting them in adapting to initial social differences. The success of this program is confirmed by the fact that as many as 91 percent of the students who went through the preparatory class during its piloting from 1992/93 completed the eighth year of primary school and were admitted to secondary and vocational schools²³. There are more than 2,000 children per cohort every year in the preparatory classes and the majority of them are of Roma origin.
- Funding to encourage Roma students to complete secondary schools: The Office of the Plenipotentiary for Roma Affairs provides funding to encourage Roma

²² In June 2006.

²³ Roma People, Ministry of Construction and Regional Development of the Slovak Republic, 2006.

students to complete secondary school. The funds are used to enable gifted but socially disadvantaged Roma secondary school students to carry out their studies.

- Civic involvement: Insufficient state involvement in efforts to meet the educational needs of Roma children has encouraged the emergence of an extensive network of nongovernmental initiatives at all levels. Civic associations working at the school level often carry out extensive work with Roma children.

Despite all of the above achievements, the Slovak education system has a severe and built-in systemic problem that brings about extensive, up-front discrimination against Roma students: A large percentage of Slovakia's Roma children are de facto segregated in special schools, or in special classes in regular schools.

The special education system was designed to create schools for children with different disabilities. However, most of the students enrolled are diagnosed with a mild mental disability, and the majority of them are of Roma origin. Children are placed in special schools based on a diagnosis of mental retardation. Violations in testing and diagnosing Roma children are found to be common, but these violations are often overlooked, and they are not considered as signs of discrimination.

The Special Schools for the mentally handicapped in Slovakia caters to more than 24,000 children, with about 230 special primary schools. Many of these schools are located close to Roma settlements, and thus they are the easiest schools for Roma students to access. Special education in Slovakia is a low-quality education. The system has a lack of qualified teachers, and it offers a reduced curriculum for students. Roma children enrolled in Special Schools for the mentally handicapped do not receive a formal certificate for completion of primary education, and, therefore, they may not apply for admission to regular secondary schools.

The high number of children in Special Schools for the mentally handicapped is encouraged by a high financial normative. State financing for children in special schools is twice the amount provided per-student in standard primary schools, so there is a strong incentive for special school managers to attract as many students as possible.

Another form of special education has been recently introduced under a program to allow "individually integrated pupils in regular primary school." In these cases, children are placed in special classes within regular schools and are taught with special curricula under the supervision of a special pedagogue. These types of special classes, so called "integrated classes," receive the highest normative per child in the education system. It is expected that, due to this new program, the number of children in special schools will decrease. This form of special education is considered less harmful to children than special schools for mentally handicapped, because transfer into standard classes is possible and a good level of primary school education is provided. Nonetheless, it remains a segregated form of education that prevents children from progressing in a standard environment.

There is a lack of clear state policy and political will to address the education system's shortcomings with respect to Roma, including the problem of special schools for mentally handicapped.

Strategic Directions for Slovakia

Within the overall strategic framework of the REF for improving Roma education outcomes in Slovakia, future REF activities over the next three years will be grouped around the following project themes:

1. Assistance and support to the Roma community could involve:
 - Activities focused on reduction of the number of Roma children in special schools for mentally handicapped and on decreasing segregation:
 - Supporting NGO programs and local government activities to reduce enrolment of children into special schools for mentally handicapped and to monitor and disseminate best practices.
 - Activities focused on providing direct support to the Roma community/civil society:

- Building capacity of Roma communities to be involved in education changes, including supporting Roma parents' participation in school boards.
- Developing a network of Roma NGOs and communities to work toward supporting education.
- Supporting greater interaction/linkages between local authorities and Roma NGOs.
- Assisting local and regional governments in using EU funds to support isolated Roma communities.

2. Institutional strengthening of education authorities could involve:

- Activities to support policy dialogue and provide advisory services in:
 - Training of Roma teacher assistants, through official state institutions, to receive the pedagogical credentials that will be required by law in 2010.
 - Modifying the core curriculum to strengthen multicultural education.
 - Working on training a new generation of teachers, including improving quality and multicultural sensitivity.

- Activities to support change in the structure and finance of the education system:
 - Undertaking a study on special schools for mentally handicapped, looking at the costbenefit of this approach versus efforts to support integrated education. The study will be supported by an effort to map the process of assignment of children to special schools for mentally handicapped.
 - Building alliances with the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Labor, Social Affairs, and Family, based on an economic benefit study for supporting mainstream education.
 - Building capacity of local authorities and NGOs to access EU funds.

3. Policy development could involve:

- Establishing a solid dialogue on special schools for mentally handicapped with senior policy makers, the general public, the professional community, local leaders and Roma parents/leaders.
- Providing support for changing legislation related to special schools for mentally handicapped.
- Collaborating with the operational program in 2007-2013 for use of Structural Funds, by harmonizing the REF and Slovak government approaches to Roma education financing.

ⁱ Loury, G. *The Anatomy of Racial Inequality*, 2002, Cambridge, Harvard University Press.

ⁱⁱ Kertesi, G, Kezdi, G “Segregation in the Primary School System in Hungary, Causes and Consequences.” 2005.

www.romaeducationfund.org. English translation of the study that was published in Hungarian in *Kozgazdagi Szemle*. Vol 52 No 4 and 5, 2005.

ⁱⁱⁱ “The charter of fundamental rights of the European Union,” “the International Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination,” “The Convention Against Discrimination in Education,” and “the Convention on the Rights of the Child” to cite only a few.

^{iv} In particular, the ongoing project: “Education for Roma /Gypsy children in Europe.”[country?]

^v This comes from an OSI opinion poll, “Changing mainstream attitudes towards Roma inclusion.” Unpublished discussion paper, 2006, Budapest.